Experiments in Violence: The Problem of Oppositional Politics in Late Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Fiction

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Paradoxically, Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an imagined community occupying a territory at once bounded and sovereign became commonplace around the same time that prominent global novelists were beginning to reject the obligation to reproduce that fantasy. I consider two generations of novelists who do so in the late twentieth century. J.M. Coetzee articulates the failure of sovereign boundaries in the postcolony and the changing nature of the relationship between the citizen-subject and the state, while Sebald considers the possibility that a new form of non-hierarchical community might come into being amid the European ruins of the Second World War. For both authors, such projects rely on an acknowledgment of the limitations, disappearance, or outright absence of the nation-state, despite its purported centrality in modern life. More recent Anglophone novelists, by contrast, feel obliged to think with and within the infrastructure of global capitalism, paying particular attention to individuals who have been either empowered or dispossessed by global flows of resources, people, and information. Teju Cole, Indra Sinha, and Colson Whitehead are among these writers who can indeed sketch and animate the community to come, and they do so in forms predicated on the extinction of anything like the individual citizen-subject in favor of new heterogeneous and often radically antisocial forms of community. These novels offer their variously damaged (former) individuals as

protagonists who militantly oppose the partitioning of society into friends and enemies, since such distinctions ultimately encourage the classification of groups according to metaphysical categories of good and evil. The common purpose of these protagonists is instead to negate the negativity of that very opposition in the hope that anything else—some intelligent form of life—might grow.

Dedication

For my parents and Ben.

Contents

1. Introduction: On the Novel's Opposition to Oppositional Politics

1.1 Preface

Literary studies and political theory have always had a fraught relationship. Although there is a clear consensus that political life and the form of the novel are inextricably linked, critics divide over the question of whether the novel reflects the reality and limitations of politics as laid out by critical theory, or if the novel is better seen as an analytic in its own right capable of exceeding the discourses—characterized by oppositional logic—of politics, in this way presenting alternatives to political models organized in terms of struggle and conflict. This project contends that the contemporary novel begins to self-consciously break away from the novel's long history of association with a liberal political tradition. Thus it tests out modes and consequences of political theory in order to suggest how and why we might go beyond its limitations, bringing together elements of both perspectives on politics and the novel identified above. I begin by identifying and analyzing how the novel takes up and works within the paradigms of political thought in order to start to imagine what it would take to exist in a world not governed by such logic. Proceeding from a methodological approach that brings together frameworks of novel studies and cultural studies, this project investigates how the contemporary novel thinks its way beyond not a specific mode of political power or

oppression, but beyond political opposition as a structuring principle of social life.[1] In this way, my project takes up the question of how the contemporary novel form's changing aesthetic—from the late twentieth century to the present—articulates a political perspective that is defined by its insistence on imagining how alternatives to oppositional politics might be organized and animated.

These novels are neither fully utopian, in the sense that they do not break entirely from the material conditions of the world in which they are produced and distributed, nor do they resign themselves to merely critiquing the failures or limitations of that world. As these novels strive to imagine alternatives to what appears to be a determined set of social relations, they re-purpose and reassemble the constituent elements of familiar, albeit dysfunctional, former worlds that failed in this respect. In examining the contributions of two generations of contemporary novelists to this ongoing project, I show how they re-purpose the materials that define, respectively, early twentieth-century colonial administration, post-World War II rebuilding efforts in

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[1] AnaLouise Keating also identifies a problem with the use of oppositional politics in both scholarship and activism. Writing from a disciplinary background of women's and gender studies, Keating focuses more on the ways that oppositional stances limit the possibilities to collectively realize political and social change. "Oppositional consciousness," as she defines it, is "a binary either/or epistemology and praxis that structures our perceptions, politics, and actions through a resistant energy—a reaction against that we seek to transform" (3). The three main issues with this mode of thought and resistance, for Keating, are that opposition renders us "locked into the existing system (which shapes and reinforces the social problems we aspire to change); we can't imagine alternatives to this status quo, with its essentializing dichotomous definition of reality; and we internalize our oppositional approach so thoroughly that we use it against each other" (8). Implicit in Keating's argument is the sense that oppositional logic is not just a tool of the politically powerful, but a strategy of power that benefits the state and other entities as it is distributed throughout and adopted by populations of subjects.

Europe, and widespread neo-liberal financialization of the twenty-first century. Contrary to most analyses of these contexts, these novels emphasize how even the most seemingly condensed and inescapable modes of power are liable to be disrupted by or re-imagined through non-oppositional modes of being—modes of being that is, in a truly positive sense, in opposition to oppositional modes of being.[2]

The first generation of novelists who feature in this project—J.M. Coetzee and W.G. Sebald, for instance—have amassed oeuvres that, in turn, have generated an entirely scholarly industry that insists on the historical importance of their formal innovations and what they say about the present moment. I am less interested in examining this type of authorial figure (also exemplified in Kazuo Ishiguro) to draw out or question his part in constituting a canon of emergent contemporary literature. I am more concerned with how their works, taken together, define the conditions of

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[2] In their introduction to the recent volume *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner advocate for uses of their key terms that indicate rupture, newness, and innovation. They note that the word institution itself "designates an action or happening as well as a place or a thing," such that "the word can also designate the act of establishing that breaks with business as usual, providing a 'novel' departure from institutional protocol" (3). Although they display a commitment to understanding the novel as capable of—and even defined by—a willingness to overturn or exceed established forms of disciplinary knowledge, they also re-immerse the novel in the kinds of disciplinary paradigms that see the novel's impact as one of an oppositional struggle between tradition and progress. Eleni Condouriotis comes closer to imagining how novels can oppose the consequences of oppositional politics in her specific analysis of African war fiction. As she puts it, considering how these novels try to reckon with an oppositional reality that they would like to displace or reconfigure, "[i]n their categorical rejection of war as a means to achieve political ends, the novels point to an outside, or beyond, of war, something beyond the all-determining environment rendered through naturalism. This outside [is] intimated while the author conveys the sense of being trapped inside" (23). In other words, even as they portray a reality defined by war, the novels express a desire to imagine alternatives. Condouriotis does not specifically link this uneasiness with war to the novel's moralistic tendency to invoke and perpetuate moralistic and oppositional binaries, but she does explain the way that novels can portray explicitly political subject matter without necessarily promoting or accepting its power.

possibility for re-imagining the social dimensions of the novel form for the present moment. If previous shifts in the novel's social imagination were responsible for realism in the nineteenth century and modernism in the twentieth, then we need to identify a project for recent changes in the novel form. To do so, I must turn away from the work of such luminaries as Derek Attridge and David Atwell, for example, intent on demonstrating J.M Coetzee's signature turn on the use of allegory for purposes of investigating the ethics of otherness. I argue to the contrary that Coetzee himself critiques such argument as taking place within a limited and unacceptable set of political options. By focusing on Coetzee, Sebald, Teju Cole, Indra Sinha, and Colson Whitehead, I try to understand how the positions of a range of authors writing at different moments from 1980 to the present, in a range of geographical positions, take up the same quest of thinking outside the binaries determined by the modern state in very different ways.[3] All these authors re-purpose the materials of their world, formed by the wreckage of systems of political and economic power, to imagine new modes of sociality that lack a clear precedent in political and literary studies.

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[3] Susan Stanford Friedman's recent work on planetary modernism starts from the kind of perspective that is necessary to avoid replicating political oppositions in literary scholarship. She understands modernity itself as "heightened, often extreme and accelerating change that spreads through the various domains of society… Modernity can enslave or free, shatter or exhilarate, displace or replace, dismantle or reassemble—thus, *utopian* and *dystopian* at once. Modernity is itself rupture" (Friedman 4). By emphasizing the way that such seemingly contradictory forces and characterizations combine to produce modernity, instead of tracing the way that they contest one another, Friedman enacts—at a disciplinary level—what I read contemporary novels as doing when they refuse the imperative to define a political position or a project in oppositional relation to another.

As I consider the way that the political functions in these novels, it becomes clear that the sovereign power of the state has always protected and been enabled by the economy and vice versa. The mode of power that the novel reveals is something like a non-sovereign sovereignty, or a mode of government that can be detached from any human agent and understood as a self-sustaining, self-perpetuating mechanism. The result is a paradoxical form of power that is constantly destroying that over which it rules in order to recreate it—an oscillation between creative and destructive impulses—omnipresent and yet invisible in all aspects of life, from the quotidian to the spectacular. Gastón R. Gordillo sees "rubble" as a key figure in explaining how such power manifests itself physically in a landscape even while obscuring its legacy. As he puts it, reflecting on the fieldwork that brings him into intimate contact with ruins and rubble in Argentina, "[t]he places that affected me were the living, functional places that give shape to dominant social relations… Yet these are also the forms that naturalize the present by erasing the destruction that created it as well as the constellations of debris that testify to that disruption" (Gordillo 13). Deborah Cowen, meanwhile, more explicitly links the economic and the political in her discussion of the way that logistics co-implicate modes of global business and perpetual war in the same sphere. She suggests that such economic considerations are at the heart of both imperial systems and contemporary neo-liberal forms of power, pointing out that the supply chain's existence "at the center of contemporary geopolitical economy with the echoes of empire connects

present war with past forms and indicts the era of national territory as the historical anomaly" (Cowen 9). In other words, Cowen recognizes that the real power behind forms of political rule is that which controls the ability to produce, control, divert, or appropriate resources, even when those forms of government seem bent on territorial control or authoritative forms of rule. Here, Cowen and Gordillo think through one of the problems confronting the novelist who refuses to replicate the discourse and history of politics, whether by reiteration or rebuttal: How can we understand the operations of power without becoming interpellated by them? By focusing on the economic machinery that enables the realization of power, Gordillo and Cowen turn their gaze—by means of novels themselves—toward the disrupted, abandoned, or buried ruins created by this economic machinery and expose progress as a process of perpetual destruction and rebuilding.

In so doing, certain novels suggest that theory itself needs to think in similar terms—how the consistent need to make a living actually determines how people live. For novels to imagine alternatives to daily life so organized, they must imagine the conditions under which life might be lived otherwise. Certain novels suggest, in other words, that the stage for theorizing, as well as the actors, has to be reimagined before the operations of neoliberal capitalism can be exposed and demystified. Alison Shonkwiler gestures toward this literary task when she suggests that a modified form of the novel allows us to visualize the increasingly abstract nature of late-stage capitalism (ix). She

describes the forms that do this as participating in what she terms the "financial imaginary," and would have us understand it as

> the idea that abstraction, for better or worse, presently dominates not only the economic but also the historical, cultural, and aesthetic domains… It invites critical attention to the problem of recognizing a system that is understood to be less and less tethered to the material, less directly connected to specific modes of production, and therefore less tangible, visible, or controllable. (xi).

Annie McClanahan understands the literary-cultural and the economic-historic spheres as constructing each other as two faces of the same coin. Ironically echoing the neo-liberal ideology that produces ruins which it can then renovate and repurpose in the name of progress, she points out that "crisis is an invaluable historical hermeneutic, compelling us to anticipate limits, to imagine alternatives, to welcome collapse, and thus to resist the 'end of history' triumphalism characteristic of late capitalist ideology" (McClanahan 15). What McClanahan encourages is an understanding of crisis that borrows from political economy by seeing crisis as an opportunity for re-invention and transformation. In her view, however, "crisis" can also provide critical theoretical opportunity by breaking apart what appears to be a flawless machine propelled by self-instigated crises, so that we might envision new and different forms of life in its place.

I see McClanahan's formulation of crisis offering a way of getting beyond the oppositional logic of political thinking that would have us see the world in terms of

friends and enemies, good and evil, and thus as one that exists in a perpetual state of potential conflict. Recent scholars have pointed out that even modes of dialogue—whether political or literary in nature—that seem intent on finding a way beyond this toxic binary cannot actually do so in practice. John Frow questions whether the act of interpretation itself—striving as it does to uncover a kind of knowledge or meaning that hovers just beyond clear-cut legibility—can actually escape this implicit conflictual power imbalance. Taking Kafka's story "The Problem of Our Laws," as a test case, Frow points out that the act of interpretation is "restricted to an exclusive few (*nur einzelne*), endlessly speculative, and endowed with authority by its sheer age rather than by its grasp of a reality external to it" (Frow 2). This, he points out, "is something like the nightmare of an activity that feeds on itself, perpetuating an order of the world rather than changing it" (2). If interpretation really does function in this manner, in my view, it signals not so much the novelistic imperative to dismantle and re-assemble imaginative possibilities and worlds, but a political state of affairs in which power and its exercise remain constant, merely changing hands but continually perpetuating the conflictual binaries that animate it. In other words, the failure of interpretation that we can extrapolate from Frow's Kafka example implies that although we believe dialogue can produce consensus and meaning, it may only be capable of reinforcing hierarchies, since one side will always have more authority.

Juan Meneses is practically alone among recent critics in proposing exactly how dialogue might function to create the façade of democratic inclusion while actually protecting the status quo. In his book *Resisting Dialogue: Modern Fiction and the Future of Dissent*, he identifies a phenomenon he terms "illusory dialogue," in which

> a "minor voice" is offered the chance to speak up and express disagreement with a 'dominant' one in order to provoke the necessary political change. This type of interaction, however, is merely a spectacle of tolerance controlled by the dominant voice and is designed precisely to prevent any meaningful change from occurring when authoritarian, antidialogic, or simply oppressive practices are either infeasible or no longer tolerated. (4)

What Meneses demonstrates so effectively through the figure of dialogue is that systems of power have learned to deploy tools of critique and resistance. In this way, they ward off *actual* forms of critique and resistance, by seeming to provide a space for dissent to be encouraged and protected. Dominant political actors emerge as magnanimous figures committed to uplifting marginalized voices, which in turn strengthens their own authority. Nevertheless, Meneses readily admits that the idea of arguing against dialogue is itself a contradiction in terms; what he ultimately advocates for is not the elimination of dialogue, but the promotion of conditions in which dialogue can actually support forms of dissent (219). What I believe to be implicit in his schema is the idea that dissent itself can be encouraged without reproducing the binary schisms that sort

political actors into different, static camps based on identities that are defined in opposition to one another. Without "taking sides" that inevitably devolve into reified political antagonisms and moral judgments, dialogue without consensus becomes just another way of expressing idiosyncrasies and singularities.

However, when Meneses identifies the challenge of arguing against certain tendencies of dialogue without reproducing the objects of his critique, he echoes the problem facing the novel itself. If, as I argue, the contemporary global novels that I consider attempt to undo the oppositional and moralistic binaries of political thought, how do they do so without becoming oppositional themselves? In part, I argue, they avoid the temptation to fully theorize alternative models of political, economic, and social engagement which could end up reinstantiating such power dynamics. The shared project of the novels I discuss is to disassemble and defamiliarize the component elements of narrative worlds such that its pieces can be taken out of the totalizing narratives that would locate it in relation to hierarchies of dominance. In other words, they begin to imagine what novels had previously considered unimaginable; how life could be lived, how connections could be formed, and how the individual might be shaped without taking into account the directives of organized political power. The dissertation that follows shows how two generations of novelists take up this "impossible" task, to oppose political opposition imaginatively without becoming oppositional themselves. To do so, they embark on a series of "experiments" in violence,

as I term the disorienting and unsettling forms of meaning-making, anti-social connection, and territorial appropriation that work against the logic of the state and the market without committing to an anti-state position.

These critics, who understand the novel as the location where the changing nature of power makes the act of getting beyond oppositional resistance an even more difficult task. As the political and the economic continually collide and co-constitute one another, life under neo-liberalism makes it increasingly difficult to find and articulate the ways in which power perpetuates itself. Hiding behind the seemingly inclusive rhetoric of individual consumer choice and political dialogue, neoliberal power is omnipresent but diffuse in a way that classical models of sovereignty could not anticipate. Part of neoliberal strategy in this regard is not just to normalize forms of crisis, but to view them as opportunities for profit and rebuilding. This, perhaps, is where the novel comes into play, exposing moments of disaster—including the backlash of colonialism to its own dissolution, World War II and its aftermath, 9/11, and the Bhopal factory gas leak—as both produced and exploited by modes of political and economic power. If neoliberal logic works by making cycles of destruction and rebuilding a naturalized way of life, then contemporary novels use a kind of penetrative vision to excavate the buried evidence of this strategy of power. Looking not just to the buried past, but to the possible future, novels suggest that the only way to halt this increasingly invisible system—one which eagerly avails itself of the catastrophic results

of its own capital-generating operations—is to imagine an alternative future that does not play by the rules of politics as we know it. Imagining a life that does not just reject or counter one familiar mode of political power with another is a daunting task. Rejecting the temptation to oppose systems of neoliberalism, however, is the only way to get beyond it. To do otherwise would be to take up the political logic that depends upon the construction of friends and enemies, the establishment of insides and outsides, and ultimately justifies forms of capitalist advancement and development at any cost.

1.2 Beyond the Rules of Power

"The true challenge is how not to play the game by the rules of the state"[4]

-J.M. Coetzee

When he defines the problem that confronts today's novelist as how *not* to reproduce the power of the state, Coetzee also expresses his intent to find a way out and beyond the oppositional logic on which, in his view, state power depends. For him, the "true challenge" is to imagine a society that is both compatible with the material conditions of the moment and incompatible with the thinking of the state, neither for nor against it. For the real power of the state, in his view, comes from its ability to persuade us to imagine that we exist in a relation of either complicity or opposition to some form of political sovereignty. The forms of sovereignty that organize daily life in

[4] See the essay "Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State" in *Doubling the Point* (1986).

Coetzee's imperial settings rely on a binary distinction between citizens who belong to and within the state and strangers who constitute a threat to its integrity. The ruling class sets the norms of moral value, deciding who belongs within the collectivity of citizens and declares them the "good" actor in relation to some population of enemies that threaten to corrupt the body politic. Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction exposes how the principle of inner partitioning reduces political reality to nothing more nor less than the relation between those groups that the state has designated as "friends" vs. "enemies" (*Concept* 26). The formation of any political community, according to this model, posits a "'we" that, as it defines itself necessarily in opposition to that which it is not, presupposes and is defined by conflict" (Strong xv). In arguing for the "inherently objective nature and autonomy" of the political because it can "treat, distinguish, and comprehend the friend-enemy antithesis independently of other antitheses," including that of good and evil, Schmitt admits that because the category of the political makes moral distinctions and judgments, even as it professes independence from them, it is all too easy "[e]motionally" to treat the enemy "as being evil and ugly" (*Concept* 27). Indeed, Achille Mbembe considers the "enemy" of Schmitt's formulation as the "object of a supreme antagonism… whose physical death is warranted by their existential denial of our own being" (26). Once friend and enemy can be construed as ontologically hostile states of being, the very existence of an enemy will activate "one's capacity to demonize, and that kind of pleasure and satisfaction one feels when a presumed enemy is shot

down by special forces or when he is captured alive and subjected to endless interrogations" (Mbembe 26). The category of the enemy confirms one's own being, according to this argument, because moral judgment produces satisfaction in the subjection and destruction of an enemy with whom one no longer shares humanity.[5] Mbembe characterizes our moment as an age in which the political and the moral have collapsed into "a hatred of the enemy, the need to neutralize him, and a generalized desire to avoid the sorts of dangers and contagion he is perceived to bring" (27).

If this moralizing tendency accurately describes the oppositional character of contemporary politics, then a refusal of oppositional politics would free late twentieth and twenty-first century novels from the novel's conventional tendency to moralize in favor of one population over another. Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) features perhaps the most extravagant attempt to literalize Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction. Invoking and modifying the figure of a zombie apocalypse as it entered pop culture in the films of George Romero, the novel diversifies the zombie population, trading the 1960s wave of interchangeable, inhuman creatures that rise from on-screen graveyards for a group comprised of two types: "stragglers," who are still stuck re-enacting parts of

[5] The sense that national forms of identity could be so strong as to automatically create categories of enemies and generate the kind of hatred that Mbembe describes is made clear in Rancière's *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. As he points out, however, the dissolution of national sovereignty made it clear that enemies could be constructed just as easily from those populations who could not claim any particular citizenship: "The Rights of Man made it seem that natural life was the source and bearer of rights, and birth was the principle of sovereignty. This identity, it is alleged, was protected for a long time by the identification of birth—or nativity—with nationality, or figure of the citizen. But the vast flood of refugees which emerged in the twentieth century apparently shattered the identity and, stripped of nationality's veil, revealed the nakedness of bare life as the secret of the Rights of Man" (65).

their former lives, and "skels," who roam freely and hunt uninfected humans. Trapped in office buildings, abandoned restaurants, and subway stations, Whitehead's stragglers are caught up in the spaces and responsibilities that ordered their lives under "normal" capitalism while the skels animate a violent new biological reality in which their mode of survival is nevertheless driven by a familiar need, rendered more bloodily literal, to consume. Whitehead imagines the enemy as a dispossessed population with an infection that transforms it along biological and racialized lines to constitute a threat to the civilized state. His scenario is one in which the human survivors of a zombie plague are given the task of hunting down and eliminating the inhuman skels who would consume and infect them. This scenario seems, at first glance, like a textbook example of a friend-enemy relation whereby the "physical death" of one group is warranted and even made necessary by the other's "existential denial of [their] own being" (Mbembe 26). The novel, however, refuses to make the judgments we might expect to coalesce around the opposing factions it presents.

Mark Spitz, Whitehead's protagonist, is employed by a state-run corporation that expects to make a killing by transforming the abject and abandoned spaces of a post-crisis city into a shiny new fortress where the neo-liberal dream can continue to play out. As a "sweeper," he is responsible for clearing the stragglers from apartment and office buildings that the state wants to recapture as pricey real estate. He is also responsible for hunting down and eradicating any of the skels who make it over the barricades

surrounding Manhattan, or who manage to infiltrate the city's militarized "zones" through the subway tunnels and sewer system. The hyperbolic enemy status of the skels in Whitehead's post-natural environment identifies them with Hobbes' figurative cannibals, who perform the ultimate violation of human rights by helping themselves to the bodies of others.[6] Because, as he describes his position, Spitz straddles the wall around Manhattan, he exists as a kind of boundary creature never fully inducted into Manhattan's propertied elite, a class that was further divided into those who were incorporated into the new body politic of the zombie population and those few individuals who were able to barter their way into "resettlement centers." As a sweeper, Spitz is poised between the skels who occupy the zoned-off part of Manhattan and those factions who hope to renovate it for commercial and residential rebirth. He consequently maintains an ambivalence that will not let him moralize one of the opposing forces over and above the other.

Instead, he recognizes both as equally subject to the same "kill or be killed" logic being played out in the last days of life under global capitalism. Rather than buy into the logic of containment and separation that relies on "barricades" ranging from "[t]he

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[6] Kant, in "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (1795) also uses the logic of cannibalism to reveal the nature of oppositional political relations. As he writes, "[t]he chief difference between European and American savages lies in the fact that many tribes of the latter have been eaten by their enemies, while the former know how to make better use of their conquered enemies than to dine off them; they know better how to use them to increase the number of their subjects and thus the quantity of instruments for even more extensive wars" (437). Setting aside the problematic Eurocentrism of the passage, Kant's suggestion that all political violence seizes and appropriates the "property" of an enemy—whether their bodies, their goods, or even their loyalties—in order to increase their own power would suggest that in Whitehead's novel, the different between "skels" and human beings is not one of methodology but classification.

camp" to "[t]he settlement" and "[t]he city" to remain "safe inside from what is outside," Spitz doubts the ontological distance between "us" and "them," and acknowledges that the skels "might have been people he knew, 'not-quites' and 'almost-could-be's,' they were somebody's family" (19). His exceptional ability to resist criminalizing either side casts doubt on the friend-enemy distinction—even in the limit case of the cannibal who we might understand as having forfeited his own humanity. After performing his duty as a sweeper by shooting a skel that was lingering in a downtown office building, Mark Spitz pauses to identify his victim as a human type he recognizes and terms a "Marge" after an actress whose popular hairstyle and New York City sitcom lifestyle was emulated by scores of young women before the plague. He proceeds, as per sweeping instructions, to put her in a body bag,

> hastening when he arrived at the bloody mophead of her scalp. Was this skel a native New Yorker or had it been lured here…[s]truck dumb by the stock footage of the city avenues at teeming evening…The city required people to make it go. When citizens flee or die, others must replace them. As it expanded its magnificence, out over landfill or up in its multifarious and towering honeycombs, it required bodies to fill the vacancies. (72)

Rather than demonize her, Spitz sees in this "Marge" the same motives, limitations, and desires that shaped scores of others, including himself. The distinction that would divide "the Marge" and Spitz as enemies under present conditions is a matter of pure

contingency, not the moral difference between evil and good. The narrator's awareness of the slippage between what only appears to be a polar opposition is the novel's way of refusing to stage the triumphalist narrative that we might expect from a Romero movie where the conflict between "us" and "them" does indeed split the population into good and evil.

By so doing, Whitehead updates the pop cultural zombie to acknowledge and to challenge Mbembe's conviction that the contemporary mode of the political is one in which the category of the enemy is subject to an antagonism so totalizing that it results in a complete dehumanization. *Zone One* insists, to the contrary, that the uninfected and the skels are just two different phases of humanity that enact the same logic of consumption by contrary means, so that consumption itself becomes self-consuming. The novel not only makes this transformation of a population from capitalist drones to zombie skels seem all but inevitable, but also suggests that one way or another humanity will eradicate the friend-enemy distinction. Like the Corporation in Buffalo intent on renovating Manhattan properties, the skels rely on consumption. But where the Corporation and its team of sweepers—with the exception of Spitz— have internalized the logic of economic competition as a zero-sum game, in which one person's acquisition necessitates another's dispossession, the skels are measured and cooperative consumers. Rather than produce rivals and eventually an enemy within their own population, they recognize that their strength lies in their collective nature.

This means that any single body is disposable if it enhances the viability of the population as a whole, and there is no incentive for one zombie to benefit at the expense of another. Indeed, the vitality of the population comes from each member's instinctive awareness of, and mobilization according to, a kind of swarm intelligence. Mark Spitz recalls an early skel attack in his former suburban neighborhood as an encounter between the one and the many: the zombies "didn't fight over the old man" who was their prey. Instead, "[t]hey each got a piece" (Whitehead 24). When one of Mark Spitz's supervisors remarks of the skels later on, that perhaps "they've got it right and we…have it all wrong," he indicates that the skel population's refusal to divide itself into friends and enemies according to "right" and "wrong" frees it from the moral imperatives that would jeopardize its success as a whole (120-21).

Zone One appeared after two generations of novelists had begun to attempt to strip the form of the techniques and thematic preoccupations that ensured its reproduction of bourgeois ideology, including such notions as the sanctity of the individual person and his/her property, the value of work and personal merit as determinants of social position, and the representative character of government. Beginning with Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), I establish how, at a time when empire has crumbled, a colonial government nevertheless continues to reproduce an earlier partitioning of the body politic to justify its continuing authority. The state presents itself as so central to everyday life in the postcolony that each form of resistance

against its rule only re-affirms what is clearly little more than a rhetorical centrality. Although Coetzee is pre-occupied with the question of sovereignty—specifically, "how not to play the game by the rules of the state"— one detects an economic undercurrent in *Barbarians* that suggests that the aggressive enforcement of an increasingly obsolete political sovereignty is not only good business but also the only business of an unspecified imperial outpost. His narrator-protagonist, the Magistrate, reveals the apparent impossibility of resisting the abuses of the military government, even if one can neither accept the criminalization of "enemies" that justifies state-sponsored torture nor imagine giving up the comfortable life that an administrative post guarantees. Coetzee refuses to subordinate the abuses and moral justifications that sustain forms of sovereignty—that even today shape the South African writer's frame of reference—to those paving the way for global capitalism, at least not completely. The result is a body of fiction in which different locations are incorporated within or exploited by the emergent global order in different ways. Nevertheless, as I demonstrate, the novels aimed at a global readership indicate that, to some degree, modern sovereignty has been economic all along.

As early as Thomas Hobbes, political philosophy based the model of modern sovereignty on the premise that "because the condition of Man…is a condition of Warre of every one against every one…there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemyes; It followeth, that in such a

condition, every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body" (190). To avoid death or even cannibalism, according to this logic, all individuals must hand over "every thing," including their bodies, to the protection of the sovereign, in exchange for which he returns those things and that body to individuals as property subject to the law of the state. *Barbarians* does not make this element of the social contract particularly visible, except to show how its terms both frustrate and serve the Magistrate, who admits to being "sustained by the toil of others, lacking civilized vices with which to fill my leisure" (16). In Coetzee's novel, it becomes apparent that the Magistrate has struck a kind of Faustian bargain with the Empire, whereby he occasionally completes small administrative tasks and upholds the terms of their authority in return for "a quiet life" (8). The minute he questions the Empire's brutal methodologies, he is warned "to consider soberly: what kind of future do you have here? You cannot be allowed to remain in your post. You have utterly disgraced yourself" (113).

In *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), Coetzee stages another of his many attempts to resist state power, this time on the part of an ageing writer referred to as "JC." The novel dramatizes his internal struggle through its unusual typographical format. Multiple different bands of dialogue on each page record the ways that JC's personal interactions challenge the manuscript that he has been commissioned to write on "what is wrong with today's world" (21). As JC sees it, a critique of this nature has to concern itself with the nature of modern sovereignty, which he believes builds a structural and inescapable

subjection into political life. The problem he faces, therefore, is how to change the model of the state to reverse those priorities so that the state serves the people, a challenge made more difficult by the fact that he has internalized its oppositional logic. As the self-limiting style and subject matter of his early prose demonstrates, JC believes that his only options are either to rail against the state, thereby replicating the same unyielding authoritarianism that powers sovereignty, or to become willfully complicit in its crimes. Coetzee makes it clear that JC's insistence on broadcasting his opposition to the state only reproduces the very logic on which the state depends, namely, that it is the acknowledged center and source of power. It takes the involvement of Anya, the woman he hires as his typist, to transform his perspective and mode of engagement.

As the typist becomes the critic, she enables JC to think his way out of his identity as a citizen subject to state authority and enter into an experiment in subjectivation that leaves the state behind, responds to purely social forces, and incorporates other voices. Rather than simply take his dictation, the appearance of her narration on the page of the novel introduces bits of personal and quotidian information into a political discourse that has, to this point, fixed JC's full attention on his relation to the state. She gradually turns his narration away from the operations of political power and toward those of the natural world, mythology, poetry, and music. This transforms the space of the novel; the relation between the two bands of narration on the page grows increasingly dialogic as JC's narration engages hers rather than addressing the

abstract, invisible interlocutor that turns out to be his own phantasm of power. This novel succeeds, in effect, where *Barbarians* fails to think its way out of a situation where one either opposes or enters into complicity with the state. But insofar as resistance, in Coetzee's novels, tends to substantiate the very power it resists, oppositional resistance itself becomes a form of complicity. In the terms of Coetzee's opening dictum, it is easy to know how *not* to think as a novelist; it is another thing to imagine an alternative to such modes of resistance that is realistic, sustainable, and reproducible.

In creating a space that offers an alternative—however incompletely rendered—to those that reproduce oppositional power, Anya takes up the struggle that persists throughout Coetzee's oeuvre. In *Foe* (1986), in an abstract dream-like sequence that concludes the novel, Coetzee's narrative dives into the wreckage of what we might understand as the lost ruins of the founding myth of the modern novel and proprietary individualism alike. He imagines the shipwreck that stranded Robinson Crusoe on his island not as a place where the white European capitalist defines himself in opposition to the cannibalistic natives that he kills or to the figure of Friday, whose labor he exploits and whose narrative he controls, but as a place "where bodies are their own signs" (157). In a space beyond the conflictual hierarchies of friend and enemy, master and slave, author and subject—the space, in effect of death, decay, and transformation—all bodies are subject to the same natural laws. In *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), when asked to define her beliefs using the kind of moralistic logic that would force her to "judge between the

murderer and his victim," and thus to define the elements of the world in terms of good and evil, the novelist-protagonist will not play the game by such rules (204). Instead, she shifts her attention away from the human world altogether and attests to the existence of frogs on the Australian mudflats; she does not believe in God nor the state but she does believe that the frogs are "true." Their sheer "indifference" to her makes her believe that an existence outside of ideology is possible (217). The possibility that human beings might at least imagine such small alternative spaces, spaces that oppose opposition itself, becomes apparent only in the brief and speculative conclusions of Coetzee's novels.

Life and Times of Michael K (1983) is perhaps the best example of his numerous attempts to create and sustain spaces where social relations are neither political nor economic, and do not require the distinction between friend nor enemy. Under these conditions, the novel suggests, people will have to form ties of what might be called uncivil consciousness. Michael K alternately seeks out these kinds of spaces, hiding out in undiscovered or abandoned places where the state of war that envelops South Africa has not extended, or he creates them within the network of "camps" that attempt to consolidate the subjection that characterizes sovereignty. Because the relations that Coetzee depicts between Michael and other figures take on a purely contingent character, given his absolute disinterest in orienting himself in relation to the state, they also have the ability to create a population that is not defined by contractual logic. This

possibility is not truly envisioned until the end of the novel, when Michael imagines that he might make a homeless man in Cape Town his traveling companion, united in their disregard for the law's efforts to contain them. He can do this because both of them, in his eyes, are beyond the friend-enemy distinction that would dictate the nature of their interaction. In such a space beyond, uncivil consciousness becomes a matter of recognizing that what exists between them is something as basic as the physical need for water. Changing from an "I," to a "we," as Michael imagines what would happen "if the old man…complained, saying, "'What are we going to do about water?'" the novel ends in the conditional tense by suggesting that "he, Michael K, would produce a teaspoon from his pocket…he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon, and in that way, he would say, one can live" (183-84). Indicating the difficulty of formulating the rules and qualities of such spaces beyond the state in positive rather than deferred future-conditional terms, Coetzee's novels reveal why early novelistic attempts to get beyond oppositional politics tend to work negatively, identifying hierarchies and organizing principles to be avoided, rather than inaugurating new formations.

Diary, too, relies upon a renunciation of particular modes of writing and perspectives—all of which invoke moral binaries and advance the logic of the state—and stops short of suggesting what the novelist might imagine once he no longer thinks within the spatial limits of sovereignty. The sense that the aged JC will be free to "get on

the boat or whatever" and depart from life itself, once free of the shackles of political life, recalls the manner in which Coetzee's other novels generally invoke ontologically exceptional or quasi-mythological spaces to imagine life that is not regulated by the state and market, or indeed, by the state of the market (226). Thus the challenge facing Anya—and by extension, Coetzee—is that of the contemporary novelist, namely, how to imagine a positive alternative whose notion of "good" is independent of the moral binaries of contemporary political life. In *Diary* as well as in *Barbarians*, this question is made all the more urgent by an economic dimension of the political that increases the difficulty of finding an alternative space independent of the economic operations of state power. Take, for example, Anya's role as JC's mentor and guide to political disengagement. Despite her capacity to turn JC away from his oppositional relation to state power, it is worth asking whether or not the promise of financial benefit that prompted Anya's involvement makes her similarly complicit in the exercise of capitalist economic logic. Arguably, their dialogic relationship transforms her perspective in this regard as well as his, as is evidenced by her promise to "hold his hand" through death and tend to his affairs afterward, both of which constitute voluntary acts of service that cannot be monetized (*Diary* 226). Although the challenge in Coetzee's novels is to carve out a space in which one is not subject to the state, this inevitably involves the rejection of coercive economic influences. This task becomes at once more urgent and more

difficult as political sovereignty is subsumed into the economics of empire and state power gives way to something much more diffuse.

The Anglo-German writer W.G. Sebald brings to life a world that exposes the lack of a sovereign center in a historical moment between the concentrated political force of the world wars and the onset of a globalized neo-liberalism. Sebald, a writer who left his native Germany to teach and reside in England, represents an emergent group of global Anglophone writers who produce what Rebecca Walkowitz has identified as novels "born translated." These novels are written in various print vernaculars to be translated and circulated in English as well as the language in which they were originally composed (570). In *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), Sebald offers something like a model of this suddenly diffuse and easily transgressed model of what were once national cultures, as his unnamed narrator-protagonist assembles a radically new model of European space from the debris produced by the violence of the early twentieth century. Sebald understands this political violence—indeed all political violence—as "experiments" whose eruption in the longer and more capacious history of the planet reveals just how unpredictably different forces combine—rather than oppose one another—to produce the cycles of destruction and rebuilding that govern organic life on this planet (*Natural History* 66). This particular novelistic experiment shows how the various enterprises that emerged from the shadow of the Second World War bring about their own destruction as the pretext for growth and renewal. Largely devoid of the

biographical continuity and personal forms of memory that would make him fully a subject, the schizophrenic perspective of *Rings*'s narrator invites us to see everything from natural disasters to the firebombing of German cities as equivalent forms of violence on a single horizontal plane. In this way, Sebald takes perhaps the most morally charged events of the twentieth century—the Second World War—and suggests that what we are actually witnessing a world in which moral opposition does not hold.

The narrator's recollection of the manor house of Somerleyton, once a testament to the power of imperialism and now a monument to its dissolution, reveals the economic foundation that has thrived on the mistake of considering this opposition real. Having ceased to represent in miniature the illusion of imperial power enshrined in nineteenth-century architecture, the estate has become a tourist attraction that makes the dissolution of state power a commodity in its own right. Though it represents a world constantly in the process of disintegration and rebuilding thanks to the combined effects of natural and human forces, *Rings* lets us glimpse a privileged socio-economic position hardly available to the general population. The narrator's access to travel and accommodations and his demonstrable familiarity with highbrow literary and historical information marks him as the kind of cosmopolitan subject whose distinct perspective is made possible by adequate reserves of transnational economic and cultural capital. Sebald's disregard for state sovereignty in favor of forms of government that operate through largely invisible economic transactions exposes the epochal shift that produces

his perpetually dislocated protagonists but also allows them to go about their lives. In a sense, then, the economic complicity that rarely reveals itself as the face of power in Coetzee's novels is omnipresent in those of Sebald, by virtue of his decisive shift away from sovereign forms of political organization.

This new global order, in which an information network displaces oppositional relationships in a post-sovereign world, becomes even more apparent in Sebald's 2001 novel *Austerlitz*. Here, the story of the eponymous protagonist is shaped by a personal history derailed by Nazi violence and still made inaccessible by the rebuilding initiatives that have scattered the remnants of that history across the continent. In *Austerlitz,* Sebald resolutely declines to make the Nazi atrocities the evil against which both protagonist and reader could define themselves as good. Instead, he would have us understand such violence as akin to what Naomi Klein terms the "shock doctrine," that is, the logic by which capitalism takes advantage of crises as the pretext for the development of radically new economic policies and techniques (7). From this perspective, the central conflict in *Austerlitz* is that of a man struggling to deal with the onset of neo-liberal modernity that Nazism wielded and advanced. An analysis of Nazi crimes that relies on economic rather than political logic proves this point. If *Austerlitz* refuses to linger on the obvious moral crime of Nazi violence, it does so in the name of exposing how the Final Solution not only created a perverse market of goods and labor but, in doing so, also created an extensive economic infrastructure. It took over railway lines, turning them

into conveyor belts that could calculate the units of labor and racial statistics of its cargo en route to the camps. As the bureaucracy multiplied to serve the new industry, so did the value of the possessions of the dead and imprisoned, as they were traded among German officers or sold in the windows of European junk shops. The condition that Austerlitz faces—of a past dismantled, distributed throughout a ruined continent, and paved over as the foundation for a new era of economic prosperity—is not unique to him. In finding the act of reckoning with this new reality so profoundly traumatic, he signals the anachronism of his search for an origin in an age that discards the notion of the concept of the liberal individual as the citizen-subject of modernity in favor of a split class of subjects. This introduces a new generation of protagonists who embody either the notion of the global citizen-consumer or represent a member of those populations whose disposability subjects them to commodification within the new economic order.

In seizing on what are unquestionably still the most emotionally loaded events of the twentieth century, Sebald's protagonists dramatize the dilemma of personal memory as a way of situating oneself in a global order whose subject is a person that presumably once constituted a whole in its own right. The partial nature of Sebald's protagonists demonstrates the manner in which the concept of the citizen-subject of political philosophy becomes obsolete in an era that renders the individual biographically incoherent and unrecognizable to him or herself. The failure of personal memory accompanies the failure of historical memory. Both are tied to the emergence of

economic processes that become dominant over a political order that claimed to prioritize the protection of individual persons and property. Instead of taking forms of sovereign government to task for demolishing the past, however, regardless of the protagonists' impulse to do so, these novels help us to see how such a course of action is meaningless in a present reality governed by the imperative to ceaselessly rebuild. By excavating ruins that reveal how this process of turnover has always sought to create economic value, Coetzee and Sebald show that histories of progress have depended not just on the state's narrative of its own authority, but on the economic mechanisms that proceeded out of view. These mechanisms themselves encourage a kind of forgetting in order to leave behind what came before and focus on increasing value in the future. Even as they come to terms with a world in which personal memory and historical continuity have become defunct forms of currency, Sebald's anachronistic protagonists establish conditions of possibility for a new form of political intelligence. In *Rings*, such intelligence manifests itself as a hyper-sensitivity to life that, like that of Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello, does not limit itself to the human sphere of action. Personal memory gives way under these conditions to the schizophrenic's capacity to be in and through all living and once living things, a capacity that forsakes a linear progressive narrative for one that can move metonymically backwards and forward across time and place. *Austerlitz* demonstrates how this same thinking begets the neo-liberal imagination of the post-war reconstruction of Europe. Here, the loss of a personal biography and memory

that once linked past and present force decimated and displaced populations to regenerate not on the basis of the cultural connections they share, but on what they have lost. Moving throughout spaces where the life that Austerlitz might have lived has been obscured by new layers of infrastructure, Sebald demonstrates that community formation, in the present moment, is a form of infrastructure, or information network, in its own right. Having little or nothing to do with economic exchange—these connections are not for sale—this network recognizes the affective deficiency among those who, like Austerlitz, find themselves trapped between an inaccessible past and a future intent on burying that past beneath accumulating layers of progress. Poised between the failure of sovereignty and the hegemony of neo-liberalism, this form of intelligence appears to be strikingly new because it does not use moralized differences to designate those who do and those who do not belong. This intelligence subtracts the notion of the citizen from that of the subject so that the former loses its vaunted status and its ability to distinguish those who must be protected from those who can be allowed to die. Sebald's model suggests that human beings possess instincts, impulses, and a way of knowing that is prior to and thus fundamentally outside the categories of modern government.

We catch only a glimpse of this form of political intelligence in novels like those of Coetzee and Sebald that recognize the emergence of neo-liberalism. More recent novels, however, offer both a fuller and more ambivalent perspective on the social possibilities under this system of power. Many of these novels see the novel itself as a

technology and a product of global modes of economic circulation. Novels in this category not only reproduce the invisible mechanisms that maintain neo-liberal capitalism by technological means, but also expose those mechanisms to critique according to purely economic standards of waste, inefficiency, or unprofitability. Protagonists of such works possess nearly unlimited resources allowing them to move seamlessly between rarefied spaces of the global city. However, a second type of protagonist featured in twenty-first century novels can be understood as an updated version of the partial figure that populates Sebald's novels. While Sebald's protagonists have been dispossessed of their personal pasts and rendered damaged or partial subjects under late-stage capitalism, the partial protagonist of novels of the last ten to fifteen years acts instead as a dispossessor, a perfectly programmed instrument of the system in which he exists who is designed to extract value from his surroundings. In some cases, these two types of protagonists can collide, as in the example of the unnamed narrator of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*, who uses his exponentially accumulating investments in technology and communications not only to exercise influence over a contemporary urban space, but also to rebuild it in accordance with his own bizarre fantasies, effectively making him the architect of a neo-liberal space in miniature.

Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) gives us a protagonist who is clearly a dispossessor. Julius, a Nigerian psychiatrist completing his medical residency in New York City, makes a living by collecting and distributing the stories of damaged city residents in the

post-9/11 era. The novel is simply the composite commodity created by the assemblage of these accounts. Julius has no discernible affect or attachments, but his interactions with patients and acquaintances proceed by the same economic logic that renews the neo-liberal city. Capitalizing on the limited real estate of Manhattan, the city economy depends on a constant and rapid turnover to generate taxes, inflate property value, and essentially turn capital into more capital. If virtually any building or business is disposable—and indeed must be disposed of to ensure the production of the new—then so too is the individual. As Julius mines his patients for their individual accounts of grief and dysfunction, he does so without any concern for the way that his subjects' lives might be affected—or even ended—by their manipulation within the sphere of the market. In this way, Julius shows that he not only understands the logic of neo-liberalism, but that his own personal history—like the ruins of Coetzee's frontier or the remnants of Austerlitz's lost community—is just a casualty of the latest catastrophe. What differentiates Julius from the conflicted protagonists of Coetzee and Sebald is his ability to sift through the layers of a personal and communal history without any feeling at all. Cole's novel, perhaps more than any other, confounds expectations by displaying no particular initiative to think its way out of or around the economic power that choreographs the world it displays. This, however, is precisely *why Open City* offers such a powerful instance of the toll financialization takes on the inner life of the neo-liberal city. The novel announces itself as an example of the type of product that now circulates

as a commodity. To show how the market works from the inside, in other words, requires a subject—and a perspective—produced by that market to "buy in" to its central conceits.

Where Julius exemplifies the protagonists who demonstrate how the logic of dispossession works seamlessly within the flows of neo-liberalism's global cities, a very different protagonist is required to show how that economy works or fails to work within the stagnant and neglected spaces also created by globalization. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) offers a fictional account of the aftermath of the Union Carbide factory disaster in Bhopal, India. Animal, the novel's protagonist, has no interest in establishing any kind of oppositional relationship with the phonetically rendered "Kampani," that has irrevocably damaged his peripheral city of Khaufpur, yet the mere fact and nature of his existence constitutes the greatest threat to the integrity of neo-liberal logic. Having experienced a spinal deformity as a result of the poisons unleashed into his environment by the Kampani during a factory fire, Animal's assumed name is a reference to the way that he moves, four-footed, through the world. It is also, however, a mark of the way that he embraces his non-human status. Uninterested in establishing himself as a dispossessed victim or assigning moral value to the actors and events that have shaped his world, Animal takes a perverse joy in his differences, which provide evidence of his ability to evolve to survive in a world hostile to traditional human beings. He exists as the kind of creature ideally suited to inhabit the spaces of Khaufpur,

which prove to be the kind of real estate that global flows cannot and will not re-develop. Rendered toxic beyond the possibilities of rehabilitation, such territory seemingly invalidates the capitalist modus operandi that uses disaster as an opportunity to build ever-more modern and efficient forms of infrastructure.

The alternative identity encapsulated in Animal's self-appointed name sets him apart from either faction of human beings in the novel, whether Kampani or Khaufpuri activists, making it impossible to define him according to a political position that would establish him as friend or enemy. Animal feels occasional flashes of resentment for the Kampani, but he also admires them for what he perceives to be their cleverness and stubbornness; likewise, although he establishes individual friendships with some members of the activist community, he disagrees with the intent and the methodology of their political project, preferring the preserve the damaged landscape in which he has carved out a home for himself. He can relate simultaneously to both and/or neither camps into which the humans have divided themselves, making him the kind of unclassifiable boundary creature that has more in common with Whitehead's Mark Spitz than he does with Cole's Julius. Although Julius displays the kind of isolation we might expect and do not find in a one-of-a-kind figure like Animal, it is Julius' symbiotic relationship with neo-liberal systems themselves that leads him to embrace his state of being as a way to call forth and then market the loneliness of others just like him. Those who might otherwise be understood as "friends" in relation to a figure like Julius, in this

context, serve only as opportunities to profit personally. Animal, on the other hand, as the novel's title implies, in his hyper-typicality, has the potential to inaugurate his own population based not on political recognition or economic motivation. The hypothetical future "people" of this population need not conform to designations of friend or enemy—indeed, most of Animal's individual relationships can be classified as both/and in this respect—nor must they even qualify as human at all. In making difference the precondition for the formation of new populations that have no regard for moralistic binaries that both the Kampani and the Khaufpuri activists would follow, Animal suggests that the act of co-habiting damaged spaces with dispossessed people can be an act of resistance.

The struggle to prevent late-capitalist infrastructure projects from taking hold in vulnerable spaces and populations is enunciated in *The Zad and NoTAV*, a collectively authored account of community members who are attempting to prevent the construction of an airport in the French wetlands (a project known as the zad, short for the French label it has been given as a "zone of deferred development"). By refusing to comply with the forms of political coercion and economic incentivization offered by French corporations hoping to extend city infrastructure profitably into peripheral locations, the farmers, residents, and allies of the area created a distinctive and motley collective with a methodology similar to that of Sinha's protagonist. Coming together to use and preserve a territory that, by all accounts, was never particularly fertile or

profitable for the agricultural projects it sustained in limited fashion, this makeshift community animated what would have otherwise been a debilitated population. By keeping the forces of neo-liberalism at bay, the people of the zad have made a life in a space both physically uncooperative and politically exhausting. But in the individual and varying challenges of existing in such a space, into which the destructive encroachments of industrial development continue to reach, "something that can affect each and every person, beyond sociological or political characteristics" that functions as "a call to transcend the categories that habitually separate us while claiming to unite us in the greater social body" (71). Instead of taking catastrophic threats and destruction as incentive to turn back toward western economic powers with the kind of oppositional reprisals that fuel, rather than disempower, such forces, the community of the zad—like Animal and the new population of "people" he may represent—identifies something positive in land that has been marked, appropriated, or destroyed. Where the Khaufpuri activists, readers of the novel, and purveyors of eco-criticism see only poisoned land, Animal's people would see the opportunity to fashion new forms of biological and social life in places where neo-liberalism has declared mere existence to be taboo.

Throughout the novel, Animal remains a singular creature, ultimately unwilling to consent to corrective interventions that could restore facets of his lost humanity. But it is this unwillingness to be "fixed" in accordance with a norm that would qualify him to belong to an already-existent community that makes the idea of a new collective

possible. Identifying himself as one of the "people of the Apokalis" yet to come, at the novel's conclusion Animal suggests that in the future "there will be more of us" (366). The "us" that Animal understands as being able to occupy the apocalyptic spaces that could proliferate indefinitely, in that regard, might be understood as inaugurating a new form of uncivil consciousness. This nascent mode of political intelligence would develop rather than eliminate difference by cultivating a radically inclusive group beyond designations of the human, willing to occupy and animate spaces that have revealed the limits of political and economic power.

Though the late twentieth and twenty-first century novels that chart the failure of oppositional politics across times, genres, and contexts refuse a moralizing impulse that would equip and encourage readers to pick a side in a binary conflict, they nevertheless take on a didactic function by forcing readers to unlearn the moralizing habits that have often been built into the novel form. There are habits and elements of the novel that this particular class of fiction simply denies to us. They do not allow us to orient ourselves in relation to a center of power that can order our reality, for better or worse, instead revealing the ways that such a center is merely a carefully constructed illusion. They resist the familiar developmental narrative that grants us a linear plot. They do not even allow us to recognize familiar types of subjects in which we can see reflections of ourselves. This collection of texts, then, does not comprise a unified genre so much as they frame a genealogy of the novel that is committed to divesting its reader

of certain practices and turning them away from a reliance on concepts—like sovereignty and bourgeois individualism—that have always comprised the foundation of the traditional novel.

The manner in which this project took shape is indicative of the work that these novels are capable of doing. Initially conceived as an investigation into the history of the figure of sovereignty, it became clear that rather than enabling an understanding of these novels, they demanded that the figure itself become disabled. Insofar as the disabling of central organizing figures enable the production of these novels' worlds, it also enabled the hermeneutic that can trace the points at which the uneven development, spread, and connections among branching rhizomatic forces within them presents a series of transformations and tipping points. Taken seriously, they reveal the existence of fluid, destabilizing mechanisms already at play in what we think of as absolute and unyielding modes of authority. What these novels really demand, even as they set up what appear to be conflicts between oppositional forms of power and those who would avoid or undo such binaries, is the kind of perspective that can acknowledge the way in which any single formation or force contains others within and alongside it. Sovereignty is always already moving toward the economic, and the economic in turn creates new modes of empire; bourgeois individualism begins to dissolve into fragmented or partial protagonists, who are simultaneously being invited into communities of the dispossessed and more-than-human populations. If there is one

thing to understand from this selection of novels, it is that they do not suggest a progressive trajectory in which one epoch, mode of power, or type of resistance can be understood to defeat another. Instead, what we witness are the ways in which the novel charts what it would take to uncover, temporarily displace, connect, or mutate the political conditions of the world—conditions which may very well reverse, regenerate, or even combust into something entirely new and unrecognizable in the future to come.

2. Does Sovereignty Have an "Outside?"

2.1 Sovereign Strategy, Tactical Resistance, and Incivility

"Sovereign is he who decides on the exception," Carl Schmitt famously writes in the opening line of his 1922 work *Political Theology* (5). A reductive analysis of this statement would gesture toward the co-constitution of crisis and pure sovereign power, the implication being that sovereignty emerges most clearly in limit cases and recedes in deference to the legal order when it can assure the continuing integrity of the state. But sovereignty in Schmitt's formula extends far beyond the moment of exception, in that the sovereign's fundamental ability to *decide* on what a crisis is and how to react to it constitutes the "normal" as well as the exception. Schmitt emphasizes the tension between norms and decisions in juristic thought but ultimately argues that "sovereignty (and thus the state itself) resides in… determining definitively what constitutes public order and security, in determining when they are disturbed, and so on…" (9). In other words, the primacy of the sovereign decision extends into the modern period even as embodied authority becomes subsumed in the legal order.

The decisive function of Schmitt's sovereign also survives the transition from a government committed to defending its subjects against external threats to an age that thinks in terms of the friend-enemy distinction he discusses at greater length in *The*

Concept of the Political (1927), a distinction that provides the basis for politics itself. The enemy in this case

> … is not merely any competitor or just any partner of a conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy… In its entirety the state as an organized political entity decides for itself the friend-enemy distinction. (*Concept* 28-30)

To extend the earlier logic of *Political Theology* (1922), Schmitt claims that an enemy cannot be identified according to a pre-scripted or codified set of standards. "The enemy" cannot be decided by "a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party" but only by "the actual participants… [in] the concrete situation" (*Concept* 27). Such criteria clearly invokes Schmitt's nostalgia for the waning "decisionistic and personalistic element" in sovereignty (*Political* 48). His association of this element with a theological model of power locates his concept of sovereignty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when "the Cartesian god transposed to the political world" was shored up by the dawning of a "new rationalist spirit" that recognizes the prince's singular and unified power over states as analogous to God's power over nature (*Political* 47).

Under these conditions, one could argue, if God as divine sovereign is infinitely and unquestionably good, then so too must be the prince as political sovereign. This metaphysical rationale renders Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction all the more dangerous, for if the sovereign—he who has the power to decide on friends and enemies and to decide on exceptional states—is by definition good, then his enemy—"existentially something different and alien" (*Concept* 27)—must be evil. In other words, even as the friend-enemy binary displaces that of good and evil in a secular age, political theology persists nonetheless by analogy, so that the enemy of the state is by definition evil. In sacred epochs and communities, judgments of good and evil determine friends and enemies. This correspondence holds even after the secular turn of modernity. It is merely reversed, such that labels of friend and enemy suggest quite unmistakably who is good and who is evil.

Given how easily it slides into unlimited, irreversible absolutes, couching conflict in metaphysical terms of good and evil is problematic. One can imagine the reversal of a sovereign decision regarding an enemy, precisely because the friend-enemy distinction is pragmatic—even creative—and arguably built into any community, when it excludes those who are Other in bestowing rights and protection on those who are alike. "In the extreme case," as Schmitt clarifies, conflicts with the enemy or Other are possible but not inevitable (27). The decision on how to respond to an enemy rests with the sovereign, as (presumably) does the decision that this same group may no longer constitute an enemy.

Clashes between "good" and "evil" lack this malleability. Such terms do not describe a strategic relationship between two entities, but pass absolute judgments of character.[7] Practically speaking, such a reliance on good vs. evil to determine who is a friend to the community and who the enemy actually limits the power of the sovereign to retain the right to (re)decide the friend-enemy distinction, for if an enemy can change its fundamentally evil nature and become a friend, then the supposedly unimpeachably good nature of the friend (and perhaps the sovereign himself) is automatically cast into doubt as well. Although Schmitt does not explicitly build this potential slippage between categories into his theory, the fact that he uses the example of princely sovereignty as the center of his model ultimately makes this an inevitability. Thus, it would seem contrary to his purpose for Schmitt to see seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe as the apex of united, transcendental sovereignty precisely because it turns his foundational *political* friend-enemy distinction into an *ethical* question of good vs. evil.

In discussing the friend-enemy distinction, Schmitt wants to insist on its pragmatic and relational character. He sees it as "the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation," so as not to suggest that the political enemy is "morally evil or aesthetically ugly" (*Concept* 27). He acknowledges

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[7] Modern just war theory in fact does not consider wars of religion—perhaps the best example of metaphysical clashes between good and evil—to be legally or ethically valid because of their tendency to deal in ideologically driven absolutes and the corresponding difficulty of restraining *in bello* practices of war in such scenarios.

that the language of ethics is nevertheless mobilized in contextualizing the enemy as such: "Emotionally the enemy is easily treated as being evil and ugly, because every distinction, most of all the political, as the strongest and most intense of the distinctions and categorizations, draws upon other distinctions for support" (*Concept* 27). Yet by repeatedly gesturing to the divine, princely model of sovereignty that he does in *Political Theology*, Schmitt implies at least an equality, if not an overt prioritization of ethical over political thinking. This is doubly problematic because the sovereign's distinction between friends and enemies is inexorably tied to his decision on the exception. Broadly conceived, the exception has been characterized by thinkers ranging from Schmitt to Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben as a situation of crisis which necessitates the suspension of the normal legal order (and by extension, the peace that said order is supposed to maintain) in favor of total sovereign authority.[8] The sovereign, then, is not the law, but he is also not subject to it. Always by definition able to nullify the existing judicial order in order to deploy and justify violence that has not been authorized by the law, the sovereign's power over the exception makes the concept of illegitimate state violence seem far-fetched at best, even when it violates juristic or ethical standards. With an enemy in place, the decision on the exception is really just a question of if, when, and

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[8] Agamben's analysis of the exception is discussed later in this chapter. Although Arendt is perhaps less concerned with theorizing the exception itself, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* provides a sustained, historically specific examination of the ways in which totalitarian political movements (namely Nazism and Stalinism) were practically enabled and characterized by ceding absolute power over all forms of political, social, economic, judicial, and civil life to sovereign leaders. In other words, for Arendt, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia were clear historical examples of states of exception.

how to deploy violence against said enemy. Schmitt's claim that the state's sovereignty is not "the monopoly to coerce or rule, but… the monopoly to decide" (*Political* 13) therefore echoes the classical notion of sovereignty as a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.[9] For my purposes, Schmitt's formulation is Hobbesian at its core because the sovereign decision is always connected to violence. The overarching category of the "decision" can be realistically understood as a specific prompt to determine when, how, and what type of violence to deploy against an enemy.

Given that the sovereign, in conflicts with an enemy, has not only the presumption of legitimacy (and ethical goodness) but also recourse to organized infrastructure and territorial integrity, the ways in which sovereign and non-sovereign (or non-state[10]) actors wield political violence are radically different. Michel de Certeau's discussion of "strategy" vs. "tactics" is noteworthy here. Those who employ tactical means of self-assertion and even survival clearly do so from a de-privileged position. They are the "other" and thus always identified secondarily and oppositionally in relation to a primary actor, precisely as an enemy is always characterized based on his

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[9] Indeed, in *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt makes essentially the same point but explicitly includes this right to violence: "To the state as an essentially political entity belongs the *jus belli*, i.e., the real possibility of deciding in a concrete situation upon the enemy and the ability to fight him with the power emanating from the entity" (45).

[10] Here I do not mean to imply that non-state actors are limited to those not explicitly affiliated with a state. Rather, I mean to point out that to oppose or be labeled an enemy of the sovereign is to immediately be cast outside the purview of legitimacy and ethical goodness automatically affiliated with his position. Even those who may be generally regarded as subjects of a state are swiftly stripped of any privileges or protections that would extend to those "friends" explicitly allied with the sovereign if they are excluded at any point (by their own volition or the will of the sovereign) from his political community.

difference from the sovereign and his "friends." This is in direct contrast to the strategic modality of state politics (a redundant term, in Schmitt's formulation, since for him states are the only legitimate political actors). De Certeau defines a strategy as

> … the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment.' A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles,' 'targets,' or 'objects' of research). (xix)

A strategy, then, requires a sovereign subject who is able to order, demarcate, and control not only a territory, but the relations between entities within that territory. Strategies "are able to produce, tabulate, and impose… spaces" but tactics "can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (30). The inherent limitations of tactical operations raise an essential question: must tactics always be limited to the reactionary position, or can they do something else? If we do understand tactics to be purely reactive, what is the nature of tactical power? Is it a purely negative mode or are there positive elements to it?

For de Certeau, tactics comprise "ways of operating" within such restricted spaces in ways that may not explicitly violate norms or prohibitions. They introduce subtle forms of agency by imbuing ordinary actions, such as "walking, reading,

producing, speaking, etc." with alternative (and thus transgressive) styles and intentions (30). These actions "intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level… but they introduce into it a way of turning it to their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven into the first." This "art of being in between" allows tacticians to "find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place" to create "a degree of *plurality* and creativity" (30). Although de Certeau places great value on the subversive potential of tactical modes of existence, it is nevertheless true that even the most creative re-appropriations of strategic space cannot escape the "first level" of strategic control that is an inherent condition of life for those who operate according to strategy and tactics alike. In order for tactics to deviate from a strategic logic, they first have to acknowledge and orient themselves in relation to that logic. When we envision the "subject of will and power" who demarcates and governs strategic space in de Certeau's schema, we understand him as sovereign. Correspondingly, we might assume that the subjects of a given space are able to mobilize—in a limited fashion—some form of creative tactical resistance in the face of such sovereign authority. However, the ostensible shift that Schmitt pinpoints from a theological model of good and evil to a political friend/enemy distinction also unsettles the relationship between sovereign and subject (or, in like terms, the relationship between strategy and tactics). That shift, rather than altering the mode of state power, supposedly transferred power from a metaphysical source (divine or quasi-divine ruler) to the people, vis-à-vis the Hobbesian

contractual logic that underlies the emergence of civil society. The contract between subjects and sovereign is predicated on an exchange in which subjects give up the ability to encroach on others for sovereign protection; the sovereign thus gains a monopoly on the use of violence. In other words, this exchange is always asymmetrical, and the relocation and transformation of violence is at the heart of the social contract.

The social contract, however, insofar as it underlies the mythological origins of the state, has often been understood as being at odds with the unquestionable nature of sovereignty on which Hobbes insists.[11] In his account, individuals have a right to self-defense if sovereign tyranny imperils them but the power of the sovereign, as lawmaker and political authority, is nevertheless absolute (Hobbes 260, 272). Peter Steinberger suggests there is no contradiction in this formulation, because at the precise moment when a state fails to offer its citizens the safety that it is contractually obligated to provide, it ceases to be a state. The individuals at risk find themselves once again in a state of nature, in which they find themselves opposing the unfriendly non-state actor in what might not be called rebellion so much as a war between like entities (Steinberger

[11] As Hobbes puts it, "Soveraign Power, whether placed in One Man, as in Monarchy, or in one Assembly of men, as in Popular and Aristrocraticall Common-wealths, is as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it" (260). Throughout *Leviathan*, Hobbes insists that the figure of sovereignty, as brought to life in the body of the sovereign, can itself not be opposed on ideological grounds. The only way in which such opposition can justify itself is it if occurs in regard to a clear violation of the social contract that promised to take subjects out of the state of perpetual war and protect them with the establishment of civil society: "The Obligation of Subjects to the Soveraign, is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them. For the right men have by Nature to protect themselves, when none else can protect them, can by no Covenant be relinquished" (272). In other words, Hobbes makes a distinction between sovereignty (a political right) and self-defense (a natural right) in favor of self-defense, should the two be at odds with one another.

860). In other words, if the state violates the contractual logics that defined it as a state in the first place, then it can claim no special sovereign status that differentiates it as a political actor from any other. Steinberger's formulation has profound implications for the ways that we understand the friend-enemy distinction when it is deployed within a single sovereign territory:

> If the security and satisfaction that we expect from political society begins to dissolve, if for whatever reason the state begins to threaten rather than to protect life and happiness, then the question arises as to whether the contract has been abrogated, hence whether the state is really a state and the law is really the law… When the same questions arise for large groups of people, and again presuming a certain kind of response, we have the basis for a full-fledged theory of revolution—a revolution not against the state but against an entity that has ceased to be a state, if in fact it ever was one. (Steinberger 864-65)

Steinberger invokes the sovereign and the law as separate spheres without necessarily recognizing the co-constitution of the two. Although the sovereign personifies the law, he can also be removed by it, should his rule devolve into what can be recognized as tyranny. Sovereignty itself—and thus the authority of the state form—can be understood as internally fluid, with different phases and levels of legitimacy, and not necessarily embedded in any single hereditary character. Steinberger's reading thus breaks with

Schmitt's model of princely sovereignty and builds a kind of exit clause into Hobbesian instances of absolute sovereignty. If the sovereign himself, in other words, is only the human face of a body of law, and if those laws can be suspended in the state of exception, then sovereignty itself can be cast into doubt.

If the sovereign bears this complex relation to the law—at once subject to it, representative of it, and able to decide upon the conditions for its normal as well as its exceptional functioning—then sovereign decisions on political subjects have the power to appropriate legal judgment. Modern sovereignty cultivates political loyalty in the form of contractual obedience not by calling forth the specter of enemies beyond state borders, but by turning inward to designate groups from within its own population as enemies and making them criminals in the eyes of the law. In effect, a crucial part of the friend-enemy distinction in modernity is the transformation from a binary model of political relations to a tripartite schema, incorporating the sovereign, his citizens, and those who occupy the state and who may very well comply with the terms of the social contract, but are nevertheless designated as non-citizens. In their supposed unlikeness to an otherwise supposedly unified citizenry, they pose an existential threat. Thus, they are designated as enemies to both sovereign and citizens alike.

By being criminalized and classified as an enemy, the sub-class of non-citizens identified by the sovereign is by definition at risk from the state.[12] Not only has the sovereign withdrawn or refused the protections of political society to this population, but they have identified the non-citizens as an enemy group from which its own citizenry—those who qualify as friends of the sovereign—may need protection.[13] But in making a gesture that is not only exclusionary but comprises an implicit threat to a

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[12] The best—and most controversial—theoretical example of the ways in which a conflict poses great risk to an "enemy" if they are judged metaphysically to be evil comes from Michael Walzer's theory of supreme emergency in *Just and Unjust Wars*. For Walzer, if a threat presents itself "as evil objectified in the world… in a form so potent and apparent that there could never have been anything to do but fight against it" then "when conventional means of resistance are hopeless or worn out," when it comes to conduct in war, "anything goes (anything that is 'necessary' to win)" (252-53). Although there is an extremely high bar to clear in order for a supreme emergency to be invoked (his only clear historical example is Nazism), Walzer has been roundly criticized for the ways in which his theory opens the door for unrestrained and inhumane acts of war. In relying on judgments of good vs. evil, we can see the ways in which supreme emergency lends itself to subjective judgments on the parts of sovereign entities, who, Walzer admits, place the ultimate value on their own continuing existence. As he writes, "…the survival and freedom of political communities—whose members share a way of life…are the highest values of international society" and that challenges to such communities and ways of life "bring us under the rule of necessity (and necessity knows no rules)" (254). Of course, Walzer's relevance to this particular argument is somewhat limited, given that he abides by a traditional understanding of just war theory that does not recognize non-state actors as legitimate political entities capable of waging war.

[13] Peter Nyers discusses the fundamental arbitrariness and contingency of citizenship, especially in a post-9/11 American context, by extending Paul Virilio's scholarship on the accident, which argues that the creation of any new technology always simultaneously inaugurates the accidents to which it can give rise. Nyers is concerned with the way that the accident functions as a political category and the ways in which ostensible distinctions between citizen and non-citizen are more accurately concerned with the difference between citizens deemed to be essential or worthy and those who are dismissed as accidental or undesirable. As he puts it, "the 'accidental citizen' is similarly considered to be incidental, non-essential, and a potentially catastrophic exception to the norm… However, if the undesirable citizen comes to be regarded as an accidental citizen, this implies that the opposite is also the case: that the desirable citizen is also an essential citizen, a citizen of substance" (Nyers 24). In examining the ways in which categories of political belonging actually reflect ethical and value judgments about particular populations, Nyers' discussion of the citizen and non-citizen reflects the inherent flaws of sovereign systems that operate according to friend/enemy logics.

segment of a state's population, the state, according to Steinberger's logic, has already nullified its own sovereignty over them by voiding the terms of the social contract. To recognize that it is entirely possible for a state to fail to represent the interests of one part of its constituents is to abandon the fantasy that there is a single will of the people or public interest. In that sense, for a state to label any members of its population as "non-state actors" is a meaningless gesture, for in so doing, they too lose claims to statehood. Without a state, there can be no non-state, and thus, no hierarchy of legitimacy between them.[14] Both the non-sovereign and the non-citizen are merely political actors in ideological territory without rules, restrictions, or ethics, as we might understand the state of nature.

Yet even in this world beyond civil society, we may be able to distinguish between the sovereign and those it deems to be its enemies, the non-citizens, by examining their methodologies as they move through various spaces and engage one another. Although in failing to protect the interests of a portion of its population and by constructing them as a potential enemy, a state may cease to be properly understood as a state in Hobbesian terms, its territorial integrity, infrastructure, and influence are not so easily dissipated. For de Certeau, strategy is wielded most effectively over mapped, ordered, and hierarchical space of which the sovereign is the architect. More accurately,

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[14] It should be emphasized that this negation of a state's (presumptive) existence is, generally speaking, not welcomed nor admitted by the state itself. In the literary and political contexts discussed in this piece, we witness the outcome when an entity we may think of as having lost claims to statehood continues to act with the presumption of sovereign legitimacy.

this sovereign "space" can be better understood as a specific *place* that is determined and constantly reinforced by privileged forms of knowledge. When de Certeau indicates that such a place "can be circumscribed as proper (*propre*)" it suggests that this space of sovereign authority is demarcated and recognizable; it is organized according to hierarchies that construct interiors and exteriors to political communities (xix). In a mutually reinforcing paradigm that mirrors Peter Nyers' discussion of the condition of contemporary American citizenship, those individuals who possess the knowledge of how to traverse this type of place belong within the paradigm of citizenship it is designed to reinforce (32). On the other hand, those who do not have access to this knowledge are exposed by their uncertainty and discomfort, which marks them as outsiders and ensures they will be indefinitely excluded.

Trapped in a double bind, the "others" who are denied full belonging under the law cannot break from the state, for such hostility could trigger state violence. Gilbert Shang Ndi attributes this the "hybrid" nature of the tactical subject to its inability to "claim total independence from the structures of power that it attempts to subvert… It does not claim access to full knowledge of its own intentionality but imparts a sense of uncertainty in the hegemonic political and cultural order through its nomadic and nimble agility" (96). Such manipulation of sovereign power generates forms of resistance that we might understand in terms of civil disobedience. The connection between civil disobedience and tactics here is that those who are supposed to be

protected by the law, when criminalized, reveal its failings and inherent contradictions. At their most powerful, tactical measures can force representatives of sovereign strategy to confront a radically defamiliarized version of their own logic. Under these circumstances, tactics can threaten to reverse the nature of their original relation to strategy. But would such a gesture actually reconfigure the playing field within a political system based on exploitation?

The state's strategic advantage in situations of conflict stems from the fact that the tactician "must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers" (37). Tactics are ontologically restricted to the relatively weak and dependent position of responding to violence (rather than anticipating or originating acts of war). Even so, state power is contingent on its ability to convince its citizens they need protection. Sovereign power therefore needs others against which it can juxtapose the promise of its own political collective. By excluding and defining a population to represent what good citizens are not, the state fabricates a desirable political identity and affirms its ethical superiority. Terms like "friend" and "enemy" are only meaningful if they are used in a relational context; in other words, the sovereign cannot emphasize his status as "friend" to citizens unless that status can be juxtaposed against the "enemy." Once friend-enemy conflicts are incorporated within the nation, the category of enemy expands to include entire categories of subjects—traitors, vagrants, and prostitutes, for example—who can be criminalized in times of

crisis. This class of non-citizens, otherwise animated as examples of bare life, embodies the core of what Agamben refers to as the "inclusive exclusion" (*Homo Sacer* 21).

This segment of the population comprises an essential part of the juridical order precisely because they are excluded from it (*Homo Sacer* 25). Agamben does not make such sharp distinctions between citizens and non-citizens in his original analysis in *Homo Sacer*; he is concerned with the foundational tension of sovereignty, under which the life of a subject population is meant to be protected but can also be destroyed by the state. Life is thus "excluded in the sense that the state can inflict violence upon its subject population, the very same violence that it monopolizes in order to promote public security" (Takayoshi 49). In *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, however, he builds upon his critique of sovereignty and bare life to put forth the figure of the refugee as one that becomes "the decisive factor of the modern nation-state by breaking the nexus between human being and citizen" (11). When Agamben discusses classic examples of the refugee in a historical context, he points out that the Nazis could send their victims to concentration camps only when they had "been fully denationalized (that is, after they had been stripped of even that second-class citizenship to which they had been relegated after the Nuremberg Laws… when their rights are no longer the rights of the citizen" (*Means Without End* 33). Agamben links the fullest realization of bare life to the figure of the refugee. In this sense, the non-citizen refugee occupies a particularly

vulnerable position, subject to being criminalized from within a state population and/or constructed as a foreign enemy.

When the state ejects members of its population from the body politic and then mobilizes forms of violence against them, can we call this an act of war? By simultaneously disowning and oppressing certain groups, the state does reinforce de Certeau's claim that "the space of a tactic is the space of the other" (37). This equation allows the state to reach inward, name, and extract an enemy. Within the model of strategy and tactics, the non-citizen is left only with recourse to tactics and "must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection" (37). When the relations between sovereign and subject becomes a relationship between strategist and tactician, it can also slide from the position of inclusive exclusion to that of excluded inclusion, demanding warfare between two distinct political entities. With the shift from dominant and subordinate positions within the state to that of full-fledged state and non-state adversaries, de Certeau's model proves inadequate. It fails to capture the ways in which mere political existence for the non-citizen often requires a sustained state of violent conflict against a stronger state adversary. Built into the very model of strategy and tactics, the interdependence of these two forms of power suggests that although the names of the players may change, the power imbalance itself will persist.

De Certeau, however, does not close down the possibility of such an event. We must remember that the specific methodologies inherent to both techniques depend largely on the ability of a given actor to demarcate, control, and codify a given space. If the tactician is able to operate within a system of power to the degree that he makes the system itself illegible to those who command it, then the tactician has become the strategist. This may shift the names and social character of the players but not the power dynamic of the model. Power depends on the threat of illegitimate state power, which in turn generates new forms of resistance. If successful, this resistance transforms itself into the very mode of strategic power that initially triggered resistance.[15] In effect, the success of tactical methods will be its failure. Pursuing this model, we find ourselves in a death spiral of power framed by the space of strategy. De Certeau himself acknowledges this conceptual limitation in describing the tactical character of everyday practices as a "common and sheeplike subversion—our own" (200). Given the reversibility of strategy and tactics that inevitably reinstates opposition and exploitation, success becomes a contradiction in terms. Either it fails to challenge strategic logic by remaining subject to it or it fails by successfully doing so and taking up the very position it once opposed;

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[15] With their figure of the multitude, Hardt and Negri begin to theorize a mode of collective political identity that is not "limited to a choice between central leadership and anarchy… this production of the common is neither directed by some central point of command and intelligence nor is the result of a spontaneous harmony among individuals, but rather it emerges in the space between, in the social space of communication. The multitude is created in collaborative social interactions" (*Multitude* 222). This model of political existence that does not seek to reinscribe forms of oppositional power allows us to begin envisioning a logic beyond strategy and tactics.

either way, true resistance that can oppose strategic power as a *category* of political existence, not merely as a different iteration of the same power, is exposed here as an impossible necessity.

We must consider a third means of political existence—beyond the dualism of strategy and tactics— that does not think in relation to the state in order to overcome this limitation. Such a form of political consciousness offers the possibility that a group of non-citizens, ejected from civil society and freed of the obligations imposed by the social contract, could nonetheless recognize their shared political interests and identity.[16] In using the term "uncivil consciousness" to describe this other way of thinking and being, I mean to draw on the concept of Marxist class consciousness, but with the reservation that the category of non-citizens cannot be so easily or fully defined in terms of their relation to the means of production.[17] "Uncivil consciousness" points to a population of non-citizens who are exploited by the state in ways that remove them from the obligations of the social contract, that bind them to the state under designations of subject or criminal. According to the novels I engage in this dissertation, a new

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[16] De Certeau understands contemporary marginality as a phenomenon "no longer limited to minority groups… Marginality is becoming universal. A marginal group has now become a silent majority" (xvii). He means to indicate a unity more broadly among those who could not be called sovereign, a group which includes both "the immigrant worker" and "the average citizen." By separating out the non-citizen as the particular site of an awakening uncivil consciousness, my analysis attempts to differentiate between such categories.

[17] I am also persuaded by the argument that attempts to split off non-citizens, migrants, or refugees from a national working class only creates divisions between populations who are all, for various reasons and to various extents, alienated from their labor (Vickers and Rutter, 2018).

"formulation of consciousness as an emotional and psychic response to social stratification" emerged during the postwar period, establishing a more capacious category compatible with oppressed labor that also anticipates the ultimate replaceability of that labor (Ramugondo 491).

In my view, uncivil consciousness refuses the notion of subjection to the state and instead poses the indifferent challenge, "What state?" Its members seize the prerogative to decide to recognize the very existence of the state (or not), negating its distinctions between inside and outside, friend and enemy. Rather than tactical resistance, Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener performs a disinterested refusal to conform to the demands of his position; he is a scrivener who doesn't write. Since this refusal to embody his socio-economic position puts him in the category with those who refuse to work, it suggests that this incivility moves beyond resistance to a disregard for—or willed ignorance of—the demand itself. By willfully dying, Bartleby exposes the economic assumption built into the social contract that to be a living person one must exchange his or her labor for the means of staying alive.

Erving Goffman's theory of civil inattention models how we might understand this turning away in positive terms; civil inattention occurs when individuals who come into close contact simultaneously choose not to acknowledge one another explicitly but implicitly do so by respecting the other's boundaries and autonomy (Goffman). This constitutes a form of social engagement realized through intentional disengagement, or

what Goffman calls "awayness," which "makes possible co-presence without co-mingling, awareness without engrossment, courtesy without conversation" (Lofland 462). So conceived, the social contract puts an almost positive spin on "incivility," which is precisely this mode of engagement through disengagement. Performing incivility would thrust citizens and non-citizens alike into a rapidly expanding population of migrants, fugitives, and nomads.[18] Their way of life, in other words, exceeds tactical

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[18] Such descriptions, particularly as they relate to the ways that revolutionary entities move through particular spaces, cannot help but call to mind Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad and the nomadic war-machine from *A Thousand Plateaus*. Ada Ingrid Engebrigtsen describes the figure of the nomad as "conceived as the ultimate 'other' to modernist conceptions of territory and the nation-state" yet finds that "Nomad and state, nomad thought and state thought are…interdependent; the one wants to control, the other to destroy or evade control. As the nomad is 'becoming', she is always possibly controlled and although the state is 'stasis', it always has inherent nomad elements" (43, 45). Craig Lundy's analysis of the revolutionary problem in Deleuzian political thought diagnoses a similarly indeterminate relation between nomad and state: the ideal nomad is not necessarily cast as the state's absolute other, but as one who can navigate spaces that hold within them the potential to shift from smooth to striated. They must be able to manipulate and mobilize techniques of the state, or we might say, strategy alongside their own tactics. Lundy puts forth the example of the barbarians in the conflict between the Romans and Huns in A.D. 451 as, perhaps, the ideal Deleuzian nomads. As he writes, "if the nomad is to be the figure of transformation, then it might in fact be more appropriate to place him or her in the continually shifting and amorphous space in-between the Romans and the advancing Huns. For is it not the barbarians who come closest to the ontology and ethic of transformation? The Huns are sure of their task – destruction of the State – but the barbarians, by contrast, have mastered the art of disguise and metamorphosis, continually going between the Romans and the Huns, becoming one, passing off as another, and then taking up arms against either or both. It is the barbarians, in other words, that are truly between known and immutable identities" (Lundy 243). This more Deleuzian nomadic methodology discussed here, in its relation to the state, is more closely aligned with my discussion of tactical methodology than with the cultivation and mobilization of an uncivil consciousness.

[18] The sense in which incivility can imbue everyday activities with a radically anti-sovereign character is reflected, obviously, in Michel de Certeau's work, but also in Elelwani Ramugondo's definition of "occupational consciousness," which is "concerned with how the things people do every day, individually and collectively, sustain systems and structures that support and promote certain occupations or certain ways of doing, to the exclusion of others… the term unearths and gives language to acts of resistance that may already be in existence in certain communities that have and

methods the instant they refuse to think in relation to strategic networks at all.[19] By contrast to the migrant, the uncivilian rejects the very idea of finding a place to settle down and so differentiates him or herself from either Lukács's "homeless" protagonist or the picaresque heroes that preceded such a figure. Nor is the uncivilian quite like the nomad who tries to move beyond the social order altogether, for they are animated neither by the positive desire to find a home nor by the negative desire to escape the state. The nomads' patterned movement may be blocked and diverted by the state, but they are nevertheless at home while they are travelling. Although "uncivilian" contains within it the term for belonging to society, the prefix "un" sets "civilian" paradoxically outside the established social order.[20] If "civilian" generally signals an individual outside the military and police apparatus of the state, then what does the prefix "un" do to this negative definition of the word?

I would suggest that by negating the negative, "uncivilian" points the way to a positive sense of being unrelated to the state. By refusing to live in relation to the law and the social categories it maintains, the uncivilian cannot be considered a "friend" of that state. By virtue of his or her indifference to the state, neither can we classify the

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continue to face marginalisation and oppression, but have not yet been theoretically explored" (Ramugondo 492).

[19] In so doing, such figures refuse to acknowledge the structures of power that surround them, thus avoiding what Louis Althusser refers to as "interpellation." For more, see his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1972).

[20] The word "incivility" is derived from the Latin *Incivilis*, meaning "not of a citizen."

uncivilian as an enemy—even though the uncivilian presents perhaps an even graver threat to state sovereignty by challenging its contractual basis. The uncivilian and practices of incivility consequently indicate that one lacks such protected status within the state and may well become a target of its violence. In using the term "uncivilian," therefore, I mean to indicate the emergence of a new figure and technique of resistance beyond our familiar schemas. This is as far as this nascent concept can be pushed within the limits of political theory. Luke Sunderland identifies something like this positive potential wherever Agamben intimates the possibility of opposing sovereignty by "rendering inoperative its oppositions between subject and object, inside and outside, active and passive, or useful and useless life" concluding that "if the capitalist world order seeks to create productive subjects, then there lies a radical form of resistance in being inactive and unproductive, in study, play, and profanity" (77-78). De Certeau does much the same thing when he credits the tactician with "creat[ing] a certain play in the machine through a stratification of different and interfering kinds of functioning" (30).

More specifically, Claire Colbrooke offers this example of how tactics can insert themselves under capitalist control: "The factory worker making a product for himself on company time appears from the point of view of surveillance as thoroughly obedient. But the worker is considering this object as a gift to be taken home. By the worker remembering another place and another time, all the ostensible gestures that seem dutiful are figured from his point of view as disobedient, as fortuitous" ("Certeau and

Foucault" 547). Here, we see the factory worker perform incivility by turning away from the wage-labor contract and rewriting its logistics with his own intentions and objective. According to this reappropriated narration, the worker is working for himself. De Certeau imagines that writing can move beyond the same dualistic logic of exchange and open up a space other than what is known or knowable in terms of that exchange, in this way enabling incivility to express itself in positive terms.[21] "Writing," he claims, "spells out an absence that is its precondition and its goal. It proceeds by successive abandonments of occupied places, and it articulates itself on an exteriority that eludes it" (195). Coetzee never fails to expose the incomplete and process-based nature of writing, thus the repeated attempt of his fiction to find "the exteriority that eludes it."

2.2 Incivility and the Novel

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau takes great pains to write in a hybridized style that borrows as much from literary—especially novelistic technique—as from sociological and political theory. Hence the book begins with a paean to "the ordinary man…a common hero, an ubiquitous character… What," he wonders, "are we asking this oracle whose voice is almost indistinguishable from the rumble of history to license us, to authorize us to say, when we dedicate to him the writing that one formerly

[21] It is especially noteworthy that de Certeau's reflections on the power of writing, which he reads as both animated by and striving toward absence and expectation, come in a chapter entitled "The Unnamable," which cannot help but reference Beckett's novel of the same name. Both the content and style of de Certeau's claims about writing in this chapter are echoed by Beckett's assertion that, "There at least is a first affirmation, I mean negation, on which to build" (*Three Novels* 333).

offered in praise of the gods or the inspiring muses?" (v). This lyrical dedication envelops the subject of de Certeau's inquiry. By citing him as a "hero" and thus making him a descendent of the heroes of epic poetry, de Certeau also suggests that the ordinary man is, like his precursors, a tactician and figure of resistance in his ability to navigate structures of power. Salman Rushdie asserts that "description itself is a political act… Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images… the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth" (*Imaginary* 13-14). Edward Said makes a case for the novel as the foremost aesthetic object capable of envisioning and fomenting forms of anti-imperial resistance. For those subjects denied the political protections of citizenhood, narrative fictions "became the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history… As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important" (xii-xiii). But these accounts ultimately fail to explain why the ordinary individual seldom if ever appears as the protagonist of a major contemporary novel. Instead, we encounter a vast array of protagonists who are in some way uniquely damaged by modernity itself, suggesting that exceptionality itself becomes a kind of ordinary condition in this context. Though clearly one of a kind, Kathy H in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, Animal in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, Cora Randall in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, Anjum in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and the unnamed

narrator of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* can all be said to survive by non-violent means. Though they are in this sense tacticians, the ways in which they assert themselves without reproducing the logic of strategy acquires meaning and transformative potential beyond the state.

Arguing for the continuing political importance of literature and the enduring relevance of Marxist critique, Anna Kornbluh advocates for the continued importance of Marxist literary critique, a practice in which the novel plays an instrumental role:

> With a long and political-economic view of crisis, we can best conceptualize that the arts and literature contravene modern democratic capitalism through their constitutively speculative, generative utopianism—their deliberate building of something other than what already exists, their formalization of other, different, better ideas and relations than what is already here. In departing from the merely made world and proposing other worlds, literature operates both the negative and affirmative poles of critique, positing imaginative, alluring alternatives to our raging, dystopian hellscape of capitalist contradiction, climate catastrophe, and insurgent global fascism. (398-99)

The novel, she contends, is both iconoclastic and utopian to the extent that it engages in the "deliberate building of something other than what already exists." In the terms of my own argument, the novel not only opposes sovereign violence by performing tactical resistance, but also takes this opposition a step further by yearning for—if not always

precisely imagining— alternative worlds that do not position subjects in a relation of subjection to a sovereign state. Her claim that the novel "operates both… negative and positive poles" that limit its own narrative possibilities implies that critique, by contrast, cannot operate both simultaneously. To the contrary, she suggests, political theory is bound by a logical mode of thought that stops short of the dialectical move that might untether that thought from its political presuppositions. To formulate alternative conditions of possibility, according to Kornbluh, critique needs to dislodge itself from the positive and negative binary terms inherited from the nineteenth century. It must simultaneously acknowledge the reality of the historical framework within which it operates and collapse that binary before it can think in different political terms. This requires an act of invention that she associates with the literary. Kornbluh's explanation of the limitations of political theory ultimately suggests that this mode of thought cannot collapse the opposition of tactics to strategy without calling upon the poetic.[22] To venture beyond the binary of strategy and tactics requires the critic to think in terms of metaphor, allegory, allusion, synecdoche, and chiasmus, all of which Kornbluh

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[22] As Hardt and Negri point out in their discussion of the multitude, "If democracy cannot adopt the opposite strategy from sovereignty and pose pure pacifism against its permanent war, then must it necessarily be no different? Is its war against war a simple nonsense? Such confusions arise when we can think only in opposites. A democratic use of force and violence is neither the same as nor the opposite of the war of sovereignty; it is different" (342). This desire to get beyond binary "opposites" and to understand the ways in which the relation of new political alternatives to existing categories can encompass a simultaneous negation and a move beyond that one-dimensional negation to include new transformative possibilities seems to strive toward the complex dialectical thinking that literature can induce.

unleashes in the paragraph above. What Kornbluh considers the critical potential of literature seems to rest on its unique capacity to serve as a point of intellectual departure from a material world governed by strategy. By orienting itself toward a not-yet-existent polity, her notion of novelistic critique exemplifies a mode of critical thinking that fits within my definition of uncivil consciousness.

To animate incivility in its own right, a novel would have to think in plural terms, for incivility is not a practice one can take up on his or her own. It simultaneously requires and constitutes a collective, which I refer to as uncivil consciousness. However, it cannot be fully understood as the type of fixed and cohesive group we associate with class, even though it emerges in certain works of fiction in a manner similar to the formation of class consciousness. The populations through which contemporary novels often trace this kind of collective realization bears certain resemblances to Marx's *lumpenproletariat*, whose motley membership he considered "the 'dangerous class,' the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society." He saw them as most likely to become a "bribed tool of reactionary intrigue" (876). But while he does not allow for the possibility that this politically malleable underclass might unite around a common cause, his use of the phrase "dangerous class" also reveals the latent political pressure of this non-class of uncivilians. The danger they pose is not just to a bifurcated class order, but to the manner in which authority is always derived from ownership of the means of production. The struggle between bourgeoisie

and proletariat, although it seeks to redistribute economic control as a means of securing political power, ultimately tries to re-arrange rather than to abandon a traditional model of state power. This model also assumes that individual forms of identity or sub-group memberships are always sublimated into a singular class-based political affiliation. But Hardt and Negri use the figure of the multitude to push back against the implicit limitations that a Marxist perspective projects onto the idea of an uncivilian collective. They describe the "multitude" as a diverse and open-ended network that moves a set of distinct groups to act together

> without any central, unifying structure that subordinates or sets aside their differences. In conceptual terms, the multitude replaces the contradictory couple identity-difference with the complementary couple commonality-singularity. In practice the multitude provides a model whereby our expressions of singularity are not reduced or diminished in our communication and collaboration with others in struggle, with our forming ever greater common habits, practices, conduct, and desires—with, in short, the global mobilization and extension of the common. (217-218)

The novels I plan to discuss take us back to the moment when the figure of the individual—the ultimate export of traditional fiction—turns away from itself and becomes an uncivil consciousness. In ceasing to defend individualism as the source of political power, today's protagonists develop the uncivil consciousness that refuses to

define itself in relation to the "regime of violence that perpetuates our state of war and supports the systems of inequality and oppression" (67). Where the multitude's "war against war" requires "active" opposition, I would set incivility apart from both sovereign violence and tactical resistance, defining it instead by the extraordinary passivity of its aggression. Sovereign violence is designed to instantiate and reify categories as a means of accruing power, while tactical resistance has the power to begin to erode such categorizations, blurring the line between state strategy and tactical manipulations. However, incivility and forms of uncivil consciousness go beyond mere tactical resistance; they simply have no regard for the existence of sovereign categories at all. Uncivil consciousness understands that the sovereign state—while its effects on human and planetary life are material and tangible— is actually a fiction. Eager to acknowledge this truth, the novel enlists tactical methodologies in order to build worlds beyond those articulated in terms of political theory.

The early work of J.M. Coetzee generally continues to be read within the politically bifurcated field of postcolonial studies, where any form of human self-assertion or resistance can be understood in relation to imperial power. A passage from the 1983 Booker-winning novel *Life & Times of Michael K* models how Coetzee thinks the novel can begin to move beyond this limit. Voiced by the medical doctor in a refugee/labor camp where the itinerant protagonist has been incarcerated under military

rule in apartheid South Africa, the novel speaks to K and beyond him to us in these terms:

> Your stay in the camp was merely an allegory, if you know that word. It was an allegory—speaking at the highest level—of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it. Did you not notice how, whenever I tried to pin you down, you slipped away? I noticed. (166)

What the doctor describes is a flawlessly rendered textbook version of tactical behavior. Michael K "slips away" whenever the doctor, as an agent of the state apparatus, tries to extract information from him. He is caught in "residence in a system" yet wields a degree of individual power to avoid becoming reified or frozen as a "term" within it. Despite this tension between the degree of evasive independence that K exhibits and the predetermined plane of strategic power on which he exists, the doctor's gaze nevertheless proves panoptic. His knowledge of Michael K's maneuvers, and his confident, unconcerned watchfulness (rendered chillingly through the casual understatement "I noticed") initially seem to indicate the stability of the doctor's own authority within the strategic logic of his setting.[23] This strategic claim to authority, however, ultimately invalidates itself completely. In this section of the novel, as Coetzee switches from his characteristically impersonal third-person narration to the first-

person perspective of the doctor, his surrogate narrator consistently misrecognizes and misnames Michael K as "Michaels," seeming to preclude the possibility that the state could interpellate him. Michael's iteration "'I am what I am'" serves as a corrective to the doctor that simultaneously refuses to acknowledge him in turn (130). Linguistically, such a formulation signals that K is identical to himself. He cannot be turned into a metaphor nor an avatar of allegory, since he exists as his own referent. Nor, by extension, can he be interpellated within the systemic logic of the state. He embodies incivility, and it is not well received by the agents of the state nor by those who hope to survive by submitting to their arbitrary rules. Falsely classified as an insurgent because he doesn't voluntarily submit, K explains to the doctor that he does not take part in the war. To which the doctor responds, "'You are not in the war? Of course you are in the war, man, whether you like it or not!'" (138). Although he recognizes that Michael is "not of our world," which clearly means that he does not subscribe to the prevailing fiction, the doctor lacks the capacity to imagine "a creature beyond the reach of the laws of nations" (142, 151).

Contrary to the medical officer's belief, the novel's crucial truth about Michael K is that he is both of these things: not only an individual who belongs to a world other than one declared to be in a state of exception, but also a creature who seems unable to acknowledge the power of the state itself. The doctor is not wrong to call attention to the ways in which K's "slipperiness" operates within the established system of power, but

this is not the full story. To emphasize K's tactical fluency at the expense of how he manifests the radical possibilities of incivility is for criticism to remain stuck, like the doctor himself, in the logic of sovereignty.[24] Coetzee's novel provides a glimpse of a world distinct from the chaos of war, one where it is possible both to refuse the oppositional death spiral of sovereignty and to practice collective uncivil consciousness.[25] The novel's conclusion depicts K's tactical maneuvers—as he slides beyond categories and boundaries, eluding names and fences—as both driven by and

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[24] Daniele Monticelli's reading of the novel, in my view, is able to get beyond this preoccupation with sovereignty without falsely labeling Michael K's behavior apolitical through appeals to a modified conception of Ranciere's dissensus and Agamben's notion of inoperativity. She reads the camps as "the establishment of boundaries and delimitations and their control as the main concern of power, which cannot tolerate Michael's in-betweenness, his ability to live in the interstices between opposite spaces, identities, or groups," and rightly identifies that his *explicitly political* desire is "a right to silence and invisibility which no one is willing to allow him" (620, 624). Animating a perspective wholly compatible with the notion of uncivil consciousness, she goes on to say that "Michael declines to present any specific demand, to claim any right, because he very well knows that as soon as he does so, he will be captured by the consensual logic of the camp… The fact that his wish to be 'outside of all the camps' is not accompanied by an attempt to fight out a recognized social position, his own place within the existent system, does not therefore imply Michael's political failure in engaging power. On the contrary, it is exactly his withdrawal, his attempt at making his bare life into a form-of-life completely subtracted from the biopolitical economy, that represents… the most radical way of engaging power" (635).

[25] Michael K is generally understood to be a solitary individual who has no—or limited—interest in the company of others, let alone any kind of collective association. But the novel's ending as well as an earlier encounter suggest otherwise. When K camps out near the old Visagie farm and observes insurgent men passing through, he imagines, with hope and excitement, that he will "come out of hiding and trot along behind them like a child following a brass band… I could say: Be sure to come back to the dam next time, and I will feed you. I will have pumpkins and squashes and melons by then, I will have peaches and figs and prickly pears, you will lack nothing… They will have stories to tell" (109). The only reason that K does not reveal himself to them is because "enough men had gone off to war… there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening" (109). He clearly longs for community but even in this instance, his desire to leave the state behind governs his existence. While his social experiment with the Visagie grandson who comes to hide out at the farm fails, ultimately reproducing a hierarchical relation of domination, this has more to do with the strategic imperiousness of the grandson in relation to Michael and does not indicate a failure of uncivil consciousness on Michael's part.

able to generate an emerging notion of community. As K entertains the possibility of a new world at the novel's close, he leaves behind the camps and re-enters what might seem, from the perspective of sovereign strategy, to be a virtual wasteland. To him, the scarred and deserted corners of Cape Town represents the land of his early life without the institutional authority, restrictions, and reference points that constrained him. Throughout his story, he has obviously sought such a space outside the state, but every attempt to enter the "outside" has resulted in his confinement in another camp. Finding a blanket in a deserted corner of a seaside town, Michael conjures "a little old man with a stoop and a bottle in his side pocket who muttered all the time into his beard, the kind of old man the police ignored… They could share a bed tonight… if they were lucky the two of them could be spinning along the high road by ten o'clock" (183). K fantasizes about an ally and travel companion, notably "the kind of old man the police ignored," suggesting that their unity—precisely as it occurs with the cultivation of uncivil consciousness—is predicated on their disregard for state power. In its highly speculative nature and conditional tense, the novel's end provides a glimmer of a reality that is notably different from Michael's repeated evasions of the state and its camps. It acknowledges the impossibility of imagining a life that is not defined by its relation to the state unless it is lived with another human being. Having left behind the directives

and authority of the law, K begins to create the possibilities for a new kind of political community, one unconcerned with oppositional power and social mobility alike.[26]

From this perspective, we can read a narrative instigated by war and the obstacles and traps K must avoid, much like de Certeau's city dweller. By contrast to the relation between de Certeau's exemplary tactician and the city he navigates, however, K's encounters with South Africa in a state of war torn landscape provides the circumstantial catalyst that drives him to turn away from the state, but war is not what enables him to do so. Put differently, Michael K's ability to occupy pockets of land and time seemingly removed from state control are a result not merely of the exceptional space of civil war but his own uncivil consciousness. Institutionalized along with other children declared to be "afflicted" in some way, the fundamental subjection that Michael K experiences throughout his life is not radically changed by the onset of military rule (4). Because his physical deformity—a harelip— makes it difficult for him to speak and discourages most other people from directly acknowledging him, the state does not have to strip him of individuality; he simply never had it. Presumably his desire for an institution-free existence neither began with the South African state of emergency nor would end with the cessation of hostilities. Part of Michael's uncivil existence can be

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[26] See Nancy Armstrong for a discussion of the ways in which Michael K refuses the temptation to recreate the domestic household and forms of social mobility as a way to "break off the narrative of individual development and produce a before-and-after story that can distinguish the individuals we persist in imagining ourselves to be from those who prefigure what we are becoming" ("The Migrant Novel: On Becoming What We Are Not" 2019).

found in his refusal to conform to the ways in which the state itself measures time and understands history. Rather than situating himself in relation to the civil conflict, Michael thinks instead that if "there was one thing I discovered out in the country, it was that there is time enough for everything. (Is that the moral of it all, he thought, the moral of the whole story: that there is time enough for everything?)" (183). In this way, by refusing to be appropriated within the histories of national conflict—as an insurgent or as a refugee—and by embracing the undifferentiated time of nature, he fully embraces the purely conditional existence implied by the novel's poetic and obscure close. Imagining a scenario in which he tries to find water with his (hypothetical) uncivil companion in the wake of military destruction, Michael K thinks that he "would produce a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string. He would… lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up again there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live" (184). The simple and conditional nature of K's reverie envisions a world that traditional political theory could not. Where theory and state narrative would see an impossible, fictional space outside of linear time, seemingly destroyed by state violence, K sees sustenance, community, and freedom. The novel's closing line, "one can live," introduces an optimistic alternative to the options that K has otherwise been given throughout the novel: to exist, to survive, to work, but never to live. The novel manages

the revolutionary feat of untethering life from the state itself and honoring Michael K's fundamental incivility.

In lingering on this passage from *Michael K*, I mean to let the novel do the theoretical work of which I consider it capable. Benjamin Ogden raises the question posed by K's doctor to a meta-fictional level when he contends that "the problem of how one can 'take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it'" is actually the same question that animates all of Coetzee's oeuvre, namely, "how the novel can avoid the pitfalls inherent in confrontations with power, rule, and tradition" (473). In this sense, the same impulse that drives his protagonist also drives Coetzee as author, which is to get beyond the limits of the strategy-tactics binary and its complicity with the sovereign state.[27] Carrol Clarkson's observations about Coetzee's uneasiness with the strategic limitations of language itself reinforce this understanding of his project: "How does one write the other, the singular, the as-yet-untold, in language that inexorably follows tracks of the known, the familiar, the already-said?" (154). Where the state manipulates the language system to authorize a repressive political system, the novel form gives him the means of resisting the binary opposition that frames Clarkson's question. We can thus understand a unifying purpose to Coetzee's work as an attempt

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[27] Ogden resolves this question differently in his 2010 essay "The Coming Into Being of Literature: How J.M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* Thinks Through the Novel," by comparing the ways in which the novel and the state form grew out of the same traditions and modes of authority. By examining Coetzee's structurally inventive 2007 novel, he concludes that the novel's formal innovations model a kind of balancing act between factual and fictional writing that makes the authority of both subject to the reader's own autonomy, and avoids reproducing the "pitfalls" of power he discusses.

to imagine a position of incivility that he can inhabit. This is hardly an apolitical stance, even though it is far from standard, but a calculated effort to imagine a subject uninterpellated by the given political order.

Well before *Michael K*, Coetzee wrote what might be read as a guide to achieving such a subject position by negating the possibility of rehabilitating both strategy and tactics in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). A first-person present tense narration, the voice of the novel is that of an unnamed Magistrate, an imperial bureaucrat who governs a frontier outpost. The Magistrate's comfortably unremarkable existence is upended when security agents and soldiers from the nonspecific Empire arrive and proceed at once to construct and to eradicate a threat to the outpost (and by extension, to the Empire itself) from an alien force simply termed "barbarians." The novel itself stands as a kind of testament to the Magistrate's ambivalence in the face of imperial violence and torture. As the Empire's sadism becomes impossible to ignore, his indignation grows, but he finds himself nevertheless bound to think and act within his own (admittedly self-interested) position in the imperial order. This tension is never clearer than when he engages in an ambiguous relationship with a barbarian girl. Obsessed with a body marked by her torture at the hands of Empire, the Magistrate attempts to heal and perhaps to possess her, but comes to realize as he says, that this very obsession renders the "distance between myself and her torturers… negligible" (27). Liani Lochner considers the main concern of the novel a matter of whether or not it is possible to exist

independently of the state that bestows identity. "As discursively constituted subjects," she asks, "are our only available options to turn either toward the law or away from the law, or is it possible to challenge the law itself?" (107). Although *Barbarians* tests all three of these possible responses to sovereign law, I would argue, Coetzee makes a point of showing that they do not exhaust the political possibilities of the novel, because all three options are determined by a relation to the "law." If this novel anticipates the end of *Life & Times of Michael K*, as well as *Diary of a Bad Year*, and *Elizabeth Costello*, it is because they will continue its protracted effort to imagine social life outside "the law."

2.3 The Limitations of Tactical Resistance in Waiting for the Barbarians

Waiting for the Barbarians reveals that a modern imperial state that depends on a friend/enemy opposition will also depend on coding that difference as good versus evil. Such a state, this novel confirms, will use forms of strategic violence against tactical resistance. That is to say, the Empire justifies its own brutality by means of a narrative that turns a "foreign" population into enemies from whom it is obliged to protect its citizens. Sharing its title with the C.P. Cavafy poem, Coetzee's Empire is also marked by ostentatious pageantry and bureaucratic paralysis. The poem asks, "What are we waiting for, gathered here in the agora?/ The barbarians supposed to show up today./ Why is there such indolence in the senate?/ Why are the senators sitting around, making no laws?/ Because the barbarians are supposed to show up today" (53). In the poem, the

imperial state sustains itself through the conflation of present and future in an eternal present of waiting. Thus suspended, the time of Empire is contingent on the construction of an enemy that poses an existential threat. Here, the sovereign's power to decide on the exception also enables the dysfunction of a legislative body that waits for the barbarians to attack and then to be repelled by the state. The omnipresent specter of an enemy suspends political life in negative expectation. The state, by identifying this threat, guarantees its continuing authority because it stands between the people and the barbarians. Early on in the novel, the Magistrate appointed to the outpost views the situation with skepticism, musing that "once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians… These dreams are the consequence of too much ease. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe" (8). Although a barbarian army never materializes as such, the imperial security forces known as the Third Bureau nevertheless assert themselves proactively in the frontier settlement "under the emergency powers" (1).

They do so in response to a clear and present threat that has supposedly gone unnoticed by the Magistrate and other townspeople. Inverting the normal logic of cause and effect, the facticity of this threat is established by the violence of the state's "response" to it. By generating fears of barbarian hostility, Joll and his fellow officers secure political loyalty from the outpost citizens that in turn authorizes the state to deploy sovereign violence in the name of responsible rule. By using the specter of an

imminent threat to coerce its subjects to support this use of violence, the state fulfills its contract with the people by persecuting those "others" who have been designated as enemies. Such violence cannot be coded as illegitimate if it is directed against a sub-population the state has criminalized as dangerous to its subjects. Throughout Coetzee's novel, representatives of Empire use versions of the same strategy to consolidate and reinforce their authority.

Rather than assume a defensive posture, Colonel Joll aggressively captures small and forlorn groups of "nomads" as tangible evidence that barbarians exist. The Magistrate is puzzled by the "impatience" that prompts Joll to "launch a swift raid on the nomads and take more prisoners" (11). Although the nomads are never proven to be "barbarians," much less a threat to the citizens of the outpost, the novel's suggestion that the two are interchangeable implies that the nomads' refusal to be confined within the boundaries and protocols of Empire sets a precedent so dangerous that it has to be forcibly suppressed. As an agent of the state, Joll is fully aware that he needs an enemy to legitimize the military violence he commands. Because the category of enemy has no objective criteria to define it, this designation, like the state of exception itself, depends entirely on the sovereign decision. Agamben points out that "far from occurring as an objective given, necessity clearly entails a subjective judgment… the only circumstances that are necessary and objective are those that are declared to be so" (*State of Exception*

30).[28] Joll brings this principle to life when he responds to the suggestion that the nomadic fisher people may not be the barbarians with the dismissive tautology, "'Prisoners are prisoners'" (22). Echoing the formulation of Michael K's self-declaration ("I am what I am"), Joll implies not only the interchangeability of all prisoners, but also that such figures are retroactively defined as the state classifies them. By thus objectifying a few members of this population, the state weaponizes them against themselves to justify the exercise of its violence against an entire sub-population.

The ease and fluency with which Joll creates the conditions for and limitations of political life is consistent with his professed view of truth. The Magistrate, uneasy with the obvious scenes of torture being played out between imperial agents and nomadic prisoners behind closed doors at the fort, worries, "'What if your prisoner is telling the truth… yet finds he is not believed?'" (5). He actually seems to be asking Joll to admit that he has knowingly misidentified his prisoners as enemies of the state. Joll clearly considers truth a matter of conflicting interests in which those of the state will necessarily prevail. He is entirely forthright about his conviction that to maintain the authority of the state's truth, he must extract that truth from his prisoners. When this fails, it falls to Joll and his fellow "guardians of the State, specialists in the obscurer

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[28] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri echo the arbitrariness of "necessity" by emphasizing the ways in which the the legitimacy of sovereign violence is only validated or justified belatedly. As they put it, "the legitimation of violence tends only to come after the fact, based on the effect of the violence, its capacities to create and maintain order… violence comes first as basis and political or moral negotiation follows on its results" (*Multitude* 341).

motions of sedition, devotees of truth, [and] doctors of interrogation" to manufacture it (9).[29] The novel underscores this point when Joll describes the administration of torture as a uniform production process: "first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth" (5). By forcing it from the bodies of his prisoners, Joll turns his subjective truth, as the instrument of state authority, into the objective truth of Empire. Later on, the Magistrate himself, imprisoned as a barbarian sympathizer, confides to his guard that he knows how this process works and is willing to play along. "[M]ake up any story you like and I will support you," he tells the soldier (101). The Magistrate understands that his self-preservation requires him to exist within the narrative categories and versions of truth set forth by the state. In trying to talk his way out of the position of an enemy sympathizer, demonstrating the provisional and noncommittal nature of his relationship to sovereign power, he actually shows that he belongs in that category. But if he cannot occupy the category of friend, neither can he fully occupy the position of enemy which would require him to turn against or away from the state.

While the Magistrate opposes the violence visited upon the local nomads, he unintentionally reproduces the violence that the state directs against the barbarians in

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[29] As Paul Kahn points out, the fact that torture "produces its own truth" makes it a kind of "epistemological failure" from "the perspective of third-person objectivity" (26). But objectivity is counterproductive to the subjective judgments of necessity that drive the sovereign's decision on the state of exception. As Agamben clarifies, "necessity ultimately come[s] down to a decision" (*State of Exception* 30) and that decision is not only subjective, but subjectively made by a political actor whose primary concern is to preserve its own political authority.

several ways. The first occurs at the level of naming. As Jonathan Lear points out, "One can see the novel's narrator struggling not just at the edge of empire, but at the edge of empire's use of concepts. We see this in his use of the concept *barbarian*, from which he is alienated but which he continues to use" ("Waiting with Coetzee" 10). By reiterating the terminology of the official state narrative, the Magistrate also reproduces the strategic taxonomies and value judgments embedded in that story. It is true that the word "barbarians" is itself an unstable signifier throughout the novel; Joll and his men use the phrase to demonize the nomadic tribes around the settlement, but the Magistrate himself often identifies the agents of the state as the true "barbarians" who pose a threat to civilization and peace on the frontier. Nevertheless, the Magistrate's first-person narration often slips back into Empire's chosen nomenclature, imagining contemporary reality and ancient history alike as a potential contest between barbarians and bureaucrats. Even when he uses the Empire's own script to condemn its agents—"'*You* are the enemy, *you* have made the war… starting not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here!'—he reproduces the oppositional logic on which the Empire thrives, reanimating the friend-enemy opposition that drives the official government narrative (114).

The Magistrate's relationship with a nomadic "barbarian girl" is the novel's clearest example of the ways in which Coetzee's protagonist wants to oppose the violence of Empire yet finds himself reproducing it. Obsessed with the marks on the

girl's body that represent the abuse she has suffered at Joll's hands, the Magistrate seeks simultaneously to ameliorate the damage that has been done to her and to decipher the reality of what she experienced in the torture chamber. "It has been growing more and more clear to me," he admits, "that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (31). Contrary to Joll's conviction that "pain is truth," the Magistrate tells her that "pain is only pain" (5, 32). His desperate need to affirm and explore imperial violence, though, suggests a morbid fascination with the structures of power that are able to wield it. Pain is not just pain in this case, but the crux of state authority; the state uses pain to turn its view of the difference between friends and enemies into objective truth. The Magistrate's determination to find out how pain becomes a technology of power makes him into simply another version of Empire's "guardians of the State" and "devotees of truth" (9). Even though he exercises an eroticized form of domination over her body rather than the traditional brutality of the Third Bureau, his desires are not as easily differentiated from those of Joll as he would like to believe. When the barbarian girl responds with unrelenting stoicism, the Magistrate comes to understand that "The distance between myself and her torturers… is negligible," a fact that makes him "shudder" (27).

Like Michael K, the barbarian girl remains a cipher within Coetzee's text, largely indifferent to the Magistrate's attempts to elicit the type of self-disclosure that would reveal the true nature of her "barbarian" identity. Indeed, on trying to remember the girl

in her absence, he confesses, "if I took a pencil to sketch her face I would not know where to start… where the girl should be, there is a space, a blankness" (47). What makes her so impossible to situate in the taxonomies of Empire is her indifference to their existence. She displays "no answering life"—neither resistance nor compliance--to the Magistrate's attempts to locate her within the state's categories. In comparing his ministrations to her to the act of "caressing an urn or a ball, something which is all surface," the Magistrate acknowledges that her indifference renders her impervious in more ways than one (49). She remains uninterpellated by Empire which she makes clear by staying in the town, after her time in the torture chamber, to do kitchen work despite the continued presence of the security forces. In so turning away from the state, the girl proves equally impervious to the Magistrate's frustrated sexual desire for her. He might "prowl about her, touching her face, caressing her body, without entering her or finding the urge to do so," but her lack of any response tells him there is no point in trying to find a way in: "with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret?" he asks. In turning away from political engagement, the novel suggests, she has also turned away from social engagement with those who represent the state. The passivity that repels him tells us that she does not live within the friend-enemy opposition at all.

The girl's relationship with the Magistrate can always be understood as a version of her relationship to Empire. Thus, by refusing to tell the story of her torture, she arrests

the circulation of its manufactured narrative of state power. So, too, by remaining indifferent to the Magistrate's coercive intimacies does she decline to identify him as either friend or enemy and refuses to situate herself in relation to the imperial bureaucracy. Notably, when the two of them do have sex, it happens outside the boundaries of the settlement, during an expedition the Magistrate has organized to return the girl to her community. Where the very concept of sovereignty has no meaning, the girl no longer turns away from the Magistrate. Beyond the reach of state power, sexual coupling is no longer a relation of power and the Magistrate is "surprised by her fluency, her quickness, her self-possession" (63). Because the barbarian girl initiates their sexual encounter for her own undisclosed reasons, it should come as no surprise when she sardonically dismisses his request that she return with him to the fort. While it may seem obvious why she does not want to "go back to that place," as she puts it, it is noteworthy that she is now willing to express herself forcefully outside of the confines of Empire (71).

When the Magistrate's expedition comes face-to-face with "barbarian" horsemen who can return the girl to her home, he exposes the limits of tactical attempts to live within but in opposition to the state apparatus. "'Speak to them,'" he urges the girl, "'Tell them why we are here. Tell them your story. Tell them the truth.' She looks sideways at me and gives a little smile. 'You really want me to tell them the truth?'" (71). While Joll identifies truth with strategic knowledge that only qualified agents of the state

can produce, the Magistrate attempts to achieve the same knowledge by positioning himself as a perverse amalgam of lover and healer. Retrospectively remarking on the ways in which he has failed the girl, who has served as an object through which the Magistrate's simultaneous fascination and horror at sovereign violence can be articulated, he asks, "is it the case (I am not stupid, let me say these things) that it is the marks on her which drew me to her but which, to my disappointment, I find, do not go deep enough? Too much or too little: is it she I want or the traces of a history her body bears?" (64). Though tactically conceived, the idea that he could elude state power in the privacy of the bedroom simply makes it into a variant of the torture chamber: both, in this model, become spaces where any course of action is justified in order to extract the truth of the human body's subjection.

While the novel does seem to open the possibility that the Magistrate could move beyond the state, the expedition that brands him an enemy sympathizer proves, if nothing else, that his tactical resistance keeps him tethered to Empire. It is only in his role as an amateur archaeologist that the Magistrate comes to understand what it would take to exist outside the friend-enemy binary that authorizes state violence. Digging among ruins of previous settlements, he finds a number of ancient tablets covered with characters that defy his best efforts at deciphering them. What he wants to find by penetrating this code is "a special historical poignancy" that could yield "a map of the land of the barbarians in olden times, or a representation of a lost pantheon" (16). He

finds the illegibility of the tablets so thrilling because it just might mask an alternative history to the "jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe" of Empire (133). As Lynda Ng points out,

> These vestiges of a previous society counter Colonel Joll's version of the world. They could be proof that things were once different, which would raise the prospect that things might be different once again. Yet the Magistrate is wary of his own desire to imagine an alternate system, saying: 'Perhaps in my digging I have only scratched the surface. Perhaps ten feet below the floor lie the ruins of another fort, razed by the barbarians, peopled with the bones of folk who thought they would find safety behind high walls' (17)" (527-28).

Although skeptical of the fictional accounts of barbarian violence circulated by the Empire, the Magistrate still can only understand civilization only in relation to the figure of the barbarian, relying on the very terms of the oppositional narrative he doubts. Having been accused of using the tablets to pass coded messages to the barbarians, the Magistrate is called upon to translate them. Even though he has no way of knowing their actual meaning, the Magistrate feels compelled to provide Joll with the knowledge he demands. Operating as a surrogate for the novelist himself, the Magistrate invents a series of letters between a father and a daughter, informing her of the torture and death that her brother has suffered at the hands of soldiers. He describes a slip with a single character as "the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for

vengeance, and if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended" (112). The Magistrate's tactical re-appropriation of Empire's own history demonstrates fiction's uncivil refusal to accept vertical hierarchies and its ability to challenge entrenched forms of strategic knowledge. Told from the perspective of a "barbarian" family, helpless to protect their son against sovereign violence, this fictional encounter with imperial power exposes a truth that undercuts the triumphalist narrative of colonial conquest. In that it testifies to the strength of Empire, however, this story also reveals the secret of the Empire's durability, or "how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era" (133). By equating war with both vengeance and justice, the Magistrate may make the meaning of war a choice between oppositional points of view, but he also makes that opposition as central to even a fictionalized account of ancient barbarian culture as it is to his own.

Even though the Magistrate "wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects," as he testifies at the novel's close, this admission of desire has a ring of belatedness to it (154). After the imperial guard has fled the frontier, scared off by the barbarians who prove strategically superior to Joll and his men, he cannot believe in the possibilities implicit in the illegible characters unearthed in the desert ruins. The Magistrate fails to connect the fictional stories he tells about barbarian life to the idea that the history of civilization itself could be different than the narrative presented by Empire, in other words, that the progress of civilization itself

might not seem progressive to those subjected to it. But what his imagined translations—and the buried remains of the desert ruins themselves— actually suggest is that history itself is only a palimpsest of such smaller narratives that can be authored by individuals without regard for state strategy. Despite the limitations of his own position, when the Magistrate creates an epistolary fiction for Joll, he takes on the role of the novelist, revealing the ways in which fiction can create and model uncivil relationships beyond the state. Coetzee's better-known author-protagonist, Elizabeth Costello, insists that the only truth is that of fiction and rejects metaphysics for the life of tiny frogs on the Australian mudflats driven by seasonal cycles that persist despite political struggles of human history (*Elizabeth Costello* 219). Like Costello's story of the Australian frogs, the Magistrate's account of a barbarian imagines a mode of existence that occurs alongside but not under the mandates of the state. The quotidian nature of these stories indicates novels—and not official histories—testify to an incivility that is already built into everyday existence.

There is nevertheless one point in the novel when the Magistrate himself demonstrates a capacity for uncivil consciousness, which proves capable of turning away from any position within the state. Here, the novel shows what it would mean to cultivate forms of community that are not formulated either in compliance or opposition to the state. Out on a hunting expedition, the Magistrate comes upon a ram at close range. As he positions himself to kill the animal, the ram's "hooves touch ice with a

click, his jaw stops in mid-motion, we gaze at each other." The Magistrate notices that "my pulse does not quicken: evidently it is not important to me that the ram die" (39). Having stumbled into a familiar narrative trope (in which man conquers nature), the Magistrate finds himself unable to act on the oppositional logic that would enable him to bring the encounter to its logical conclusion with the ram's death. Suddenly, no longer interested in demonstrating a dominance over nature that would define his manhood in political terms, the Magistrate sets himself apart from Joll, who recounts a hunting trip in which "thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcases had to be left to rot" (1). Rather than use this suggestive encounter to demonstrate how the Magistrate deals with an "enemy," Coetzee uses the occasion to provide a glimpse of what it might be like to nullify that opposition. Time slows to a near halt, allowing the Magistrate to "turn my gaze inward and see what it is that has robbed the hunt of its savour," and he senses that "this has become… an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim." He concludes "that… events are not themselves but stand for other things" (39-40). Although the Magistrate and the ram have nothing in common outside the moment and exchange of gazes they share, this is enough to suggest that they might co-exist without conforming to the script that Empire would have them play out. The Magistrate's failure to *decide* whether the ram's difference makes him a friend or an enemy amounts to a refusal to take up the sovereign power to which he believes he must either submit or resist. In so doing, the

Magistrate experiences a fleeting union with the ram in a bond of uncivil consciousness. This co-existence can be animated even between radically singular beings, the novel suggests, who prefer to live and let live without regard for sovereign strategy.

This suggestion that uncivil consciousness emerges at the margins of Empire is also evident in the figure of the barbarians themselves. Throughout the novel there is little evidence that the barbarians actually exist. Most of the prisoners gathered by the Third Guard to testify to the threat of hostility are nomadic fisherfolk. The "barbarians" are so independent from Empire that the Magistrate can insert them into his narrative as hypothetical figures divined from the disruptions of settlement life for which they are blamed. They appear in the novel as paranoid projections encouraged by Joll and his men. Toward the end of the narrative, however, the novel affords some evidence that their stories might be generating truth. Two horsemen from the army's expedition reappear before the gates of the town bringing "tidings from the barbarians": two soldiers' corpses, each "lashed to a stout wooden framework which holds him upright in his saddle" (140). These tidings prove a powerful incentive for Joll and his remaining men to return to the Capital, bringing about a "'cessation of operations along the front for the duration of the winter'" (141) Joll returns to the settlement a chastened man who testifies to an independent human existence that completely confounds the strategies of the state. "We were not beaten," he tells the Magistrate, "they led us out into the desert and then they vanished... They lured us on and on, we could never catch them… they

would not stand up to us!" (147). Completely flummoxed by his encounters with the barbarians, Joll interprets their gesture of returning the dead to the settlement not as an example of the barbarians' humanity, but as an aggressive form of terror he does not understand. Where Joll sees the world in philosophical terms of "kill or be killed," the barbarians, like the ram, do not harbor the predatory drive that Joll equates with life itself. When faced with a threat, the barbarian instinct is not to initiate conflict but to continue to exist on their own terms. In this way, their turn away from the state also contains the possibility for an uncivil co-existence. The radical difference between the two groups does not close down the possibility for their peaceful coexistence, as the brief meeting between Magistrate and ram demonstrates. For citizens of the Empire, the presence of an "other" always constitutes a threat to the state, and thus the barbarians cannot simply be allowed to move past or away from Joll without reprisal.

Waiting for the Barbarians is the novel where Coetzee narrativizes the inevitable slide of the friend-enemy from the pragmatics of governance onto the metaphysical grid of good and evil. Even as his account of the torture chamber reveals the category of enemy to be a purely fictional construction, its emptiness obscured by the pyrotechnic narrative productions of strategic power, the Magistrate understands that the state's dominant fiction will trump that truth. As he attempts to write a record of his experiences, he muses that, "'When one day people come scratching around in the ruins, they will be more interested in the relics from the desert than in anything I may leave

behind. And rightly so'" (155). Although his objection to Empire's violence never moves beyond tactical maneuvers that reinforce the authority of his oppressors, this admission signals a dawning awareness of the limits of this resistance. To imagine a world uncircumscribed by the opposition of tactics to strategy, his narrative would have to free itself of the compulsion to oppose political history. The ruins at the edge of the settlement provide a liminal space where, the Magistrate recognizes that "[t]here has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it" (155). As a space devoid of the marks of imperial violence that scar bodies and territories throughout the novel, the desert ruins provide the basic of imagining relations of incivility that refuse to distinguish citizen from noncitizen. The story of an existence beyond the state is one that the Magistrate might have told, the novel suggests, if instead of asking the barbarian girl to return to the town with him, he could have elected to remain in a world where he was willing to let his own authority dissipate along with the strategic dictates of Empire.

2.4 State and Novelistic Origins in Diary of a Bad Year

Where in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee explains why an interpersonal relationship fails to overcome the force of state authority, he uses the later novel *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) to record the development of uncivil consciousness that can enable a protagonist to move in that direction. *Diary*, with its unusual tripartite structure, dramatizes the dialogic interplay of voices that comprise and modify the manuscript that its protagonist, the suggestively named novelist "JC," is composing throughout.

Writing in the most literal sense can be considered the action of the novel, and how that writing succeeds or fails in materializing a politics of disengagement constitutes its plot though not, as I contend, its story. The manuscript itself, titled "Strong Opinions," is part of a book in which "six eminent writers pronounce on what is wrong with today's world" (21). For JC, "the state," as a transhistorical symbol of political sovereignty, stands at the center of his non-fictional critique. This endeavor draws its identity and purpose from the very object it wants to destroy, in much the same way that Joll depends on the barbarians and the Magistrate depends on the girl mutilated by torture at the hands of the state. Thus it is only logical that, as the novel progresses, JC's methodology proves to be at odds with his purpose. Railing against the state using tactical forms of resistance, JC cannot help but reproduce the narratives from which the state draws its power.

It takes JC's secretary, Anya, to unearth and resuscitate the uncivil consciousness latent in JC's critical project. In this way, she both models the act of turning away—as the barbarian girl does for the Magistrate—and allows the writer to find the capacity to do so within himself. In contrast to *Barbarians*, *Diary* does not settle for diagnosing and criticizing the failure to move beyond the state. Coetzee's later novel provides a much more abstract examination of the relationship between man and state, not simply reversing the mode of imperial resistance demonstrated in *Barbarians*, but imagining how uncivil consciousness could be achieved even with a more indirect relationship to

political oppression. Because *Diary* only portrays a conflict with the idea or the structure of the state, rather than with any of its sovereign representatives, much of its internal plot is driven by the way that the act of writing itself helps or hinders the realization of particular forms of resistance. Striking out immediately at the heart of the problem, a section of JC's manuscript titled "On the origins of the state" begins Coetzee's novel on this note:

> Every account of the origins of the state starts from the premise that "we"—not we the readers but some generic we so wide as to exclude no one—participate in its coming into being. But the fact is that the only "we" we know—ourselves and the people close to us—are born into the state; and our forebears too were born into the state as far back as we can trace. The state is always there before we are. (3)

The state creates and disseminates a strategic account of itself in order to contextualize and legitimize its own power. Always acting as the agent of critique, JC exposes the mythical character of this narrative, which deliberately inspires awe by obscuring its own origins.[30] Insofar as the state appears as an omnipresent, panoptic entity ("the state is always there before we are"), it evokes epic scenes of trans-generational subjection, shrouded in mystery.

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[30] Rita Barnard makes the point that the state's "ostensible coherence, its sense of purpose, and its morality are all theoretical constructs, and its origins, as we have seen, are best (perhaps *only*) to be grasped in fictional, even mythic form." For more on Coetzee's fascination with the "unimaginable" temporality of subjection to the state, see her essay "Tsotsis: On Law, the Outlaw, and the Postcolonial State" in *Contemporary Literature* 49.4 (Winter 2008): 541-572.

Commenting on Rita Barnard's reading of *Diary*'s temporality, Ian Baucom explains "there was an 'unimaginable' time *before* the state and then there *was* the state… which inevitably marks its advent as coincident with the advent of true historical time—before which is the time of myth" (713). To render the time before its existence "unimaginable" is also to render our existence without—or outside of—the state equally unimaginable. This tautology afflicts the thinking of Coetzee's Magistrate, who "wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects" but cannot identity a positive something from the unintelligible nothing of the desert ruins (*Barbarians* 154). Thus, in the simplest terms, to say that history is nothing else but the history of the state is to confine one's thinking to a creation myth.

While the Magistrate takes the form of historical narrative for granted, believing that its storytelling possibilities are limited to the parameters set by the state, *Diary*'s visually disorienting layout—even at the level of individual pages— resists easy classification and forces readers to reckon with meanings embedded within, rather than beyond, its structure. When Coetzee's novel begins, we encounter a page of text bisected by a single line into two "bands," with the top band containing the manuscript of JC's "Strong Opinions" and the lower band containing his first-person narration of events in his life. His Opinions dominate each page while the few lines of JC's personal reflections are relegated to the bottom of each page. Once Anya agrees to act as his secretary, her own band of first-person narration also appears, dividing each page of the novel into three distinct sections. This mimetic typography inspires Peter McDonald to claim that *Diary* may not be a novel at all, as it self-consciously manipulates

readers into feeling "torn between the conventional novelistic desire to read for the plot… and the traditional essayistic impulse to reflect on JC's provocative opinions" (494).[31] Further calling attention to its deviation from generic form, Coetzee divided the work into two halves; the first is labeled "Strong Opinions: 12 September 2005- 31 May 2006," while the second is titled only "Second Diary." Given the continuity of subject matter between the two sections, both of which are driven by JC's disgust with contemporary democratic politics, and the appearance of Anya's partner Alan—a neo-liberal investment banker—throughout their personal commentary—we have to pay attention to form. If these different sections seem to be driven at all by a unifying thematic concern, it is a critique of political authority. One of JC's earliest essays, "On Machiavelli," describes the principle of necessity as the "quintessence" of the modern, that "infringing the moral law is justified when it is necessary… freeing the hands of the authorities—the army, the secret police—to do whatever may be necessary to protect the public from enemies of the state" (17-18). In this formulation, the modes of political authority at the center of JC's critical project appear nearly identical to the logic of the exception that Coetzee dramatizes in *Barbarians*.

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[31] Although I agree that *Diary* departs in important and intentional ways from the traditional realist novel, Coetzee also revives and depends upon traditional novelistic techniques in crafting his work—not least the dialogism that McDonald also recognizes. To suggest that *Diary* is not a novel is to rely on too narrow a definition of the novel form itself, particularly given its reinvention, proliferation, and increasingly mediated presentation in the contemporary global novel. In fact, the hybridized and self-referential form that *Diary* presents gives a better indication of the direction of the contemporary novel than one that fosters the extremely traditional, plot-driven experience of reading that McDonald outlines.

In the early sections of *Diary of a Bad Year*, Rita Barnard points out that JC "seems to adopt the role of public intellectual and play it to the hilt," contrasting his critique of "terrorism, torture… and the viciousness of neoliberal governmentality" with the ways in which the novel's later "quasi-private narrative begins to affect the public opinions" (444, 452). She notes in particular the ways in which JC's critiques of state power are characterized by "a style of considerable authority," a stylistic choice that is ironically aligned with the authoritarian political discourses against which he rails (444). Although the novel's sections of personal narration do feature a plot in which Alan plots to steal JC's savings after his death, the clear focal point of the novel is the story of JC's transformation, reflected in his changing prose. As *Diary*'s text indicates visually as well as in its content, dialogism enables JC to listen to Anya, incorporate her sense of him in his writing, and eventually formulate a position that is not tactically related to the political authority he hates. At the end of JC's essay "On authority in fiction," he poses a question that receives no clear answer. "What if," he asks, "authority can be attained only by opening the poet-self to some higher force, by ceasing to be oneself and beginning to speak vatically?" (151). Although the ways in which JC ultimately opens himself to Anya's influence transform him in a purely secular sense, the JC who seizes upon "an opportunity to grumble in public" at the novel's beginning is simply not the character who confesses, "I read again last night the fifth chapter of the second part of *The Brothers Karamazov*…and found myself sobbing uncontrollably" (23, 223).[32] We might say that Coetzee

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[32] It should also be noted that the true nature of what Anya means to JC cannot be so easily

takes the uncivil political leanings of a character like his Magistrate to their full realization in JC, if the text were less evasive as to what that might entail in the long term.

JC's critical project in his Strong Opinions proves misguided insofar as his denunciation of the state mires him in a tactical relation to an authoritarian structure. In responding to strategic power in this way, I have explained, he strengthens its hold. His Opinions cannot help but reinforce the myth that the state is the framework within which he imagines his existence, as well as the unyielding center of the narrative that JC authors in a spirit of resistance. He senses this co-dependence but his tactical position means that he cannot help but understand who he is exclusively in relation to the state, thus enabling the death spirals of strategic power that interpellate him as one who is "born subject" (4). Clarifying his dilemma for the reader, JC asks, "Why is it so hard to say anything about politics from outside politics? Why can there be no discourse about politics that is not itself political?" (9). "Born subject" to the authority of state sovereignty, he is captive to the narratives that make it difficult if not impossible for individual citizens to "change our minds, to decide that the monopoly on the exercise of force held by the state, codified in the law, is not what we wanted after all" (4). Thus the law and state authority are invoked as one and the same in his Strong Opinions, leaving him no recourse

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summarized in purely secular terms. When Anya hugs JC goodbye—presumably for the last time ever— the depth of their relationship is indicated by the nature of his response. "*Behold, who can tell the workings of the Lord*," JC thinks to himself. "At the back of my mind there was a line of Yeats too, though I could not pin down the words, only the music" (190).

but to imagine his relation to the state as that of an outlaw--"the man who takes up arms against his own state" (4).

Were we to reduce JC's Strong Opinions to its central theme, we might well have an argument to the effect that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In mounting this argument, paradoxically, JC adopts a monologic idiom as relentless and unyielding as the extralegal power that he criticizes.[33] Anya is able to recognize the ways that JC's voice only reinforces the problems of state authority. She puts her response in contrastingly antiauthoritarian terms:

> There is a tone—I don't know the best word to describe it—a tone that really turns people off. A know-it-all tone. Everything is cut and dried: *I am the one with all the answers, here it is, don't argue, it won't get you anywhere*. I know that isn't how you are in real life, but that is how you come across, and that is not what you want. I wish you would cut it out. If you positively have to write about the world and how you see it, I wish you could find a better way. (70)

Understanding that the stubborn "know-it-all" voice of the Strong Opinions is not a product of JC's own thinking, Anya gestures toward the fact that his style, shaped by the gravitational pull of the strategic narratives he addresses, inevitably contradicts his purpose. Her earlier pleading

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[33] Julian Murphet has also suggested in a 2011 essay that JC's Strong Opinions "are the closest Coetzee has yet come to the importation of what Bakhtin calls 'direct authorial discourse,' 'single-voiced discourse' of the monologic type into his novels; and… are meant to be recognized as such." ("*Diary of a Bad Year: Parrhesia*, Opinion and Novelistic Form" 73-74). Murphet, however, does not explicitly link this monologic quality of the Strong Opinions to any particular conception of authority.

with him to write about "anything but politics" further suggests that JC lacks the capacity to speak as himself within the authoritarian idiom that he adopts.

2.5 Dialogism and Uncivil Consciousness

In an essay entitled "On anarchism," JC discusses Étienne de La Boétie's notion of the relationship between strategic power and subjected populations.[34] To question the "passivity of populations vis-à-vis their rulers" that La Boétie sees as precluding any critical political self-awareness, JC introduces a new tripartite schema for understanding a range of possible relations between subject and state (11). "The alternatives are not placid servitude on the one hand and revolt against servitude on the other," he argues; "There is a third way, chosen by thousands and millions of people every day. It is the way of quietism, of willed obscurity, of inner emigration" (12). If JC's reading of La Boétie's analysis stresses how strategic and tactical political orientations choreograph subjects to either accept or resist state authority, his "third way" reads much like a formula for incivility. While the "quietism" of JC's third position implies passivity, this form of passivity is markedly different than that of La Boétie's docile populations. Although the subject who chooses this third way would turn away from power, it does so by cultivating the very indecipherability that allows characters like Michael K and the

[34] Coetzee uses the phrase "anarchism" in a very specific register here, referring back to an older political perspective that centered and elevated the rebellious perspective of convicts and outlaws against their jailers. Coetzee connects the authoritarian abuses of these jailers to contemporary politicians, and suggests that it has become once again necessary "to assert the legitimacy of the old perspective, the perspective from below, the convict's perspective, when it is of the nature of that perspective to be illegitimate, *against* the law" (11).

barbarian girl to remain unknowable to state authority; these subjects actively refuse to be hailed by an official category. Moreover, JC's contention that "thousands and millions of people" orient themselves in relation to an uncivil political axis implicitly challenges the pessimism of his opening essay, which suggests that the "generic we so wide as to exclude no one… born into the state" are "powerless to abolish it" (3).[35] The idea of an alternative way one might exercise passive resistance to the state opens the possibility that a collective uncivil consciousness might be realized in the plural "we."

It is initially unclear why Coetzee first allows the style and subject matter of JC's prose to undermine the possibility that his character is capable of adopting this uncivil "third way." This has partly to do with JC's failure to situate himself imaginatively within any collective. He condemns the authoritarian form of community imposed on subjects by the state, but he cannot actually imagine an alternative. By virtue of his own isolated—and equally authoritarian—relation to the state, his attempt at dialogue with the state turns out to be a monologue in which he observes the limited script demanded by Empire and performed by the Magistrate. This monologic discourse ensures that

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[35] James Scott's description of the many peoples of the "Zomia" region in Southeast Asia provide a concrete example of JC's "thousands and millions" of people who manage to live out their lives in a condition of incivility by maintaining a social structure "both more flexible and more egalitarian than in the hierarchical, codified…societies" that qualify as states, marked instead by "[h]ybrid identitities, movement, and…social fluidity" (18). This leads Scott to be able to claim that Zomia "is relatively stateless," and its lands "have actively resisted incorporation into the framework of the classical state, the colonial state, and the independent nation-state" (19). He makes the point that in order to achieve the statelessness that Scott reads in these populations, a kind of political resistance must go hand-in-hand with a cultural perspective that does not buy into the myths, histories, and modes of measuring "civilization" that have led to the dominance of the state form (20).

resistance strengthens the dominant authority, disallowing the possibility of another's utterance shaping a new response from the state. By thus closing the circle, the state makes its discourse the "the *ultimate word*" (*Problems* 292-93).

When Anya first inserts herself in this dialogue, her writing reveals little investment in subject matter that might have something to do with JC's understanding of politics. The result is a combative working relationship that often distorts his intentions ("Brezhnev's generals sit 'somewhere in the urinals,'" JC reads back from her typed manuscript of his dictation" [25]). Her first appearance in JC's narration is marked by fetishized, vaguely misogynistic descriptions. She wears a "tomato-red shift… startling in its brevity," with "black black hair, shapely bones" and a "certain golden glow to her skin" (3, 6). The frustrated erotic desire that Anya obviously arouses in a much older JC invariably indicates the strictly one-sided relationship characterizing the uneasy pairing between the Magistrate with the barbarian girl, as well as the relationship of David Lurie to Melanie Isaacs in *Disgrace*. These features would make Anya exactly the right person to bring JC to a state of uncivil consciousness. Coetzee so insistently calls attention to the lack of *gravitas* on the part of JC's amanuensis that he is parodying the nuanced—even tortured—self-awareness of such female characters as Elizabeth Costello, Susan Barton (*Foe*), and Mrs. Curren (*Age of Iron*). Anya's difference

from these other women, all writers, places her outside a tactical relation to the political order, which allows her to dismiss the framework enabling literary authority itself.[36]

If the Magistrate's obsession with the barbarian girl was driven in large part by his perverse fascination with the operations of sovereign violence, then JC's interest in Anya is so purely erotic that it appears naïve rather than politically charged. Her narration begins shortly after she agrees to act as typist for JC and takes the form of a band of text across the printed page that intuits, delights in, and parodies the male mind in appropriately unsophisticated diction: "As I pass him, carrying the laundry basket, I make sure I waggle my behind, my delicious behind, sheathed in tight denim. If I were a man I would not be able to keep my eyes off me" (25). Co-existing in its own space on the page alongside JC's musings on nuclear competition during the Cold War era, the jarring disjunction has an immediate impact on the way that JC's circular dialogues of power and resistance in the Strong Opinions are interrupted for readers. With Anya's intrusion in the political rant, the novel suddenly reveals an "outside" with a potential receiver who, by choosing not to participate in that discourse, triangulates JC's relation to political authority. Anya points out the narrowness of the world in which he imagines himself by lamenting, "I was expecting more of a story… It is difficult to get into the swing when the subject keeps changing" (30). Even as JC attempts to disavow his place

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[36] David Attwell has notes that "the name Anya alludes to Dostoevsky's relationship with Anna or Anya Snitkina, the stenographer who produced the text of *The Gambler* and who he later married" ("Mastering Authority: J.M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*" 220).

within the political order through writing, he has positioned himself so that he can either comply or resist political power but, in either case, subject himself to that power.

Bakhtin spells out a similar problem in his discussion of Dostoevsky's "ideological" hero whose "own thought is developed and structured as the thought of someone personally insulted by the world order, personally humiliated by its blind necessity. This imparts a profoundly intimate and passionate character to his ideological discourse, and permits it to become tightly interwoven with his discourse about himself" (*Problems* 236). Given his career-long connection with Dostoevsky, one can understand why Coetzee has his surrogate protagonist JC describe his project as "an opportunity to take magic revenge on the world for declining to conform to my fantasies: how could I refuse?" (*Diary* 23). Learning from the master of such retribution, Coetzee uses the novel as an instrument of "revenge" on an inaccessible series of constructs, condensed into the single figure of the state. He effectively uses JC to personalize what might otherwise be a war of abstraction. As Bakhtin would have described it,

> [i]t seems… that we are dealing here with a single discourse, and only by arriving at himself will the hero arrive at his world. Discourse about the world, just like discourse about oneself, is profoundly dialogic: the hero casts an energetic reproach at the world order, even at the mechanical necessity of nature, as if he were talking not about the world but with the world. (*Problems* 236)

JC's critical dialogue with the state might therefore be read as influential in establishing his own "know-it-all" tone throughout his early Strong Opinions. Insofar as JC's Strong Opinions constitute a type of dialogue, however, it is a dialogue not with another *individual's* words and consciousness but with structures of authority that JC has internalized. Thus by raging against the state, he essentially stages a dialogue with himself.

Although this order of dialogue could clearly be described as monologic, based on the fact that JC cannot move beyond himself, it is also true that because of the self-reinforcing circuits of resistance and authority in his discourse, he cannot understand himself apart from the state. Thus, like the Magistrate, he is guilty of its crimes. As Jonathan Lear puts it, JC's idea of state shame "transmits not just across generations but also trickles down within a single generation from the political class that sanctions the taboo act to the citizens who may have had little or no say in how the political class operates" (80). JC takes this claim one step further, arguing that democratic processes actually ensure that each citizen is *subject to* the state, which compromises any attempt to exercise individual autonomy. Of the state citizen, JC claims that he is always "presented with the accomplished fact: in the first case with the fact of his subjecthood, in the second with the fact of the choice. The form of the choice is not open to discussion… The citizen who expresses his unhappiness with the form of the choice on offer… is simply not counted, that is to say, is discounted, ignored" (*Diary* 8). The only

opportunity that the modern democratic state allows for critical engagement will necessarily ensure the renewal of state power. One who chooses not to vote, renounces his place in its structure and deserves to be "discounted." JC understands this double bind. Adopting the particular idiom of the state is to participate in its forms of exclusion, but refusing to participate in the state's self-renewal, on the other hand, only ensures that one will have no voice at all.

Disregarding, from the start, the liberal promise of becoming an individual with civic responsibilities to uphold, Coetzee's protagonist begins his development from an "accusation of shared shame" (Lear 80). Ventriloquizing JC, Lear proclaims to all citizens, "You are dishonored, simply by being a part of this tainted 'we.' Now figure out how to behave as an individual: for it is given to you to figure out how to deal with the shame you have inherited for acts you did not perform, for acts you abhor" (80). Each time that JC attempts to reckon with this legacy, he reaffirms the limits of his position as subject and the power of the state to withhold, shape, and ultimately to control the strategies to which he can only object. He acknowledges that the desire to hear the truth from writers outside the government is generally a meaningless wish. "The grasp of the facts that the writer has is usually incomplete or unsure" because those facts come to him "via the media within the political field of forces" (*Diary* 126). This problem with truth is also partially a product of the writer's vocation, which is "as much interested in the liar and the psychology of the liar as in the truth" (126). JC

recognizes the ways in which the "truth" of power is a combination of calculated strategic production (as in Joll's torture chamber) and information so classified that it circulates only among political administrators (what Foucault calls "the State's knowledge of the State") (*SMBD* 128).[37] He also suggests that writers perpetuate the mystery of strategic knowledge by pursuing their fascination with the "psychology" of Machiavellian forms of power.

In a 1985 essay "Into the Dark Chamber," Coetzee cautions the writer confronted with this temptation "*not* to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them" (364). If the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* vacillated unsuccessfully between these two poles, either having "stopped [his] ears to the noises coming from the hut by the granary" or lingering over the scars that simultaneously expose and conceal

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[37] Foucault discusses the production of a report on the state of France, commissioned by Louis XIV, for his grandson and heir, as a way to understand the implicit contest between the political knowledge of the king and the knowledge of the State. He puts the problem in the following terms: "Must the king's knowledge of his kingdom and his subjects be isomorphic with the State's knowledge of the State? …Because the prince exercises his arbitrary and unrestricted will over an administration that is completely in his hands and completely at his disposal, the administration… is in a sense welded to the prince himself: they are one and the same. That is why it is impossible to resist him. But the prince… must, whether he likes it or not, be persuaded to become part of the same body as his administration; he must be welded to it by the knowledge that the administration retransmits to him, but this time from above. The administration allows the king to rule the country at will, and subject to no restrictions. And conversely, the administration rules the king thanks to the quality and nature of the knowledge it forces upon him" (128-29). In other words, Foucault points out the ways in which, even under a monarchical system, the different ruling and bureaucratic elements of the State apparatus form the same cohesive strategic force. Key to the maintenance of this unified power is "the knowledge manufactured by the administrative machine itself" (128). Political subjects, in other words, are mastered not just by force or by legal coercion, but by being turned into objects of knowledge to be decoded by administrative "experts."

the girl's treatment in the torture chamber, JC commits to a position that describes—and even spectacularizes— the crimes of the state (*Waiting* 9). In so doing, he drags its "obscenities" in sardonic fashion into public view. Calling for "someone [to] put together a ballet under the title *Guantanamo, Guantanamo*," JC envisions

> corps of prisoners, their ankles shackled together, thick felt mittens on their hands, muffs over their ears, black hoods over their heads, do the dances of the persecuted and desperate. Around them, guards in olive-green uniforms prance with demonic energy… They touch the prisoners with the prods and the prisoners leap; they wrestle prisoners to the ground and shove the clubs up their anuses and the prisoners go into spasms. (37)

Shrugging off the public outrage likely to be incurred by such a production, JC points out that there is hardly any overlap between audiences who enjoy ballet and the figures who sanction illicit torture. In making a public spectacle of what goes on in the secret chamber, JC's proposal calls to mind the Harrow from Kafka's "In the Penal Colony," where state violence becomes a spectacle for public entertainment.[38]

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[38] This scene cannot help but bring to mind the "Harrow," Kafka's writing-machine from "In the Penal Colony" (1919). In the story, an explorer ("neither a member of the penal colony nor a citizen of the state to which it belonged") encounters a penal colony whose main attraction is an innovative, mechanized form of punishment in which the criminal/victim has his particular judgment inscribed into his flesh with needles for twelve hours (or until death) (200). In the end, however, it becomes clear that the Harrow works of its own accord. It ultimately turns against even the officer who lovingly oversees its function, killing him in a brutal way without any justificatory "judgment" rendered through writing. The explorer notes in horror that this machine, when left to function independently according to its internal logic, produces not "exquisite torture such as the officer desired, this was plain murder" (224).

JC's hypothetical ballet also references the infamous scene from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in which Colonel Joll beats a group of "barbarian" prisoners in the prison yard. Before this act of torture begins, Joll "stoop[s] over each prisoner in turn… rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal… ENEMY… ENEMY… ENEMY… ENEMY" (*Waiting* 105). JC's ballet—and by extension, the entire text of his Strong Opinions—attempts to invert the scenario whereby sovereign authority casts the friend-enemy opposition in metaphysical terms of good vs. evil, therefore justifying the radical dehumanization of those who are criminalized. JC's interventions instead try to publicly expose the state as the actual enemy that threatens life and liberty. Joll's performance, however, reveals two problems with JC's use of irony: first, the reaction of the crowd to Joll's public torture is not one of horror but "a curiosity so intense that their bodies are drained by it" (*Waiting* 105). The suggestion is that violence itself engenders a fascination with violence. This curiosity is only gratified when the abject status of the victim relieves those who enjoy the visual spectacle of any imperative to empathize with the victim's pain. Second, in attempting to reclassify the state as an enemy to be eradicated for the sake of the citizenry, JC breathes new life into the self-perpetuating conflict between good and evil.[39] In holding the state accountable for its crimes, JC ultimately only restages strategic power.

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[39] Anya's partner Alan, the text's designated neo-liberal villain, suggests after reading through some of his Opinions that JC "can't think structurally. Everywhere he looks he wants to see personal motives at work. He wants to see cruelty. He wants to see greed and exploitation. It is all a morality play to him, good versus evil. What he fails to see or refuses to see is that individuals are players in a structure that transcends individual motives, transcends good and evil" (97). Alan neatly summarizes the

To challenge the style and subject matter of JC's project, Anya complains that "all he writes about is politics. It's a big disappointment" (26). Tired of his "know-it-all" tone, she puts his project in a critical perspective attuned to the novel reader: "I don't see why the darkness of the times means you have to get on a soapbox and lecture" (73). Anya's interaction with JC's manuscript not only indicates that she finds his opinions and mode of articulation frankly boring, but also implies that he has failed to come to terms with the cause of his dissatisfaction. Adopting a similar perspective, David Marcus contends that JC's "bad-faith politics, his inclination to hyperbole… his hollow, nearly will-less existence are all brought forth in an effort to unfurl the entangled torture of an aging, isolated male novelist" (118). We might well regard the rage of a public intellectual as cover for the private melancholy of a lonely writer whose physical deterioration echoes his creative exhaustion. For those willing to countenance the possibility that there is some truth to be found in JC's narrative, these deeply personal elements will make it possible to do so. Serving as our surrogate, Anya suggests that the political shame JC openly professes is directly related to the more personal forms of his disquiet, collapsing the two together and disturbing JC's attempts to compartmentalize them: "Are there really different kinds of shame, though?" she asks. "I thought it was all the same, once it settled in" (95). If this

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central justification of a political sovereignty that still relies on the distinction between friends and enemies. But Alan, the investment consultant who prefers to think in strictly market-based terms, tries to differentiate the structural logic of modern politics from "old-fashioned politics, where people stage coups and murder each other and there is no security" (99). What Alan fails to understand is that the construction of an enemy requires their characterization as evil, in order to justify the extremes of violence deployed against them by the state.

challenge to what JC considers two distinct domains and modes of shame has the power to alter his perspective, then her increasing involvement in his project also proves capable of obscuring the boundaries between the bands of text on the page and the style of their respective narrations.

For the first twenty-three pages of *Diary*, the printed page requires the reader to follow two horizontally demarcated bands of text, both written and narrated by JC. Suddenly, the narrative splits again, as a third band of narration appears on each page. JC's political treatise and his personal story have to make room for new band of narration at the bottom of the page. Entering the reader's field of perception just after Anya agrees to serve as JC's typist, this third band provides an outside perspective on both of JC's narratives. Her involvement in the material production of the manuscript, it seems, gives Anya both a critical perspective and the means to express it on the printed page. Near the end of *Diary*, a letter written by Anya indeed takes over JC's band of personal narration, while the type of prose that had previously occupied that band migrates upward to displace the Strong Opinions. In effect, this means that the novel ends with JC's own more personal essays (what Anya terms his "Soft Opinions") in the top band of text, the text of Anya's letter in the middle band that previously held JC's personal (more novelistic) narration, and Anya's own narration in the bottom band. Where Carrol Clarkson takes Anya's partial displacement of JC as indication that "Anya is now a writer too; it is as if she has been released into the role" (95), I contend that Anya's role as a writer is established well before her band eclipses his. From the first moment that JC incorporates Anya's

reactions to his political rant into his personal narration, we find her operating as a narrative device that enables his skeptical re-examination of his text. JC acknowledges that she introduced this critical self-reflection into his narration: "What has begun to change since I moved into the orbit of Anya is not my opinions themselves so much as my opinion of my opinions. As I read through what mere hours before she translated from a record of my speaking voice into 14-point type, there are flickering moments when I can see these hard opinions of mine through her eyes" (*Diary* 136-37). Anya's authority over the space of the page changes drastically as she moves from amanuensis to an author in her own right. Moreover, her contributions shatter JC's pose of isolated authority by introducing forms of literary reciprocity into the text of *Diary* as a whole.

This ability to build reciprocity with an other into a text seems to be a quality that Coetzee reserves for his those of his protagonists who are women writers. Coetzee's most developed and perplexing surrogate, Elizabeth Costello, explains how the roles of secretary and writer are conflated for such figures: "I am a writer, and what I write is what I hear. I am a secretary of the invisible,[40] one of many secretaries over the ages. That is my calling: dictation secretary" (199). If Anya enacts precisely the role of dictation secretary when she listens to JC's spoken words, captured on tape, and types them to provide the manuscript that appears as the

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[40] Elizabeth acknowledges, in quoting this phrase, that she has borrowed it from the poet Czeslaw Milosz, who writes in his poem "Secretaries" that, "I am no more than a secretary of the invisible thing/ That is dictated to me and a few others./ Secretaries, mutually unknown, we walk the earth/ Without much comprehension. Beginning a phrase in the middle/ Or ending it with a comma. And how it all looks when completed/ Is not up to us to inquire, we won't read it anyway." See Milosz's *New and Collected Poems* (343).

top band of each page, then in what sense can we see her as "a writer?" Although she is hired simply to type the narrative he dictates, Anya's importance lies in the fact that she occupies neither a strategic nor a tactical relation to political authority. She is not attuned to what she hears as the hard tones of JC's political discourse. What she hears and records instead is the struggle of the "invisible" individual who has submerged his own voice in political prose.[41] JC disavows this truth, when he declares that "the opinions you happen to be typing do not necessarily come from my inmost depths." To respond, Coetzee makes a point of having Anya throw back at him JC's own words to the effect that when one lives in shameful times, "dishonour descends upon one's shoulders," to which she appends her critical response: "That sounds like the inmost depths to me" (*Diary* 91-92).

Apart from her direct influence on JC throughout *Diary*, Anya also emerges as a prototypically Coetzeean author-protagonist because she is able to recast the author function as a kind of split consciousness, animated and sometimes thwarted by the imperative to negate one's own voice and perspective in favor of the "invisible" other. As previously mentioned, this particular ability—which might also be understood as a burden—seems to be granted nearly exclusively to women characters in Coetzee's oeuvre. But Anya, along with Elizabeth Costello, Susan Barton (*Foe*), and Elizabeth Curren (*Age of Iron*), all, to some degree, already occupy a

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[41] Anya's ability to understand the different modes of expression which are encapsulated in JC's politicized, authoritative idiom calls to mind Raymond Williams' structures of feeling (see especially *The Long Revolution* and *Marxism and Literature*). She is attuned to what is not explicitly present in JC's ideas, able to translate, presuppose, and draw out what has not yet been fully realized. It is Anya, then, who is responsible for guiding and encouraging the trajectory of JC's reflections in a more inclusive and multivalent direction.

position of otherness relative to the dominant ideal of the solitary, authoritative male author. Elizabeth Costello is aged, struggling to retain relevance after being pigeonholed by her most successful novelistic work, and resistant to being viewed as the kind of standardized entertainment commodity she describes as a "Mickey Mouse postcolonial writer" (9). Susan Barton, taken from the pages of Defoe's *Roxana* and *Robinson Crusoe* and reanimated by Coetzee, fights to assert herself as a writer and an independent consciousness even though she and her memories exist as a kind of predetermined fictional construction. Elizabeth Curren is a professor of classics dying of cancer and reckoning with her own professional and personal irrelevance to the rest of the world. All of these protagonists, more importantly, are marked by a kind of internal schism caused by their attempts to incorporate another subject into their authorial perspective. Costello famously acts as a voice for animals who cannot speak for themselves, including apes, frogs, and bats; Barton battles with the difficulties of trying to represent Friday, whose tongue has been cut out in Coetzee's re-appropriation of the Crusoe story; and Curren integrates the presence and narrative of Vercueil, a homeless vagrant, into her story, even as she herself fades.

These writers' narrative sensibilities are defined by a type of dialectical transformation, catalyzed by a meeting of unlike entities whose back and forth exchange has the possibility to produce something radically new. Anya's influence transforms the novel's focus from an internalized dialogism between subject and state in JC's Strong Opinions to a split writerly sensibility that integrates a male and a female voice—each shaped by its interaction with the

other— into a new kind of composite subject. The narrative co-constitution of JC and Anya's writerly voice, as well as the mode of articulation that emerges, for instance, when Elizabeth Costello tries to think her way into the psyche of a bat or of the writer Paul West, produces a particular novelistic effect. More than modernist self-reflection, this formation of a new dialectical subject does not merely mobilize endless circuits of self-questioning, but invites the pressure of an external subject to disrupt the idea of an isolated consciousness. Part of JC's problem is that the obsessive self-referentiality of his Strong Opinions proves capable of enfolding entire worlds into a monologue, suggesting a Joycean tendency to accumulate and collapse distinct entities into a single consciousness. Coetzee's method is also markedly different than postmodern pastiche, in that it brings genres and subjects together across a variety of established categories not just to make something new, but to modify each individual element in the process.

Aside from JC's acknowledgment of Anya's influence, the novel's typography forces us to see the ways that their distinct positions and interactions echo one another throughout the novel. Early in the process of writing together, she urges JC, "Write your memoirs. Anything but politics. The kind of writing you do doesn't work with politics. Politics is about shouting other people down and getting your own way, not about logic. Write about the world around you. Write about the… mob of magpies strutting around the park as if they own it" (35). Sure enough, in the space previously monopolized by JC's Strong Opinions, the novel features a Second Diary entry that begins with an essay entitled "On the birds of the air." This essay

expresses his respect for the "magpie-in-chief" and assorted cockatoos in the park across from the apartment complex where her writes (207). JC's apparently newfound ability to imagine how the bird thinks when offered a kernel of grain is completely at odds with the perverse satisfaction he takes in envisioning a ballet about torture: "'This is a public garden. You are as much a visitor as I, it is not up to you to offer me food.' But public, private, it is no more than a puff of air to him. 'It's a free world,' he says" (209). This is the moment when JC takes his first steps outside the system he exposes in Strong Opinions, as suggested by his newfound ability to imaginatively inhabit extrapolitical spaces.

In an essay entitled "On competition," JC objects to the use of the jungle to describe the Hobbesian condition of human life before government as a way of all against all. On the contrary, he points out, "A jungle is an ecosystem where the surviving species have attained symbiosis with each other. This achieved state of dynamic stability is what it means to be an ecosystem" (80). JC implicitly contrasts the political world to the natural world, suggesting that something like a respectful mutual co-existence is in fact possible because it is modeled in nature. By rejecting the metaphorical invocation of the "jungle" to define social relations under capitalist modernity, JC suggests, like the Magistrate's encounter with the ram, that a respectful co-existence could well be possible beyond the limits of government. On entering a garden where all are visitors, he and the bird enjoy equal status and, for a moment, share a total disregard for strategic power. As JC says of the cockatoo, "public, private, it is no more than a puff of air to him" (209). It is noteworthy that this ability to think outside the political apparatus

is not something that one can achieve on his own but depends on a recognition of and respect for the singularity of the other. Even the territorial wariness of the magpie-in-chief—which JC initially takes as a warning to identify himself as friend or enemy—temporarily relieves JC of the need to understand himself as either one. With his apparent hierarchical superiority (and "chief" title) and his tendency to "warn" JC away, or to "look for [his] vulnerable point, in case he needs to attack," this magpie plays into human narratives of sovereign power (209).[42] When such behavior is telegraphed by another creature, however, it becomes parodic rather than threatening, exposing the equally contrived nature of human political posturing. His interactions with the birds—which, to him, seem based on an implicit covenant to live and let live—forego what we might imagine to be more instinctive responses: to either shoo the bird away, as one would with an enemy in territory to which it is not entitled, or to attempt to feed it or to otherwise make friendly contact. What JC does in this instant is to heed the uncivil advice of Anya: "Politics is all around us. Best to ignore it" (35).

2.6 The Imaginative Limits of Incivility

When JC's Strong Opinions abruptly end and the part of the novel labeled "Second Diary" begins, it is not immediately clear if "second" refers to sequential order or to the manner in which JC's "entries" have taken on a radically different tenor. *Diary*'s numbered chapter

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[42] A member of the crow family, magpies are extremely intelligent birds, and one of the only species that can supposedly recognize themselves in a mirror. This level of self-awareness also suggests a connection with human forms of thought and behaviors beyond its innate preening, posturing, and quick recourse to violence.

headings begin again with 01, and the band of narration that occupies the top of the page previously reserved for JC's Strong Opinions is titled "A dream." The dream turns out to be a vision of his own death, which records unhesitatingly his fears, anxieties, and relief. He dreams he has been "in the company of a woman, one of the living, younger than myself, who had been with me when I died and understood what was happening to me. She was doing her best to soften the impact of death" (*Diary* 157). One cannot avoid reading Anya's presence into this configuration, particularly since he has already described this dream in the novel's first section just after meeting Anya. "Last night I had a bad dream, which I afterwards wrote down, about dying and being guided to the gateway to oblivion by a young woman," he recalls in that first account. "What I did not record was the question that occurred to me in the act of writing: *Is she the one*?" (*Diary* 59). When the dream recurs in the second section, it occupies the top band of text and decisively transposes the subject matter of JC's personal introspection into the space previously allotted for his Strong Opinions, gesturing toward a clear shift in the narrative structure of the "Second Diary."

Whereas *Diary of a Bad Year* begins with a writer-protagonist raging against the state, doomed to define himself through the modes of power he critiques, the novel's second half bears witness to his transformation into a very different kind of writer and protagonist based on Anya's influence. The conflict that structures the narrative is no longer the conflict between personal narrative and political discourse but has become a generic conflict between political struggle and the romance tradition. Prior to Anya's appearance in his writing, JC understands

his narrative options in these terms: "What the state deals in are choices. The ordinary person would like to say: *Some days I incline to A, some days to B*… or else, *Some of A and some of B, sometimes, and at other times neither A nor B but something quite different.* The state shakes its head. You have to choose, says the state: A or B" (*Diary* 8). While JC means for this analogy to expose the authoritarian framework within which voting takes place even in a democracy, Coetzee uses JC's frustration with this political dilemma to expose the more interesting novelistic problem of the "third way" that he earlier presented as a type of sovereign coping mechanism. Trapped within the very framework he elucidates, JC can either rail against the state in a Sisyphean attempt to expiate his complicity, or he can succumb to "quietism… willed obscurity…[or] inner emigration" (*Diary* 12). Both options intensify the double bind that torments him, as both reduce him to one of millions of interchangeable subjects. Trapped within and motivated by his political subjecthood, JC's only claim to autonomy is represented in this act of choosing between two equally self-nullifying alternatives.

JC's relation to Anya releases him from the choice between categories of non-being. Rather than decide between A or B, JC uses Anya to find a third way. Calling his attention to the birds in the park, she prompts him to turn to fiction and imagine what the world would be like if unmediated by the abstractions of the state. When a writer does this, she explains, "You bring things to life." Her understanding of the power of writing as giving life would present a welcome contrast to writing that exercises the same magic "to take revenge on the world" (23). As if speaking for the novelist, Anya continues, "the strong opinions on politics and so forth

were not your best, maybe because there is no story in politics" (222). JC himself describes his Strong Opinions as "a set of opinions… a miscellany" by contrast to "a novel, with a beginning and a middle and an end." *Diary of a Bad Year* uses typography to demonstrate what a novelist has to do to the modern political imagination in order to imagine an inhabitable alternative to a world divided into friends and enemies. The dialogism of the novel that initially situated the conflict between subject and state within JC's lone consciousness has been expanded and visually dramatized to include Anya as co-writer. Resistant to binary logics that would see this composite authorial function as classifiable along male/female, writer/secretary, or even friend/enemy lines, the source and mode of writing that guides *Diary* to its conclusion can be understood as an explicit negation of these oppositional logics. JC and Anya cannot function for one another as friends nor as enemies, because they occupy an open-ended middle ground, neither openly combative nor inwardly reconciled. This breakdown of binary logic takes the Magistrate's encounter with the ram and JC's meeting with the birds a step further. Like Coetzee's protagonists and animals, Anya and JC come to a point where they can co-exist peacefully. The difference, however, is that by engaging in a sustained way beyond the narrative dictates of the state, JC and Anya are able to transform each other and share in a unified purpose that is not dependent on the status of their political subjecthood. The text of *Diary* itself, then, especially as it chronicles a turn away from the state while allowing a variety of voices to echo throughout, is itself a written record of uncivil consciousness.

In order for the novel to manifest itself as such, Coetzee has Anya's band of narration infiltrate JC's and turn it decisively away from the polemical essay and toward fiction. Searching for a place to record his dream, she asks him to turn to story-telling: "It's a good dream, a high-quality dream with a beginning and a middle and an end," she points out, in the same terms that JC had earlier described the novel form. The novel concludes with a letter that she writes to JC, thanking him for his gift of the published manuscript. She expresses her gratitude to him "particularly for sending the pieces you did not include in the book… I know what you mean when you say they are not proper Strong Opinions, but they are my favourites anyway. I call them your Soft Opinions—I hope you don't mind" (*Diary* 193). This statement breaks apart the Strong Opinions—presumably composing the published manuscript— from the "Second Diary" that records her growing presence in his written thought. Since Anya distinguishes the entries from the Second Diary as Soft Opinions, this implies that she understands the extent of her influence. "Sometimes I blush when I think of the comments I made about your opinions—you were the world-famous author, after all, and I was just the little secretary," she writes in her letter to him, "but then I think to myself, *Maybe he appreciated having a perspective from below, so to speak, an opinion of his opinions*" (196). Although her characterization of her opinions as coming "from below" acknowledges their relative importance in the eyes of the world, it also signals that Anya's iterations, as they appear on each page of *Diary*, are always located spatially below those of JC.[43] At the same time, her

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[43]JC's perspective on Anya changes radically from the novel's early pages, when he offers her a job

characterization of what she does in that position as derivative, "an opinion of his opinions" has obviously not only (or softened) his political opinions "from below," but also transformed his relation to the state into a relation to the outside. In so freeing his political discourse from the binaries of friend or enemy of the state, one might argue, she has severed the internal codependence of tactics and strategy. When it comes to romance, the novel arrives at much the same conclusion.

In that it overturns and defies the logic of the marriage plot, their relationship is less a romance than an exchange resembling a Platonic dialogue—in which Anya channels the influence of Eros to hold the student in thrall so that he can be transformed under her tutelage.[44] To see the back and forth of their early exchanges, followed by mutual infiltration, and ultimately the final transposition of narrative bands in such a dialogue, I am suggesting, we have to imagine Anya as the teacher and JC as the pupil. JC acknowledges as much when he admits (echoing Flaubert), "you are in the book—how could you not be when you were part of the making of it? You are everywhere in it, everywhere and nowhere. Like God in the universe, though not on the same scale" (181). Having derailed JC's monologue, Anya's voice infiltrates the entire manuscript, and he can think like the novelist he was before he abandoned that voice

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based almost entirely on his physical attraction to her and states, "As a typist pure and simple, Anya from upstairs is a bit of a disappointment" (25). While this phrase indicates JC's dissatisfaction with her spelling and transcription errors, it also foreshadows his realization of her true importance; her effective co-authorship means that Anya is anything but "a typist pure and simple."

[44] Plato's *Symposium* provides the best formulation of this relationship shaped by Eros.

in order to critique the state. In recovering it, he finds himself obliged to perform his imaginative labor "from below," from a position of authority that must be collectively reconstructed rather than bequeathed to him in advance.[45] By engineering this transformation, Anya brings JC to a limit or horizon which he regards as death, a line between a life of subjection and an afterlife that can only be imagined. To do requires him to turn away from state authority and engage it through the radical disengagement implied by the idea of his own end. If his imagination was limited by understanding himself as a political subject, then it would follow that the death he anticipates is indeed his death as a political subject. As Anya guides him away from his obsession with the state and toward such a death, she enables him to glimpse a new position of incivility. His relationship to her can be called a romance insofar as it realizes in the words on the page the possibility of a "we" not defined by membership in a particular political community. Giving himself over to the woman writer's guidance, JC acquires narrative authority just when he is willing to renounce an exclusive claim to it (*Diary* 151). As he nears that horizon, Anya vows, like the woman in his dream, to "hold his hand as far as the gate."

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[45] JC, we learn from *Diary*, has "won a modest reputation" as a novelist, and has also published a book entitled *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Leaving aside the pointed—but inconclusive—autobiographical echoes between JC and Coetzee, JC's past renown as a writer of fiction is made clear in the story. When Anya asks him, early in their relationship, why he doesn't write another novel instead of the Strong Opinions ("Isn't that what you are good at, novels?") he responds by claiming that he doesn't "have the endurance any more To write a novel you have to be like Atlas, holding up a whole world on your shoulders" (54).

Like Elizabeth Costello, she knows that one consciousness can guide another to the threshold that allows one to live "outside" an individual identity, but one must imaginatively establish an uncivil consciousness for him/herself. Before the Kafkaesque tribunal that Elizabeth Costello encounters "at the gate" to a similar afterlife, the aging novelist is required to confess what she believes to be "the truth" in order to cross over. She refuses the gesture that would allow her to be individuated and classified. Indeed, she appears not to know what she believes and in place of personal belief offers "a story…transparently, without disguise," describing the frogs of the Australian mudflats, "some so small as the tip of my little finger, creatures so insignificant and so remote from your loftier concerns that you would not hear of them otherwise" (*Elizabeth* 217).[46] Unleashing the novelist's ability "to bring things to life," Elizabeth proceeds to tell the story of the frogs from firsthand observation. One of the tribunal judges stops her, on the grounds that her personal biography has never placed her in such proximity to the creatures she describes. On this basis, he rejects her confession as a fiction and, as such, untrue.

Coetzee's reader, on the other hand, is invited to ponder the question of whether this fiction can be true even though she imagines the material world from a perspective not

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[46] These little frogs are clearly a potent symbol for Coetzee, since they also appear in *Diary of a Bad Year*, in a chapter entitled "On compassion." JC describes the concern of his neighbor for the frogs, buried in hibernation in the mud, during a heatwave. He admits the impulse to mock his neighbor for such *naïveté,* but re-considers: "…does this criticism not miss something? Are we human beings not part of that ecology too, and is our compassion for the wee beasties not as much an element of it as is the cruelty of the crow?" (Diary 211). The echo of the frogs across both *Diary* and *Elizabeth Costello* suggests a clear connection between the worldviews of both JC and Elizabeth.

accessible by a human being. Fiction, in this context, asserts itself as true because it authorizes a multiplicity of otherwise inaccessible beliefs. If Elizabeth believes in those particular frogs because she can imagine the world through their eyes, much as JC does the birds in the park, then the frogs exist as a truth that the novelist can imaginatively inhabit. Whether or not her version of frog life is factually accurate is not the point. The point is that the frogs allow her to think outside the limits of her political moment. The challenge for JC, as Coetzee says in "Into the Dark Chamber," is "how not to play the game by the rules of the state" (*Doubling* 364). To meet that challenge, JC not only must accept the risks and responsibilities of disengaging from the state; he must also accept the greater risks and responsibilities of novelistic engagement that one incurs once the state has been left behind. Both *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Elizabeth Costello* leave open the question of exactly what "we" become: does Elizabeth pass through the gate? Does JC "get on the boat or whatever," as Anya puts it (*Diary* 226)? These remain open questions, resistant to the categories and antinomies of political discourse.

3. Catastrophic Subjectivities

3.1 Locating an Absent Center

Toward the beginning of his novel *The Rings of Saturn*, which traces the unnamed narrator's past walking tour of the eastern English coast, the German writer W.G. Sebald makes an observation that sets the tone for the entire narrative.[47] "On every new thing there lies already the shadow of annihilation," he writes. "For the history of every individual, of every social order, indeed of the whole world, does not describe an ever-widening, more and more wonderful arc, but rather follows a course which, once the meridian is reached, leads without fail down into the dark" (23-24). This history of human destruction bears striking resemblance to the self-authorizing cycle of sovereign authority in *Waiting for the Barbarians,* as the Magistrate describes it: "Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe" (*Waiting* 133). The challenge for Sebald, as for Coetzee, is to imagine how his novel's world-building

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[47] Sebald is German by birth but spent most of his adult life residing in England, where he taught and wrote until his death at the age of 57. Although his English was perfectly well suited to translate his own works—originally composed in German—into English, he preferred for others to do so. As accounts from his primary translators indicate, however, he was intimately and consistently involved in the collaborative process of forming, reviewing, and approving the English translations of his work (Bell 1). In this way, Sebald can to some degree be considered an Anglophone writer. Moreover, his works exemplify the "born translated" quality that Rebecca Walkowitz reads as a defining feature of contemporary global novels, designed to circulate among cosmopolitan routes ("Comparison Literature" 570-71).

behavior might avoid becoming complicit in these circuits of violence. To solve this problem, Coetzee engages the political order through an intentional disengagement in order to imagine a third relation to the state that is neither resistance nor complicity, but the turning away I have called incivility.

Sebald's approach to the same problem is strikingly different. His narrator-protagonist disperses his attention across a field composed of unsorted bits of world and local history, memories, dreams, biographical information, and an odd assortment of photographic images, some of which seem to document his rambling discourse, others offering something like an objective correlative. What these fragments have in common is the devastation they reveal even in the most quotidian examples and events of the past. Patterns emerge from an otherwise seemingly entropic array of subjects, geographies, and temporalities, as Sebald exposes the cycles of human and natural violence that connect various moments in a leveled and expanding plane of rubble. In composing this field, Sebald transforms the figure of ruins—that Coetzee exposed at the periphery of the colonial outpost—into an expanding plane that obscures any such boundary. The sovereign center of the civilized world is revealed to be a fictional construction. By moving the periphery to the center of the postcolonial and postwar world, does Sebald produce the political position that Coetzee's protagonists could imagine but never fully inhabit? How does this crucial move change the way he addresses the question that Coetzee's protagonists abandon by turning away, namely,

what force, if any, might be capable of combating such pervasive and repeated state violence? If we take Clausewitz at his word and understand war as the continuation of politics by other means, then we are obliged to ask how Sebald alters the very idea of war and its aftermath by expanding his narration to include forms of violence beyond the grasp of sovereignty, because they occur outside and beyond human history.

In his 1966 work *A Theory of Literary Production*, Pierre Macharey describes ideology in terms that would at first seem to resonate with those used by Sebald—namely, a world system with a void at its center. "Like a planet revolving around an absent sun," Macharey writes, "an ideology is made of what it does not mention" (132). In using this analogy, he addresses the paradox of its internal logic; ideology is a historically limited and limiting system of thought that represents itself as natural and necessary, if not universally true. It becomes self-authorizing in large part by obscuring its own limitations. JC sees this strategy at work when he observes that the state makes its own origins the stuff of myth by insisting that it is "always there before we are" (*Diary* 3). To identify the problem (indeed the impossibility) of getting outside ideology, Macharey confronts the paradox at the heart of most if not all of Coetzee's novels. "By interrogating an ideology," he contends, "one can establish the existence of its limits because they are encountered as an impassable obstacle; they are there, but they cannot be made to speak" (132). Although the ruins in *Barbarians* mark the limits of modern Empire, the Magistrate stops short of understanding what the ruins might have to tell

him about the ephemerality of the state's ability to draw such boundaries. *Diary* turns this challenge into a matter of style, going beyond the limits of a realism governed by fictions of state but lacking the means to fully articulate, in positive terms, one's own state of being.

Macharey describes Tolstoy's "sterile social critique" in terms that elucidate Coetzee's stalemate:

> it would not be correct to say the book initiates a dialogue with ideology (which would be the worst possible way of becoming caught up in its game)… it could be said that the work has an ideological content, but that it endows this content with a specific form. Even if this form is itself ideological there is an internal displacement of ideology by virtue of this redoubling; this is not ideology contemplating itself, but the mirror-effect which exposes its insufficiency… (133)

Although they effectively challenge such forms of ideology, Coetzee's protagonists push to—but not beyond—the limits of sovereign, or centered, political orders. In so doing, they reveal the author's skepticism about formulations of a decentered world that is neither confined to the antinomies of realism (in other words, ideology) nor observed through a lens of apparent madness or deviance and thus uninhabitable by more than one person. Neither *Barbarians* nor *Diary* provide a sense of what the establishment of incivility would look like in positive terms. Macharey's own description draws attention to the difficulty of representing this absence in logical terms that do not, like ideology

itself, disavow their dependence on it. If sovereignty itself is a foundationless rhetorical figure, then it only stands to reason that it would take another figure to challenge it.

Macharey's idea of the absent sun is consistent with both the rhetorical foundations and the cosmic scale that Sebald invokes from the outset of *The Rings of Saturn*. Taken from the Brockhaus Encyclopaedia, one of the quotations serving as an epigraph to the novel explains, "The rings of Saturn consist of ice crystals and probably meteorite particles describing circular orbits around the planet's equator. In all likelihood these are fragments of a former moon that was too close to the planet and was destroyed by its tidal effect (→ Roche limit)" (1).[48] According to this definition, the rings of Saturn are what remains from a celestial body torn apart by forces exerted upon it. These same gravitational forces, however, also reorganized its constituent elements so that fragments of the former moon now appear from a distance as circular "rings," a new and different cohesive formation. With this figure as the emblem of the novel—a shattered celestial body—it would be logical to expect a tale of violence to follow, haunted by the specter of that absent moon. But if we understand this cosmic event as a

[48] The Roche limit describes the outer zone of the region where Saturn's rings exist, "where the planet's tidal forces would stretch a large satellite until it fractured and split, while also preventing small bodies from coalescing to form a larger moon" (Lang 2). Named after the French mathematician who discovered the mathematical solution, the Roche limit identifies the spatial area (based on size relative to the planetary radius) in which the rings could have formed. It is especially noteworthy that the Roche limit identifies a kind of in-between area relative to the planet, where celestial bodies like the former moon cannot continue to exist as a coherent whole, but isolated fragments cannot be pulled together into an equivalently sized new composite body.

transformation that conserves the content and thus the history of the moon, but not its form, then it has not been destroyed so much as reconfigured.

The nature of these re-animated rings—pieces orbiting a planet, which in turn revolves around another cosmic body— invokes the gravitational interdependence that gave rise to the n-body problem and Newtonian mechanics, generating a new concept of the relation between cosmic bodies in proximity to one another. The n-body problem considers how, or by what principle, multiple bodies can revolve around each other within the same gravitational fields and avoid collision. To fully solve the problem, the scientific world would need to be able to precisely predict the movements of different bodies through space relative to one another, a task which is theoretically possible with the knowledge of their starting positions and velocities. A solution would bring natural violence, of the sort that formed Saturn's rings, under man's conceptual control. But the n-body problem, whenever more than two objects are involved, continues to resist the development of an accurate and reproducible general solution (Montgomery). In figurative terms—as a problem that cannot be solved in exact terms, and that draws considerable rhetorical force from defying scientific advances—the problem bears striking resemblance to Macharey's figure of ideology. This chapter will explain what Sebald does with this complex figure.

The fact that Sebald's fictional world is missing a center, in my reading, does not constitute a problem to be solved. On the contrary, I consider its lack of centricity as a

breakthrough, and perhaps even a solution, to the problem of sovereign violence that confounds Coetzee's protagonists. Its eccentricity exposes the degree to which all ideology depends on the core fiction that the universe, like nations and selves, is organized by—and in relation to— a center. In citing forms of political sovereignty as the catalyst behind developments in human history, Coetzee arguably takes it for granted that human beings are—however irresponsibly—in charge of their destiny. Sebald does not. Still, to explain the haunted quality of his fiction, many critics turn to his non-fiction prose, in which he understands the lingering psychic effects of the Allied firebombing of German cities as a partial result of the "tacit agreement" among all citizens that "the true state of material and moral ruin in which the country found itself was not to be described… like a shameful family secret" (*Natural History* 10).[49] Readings that only trace the melancholic nature of Sebald's fiction back to an event horizon of the Second World War, however, fail to consider the ways that Sebald himself situates political violence in a larger framework. It has become commonplace for literary criticism to understand such violence as the anachronistic eruption of despotic sovereignty in a modernity that functions by relegating extreme violence to peripheral spaces; torture chambers at the edge of national and imperial boundaries, refugee and

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[49] Annette Seidel Arpaci's "Lost in Translations? The Discourse of 'German Suffering' and W.G. Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur*" suggests, too, that Sebald's attempts to uncover and describe the nature of a German history of destruction that has not been fully addressed cannot help but set up competitive equivalencies between two radically different types and degrees of victimization, putting the "natural destruction" of German cities in an uneasy dialogue with the organized destruction of the Holocaust.

labor camps formed during states of emergency. When such spectacles colonized the most central of all political and cultural centers—Europe in the twentieth century—it challenged our ability to keep sovereign violence out of sight. The particular horrors of World War II were thereby situated within a longer, and often less visible, history of tyranny. To read Sebald's response to what happened in Europe during the early twentieth century as a product of its aberrant singularity is to deny the manner in which such violence is part of a wider interplay of forces. Sebald, like Coetzee, recognizes the violence of sovereignty as a pattern that inevitably repeats itself; but for Sebald, political violence—even the unprecedented *extent* of sovereign destruction during the Second World War—becomes one among many forms.

Like Coetzee's ruins, Macharey's astronomical figure acknowledges the power of ideology to produce a gravitational center that is operative only to the extent that people believe it to be present. To make his point he imagines a solar system organized around a center despite the emptiness that can actually be found there; the absence of a sun serves as a placeholder for an object capable of exerting enough gravitational force to hold it all together. Bringing Macharey's rhetorical figure alongside Coetzee's critique of the transhistorical fiction of sovereignty reveals that it is not necessarily the presence of an organizing sun that holds the universe together, but belief in its existence. In other words, the fiction of an ordered hierarchy exerts sufficient gravitational force to animate its own reality. Sebald's world, on the other hand, has many provisional centers, many

of which seem to have an anchor in the natural world. However, they only last as long as nature will permit them to do so. Once a thriving port city, the remnants of the town of Dunwich, along the narrator's walking route, prove the instability of Sebald's multiple centers. "All of it has gone under, quite literally," reflects the narrator, "and is now beneath the sea, beneath alluvial sand and gravel, over an area of two or three square miles… The parish churches…one after the other, toppled down the steadily receding cliff-face and sank in the depths, along with the earth and stone of which the town had been built" (*Rings* 155). Attributed to flooding and a long, consistent process of erosion, the disappearance of this town led to its depopulation and, for those who remained, a transient way of life that required the sequential shifting and rebuilding of the community at increasingly greater distances from the sea. In making individual centers constantly eclipsed entities, Sebald's world doubles the absence that Macharey's rhetoric identifies. In removing even the absent center, leaving no room for the stubborn belief that a central force may yet be exerting a gravitational pull, he offers the reader a systematically eccentric view of postwar Great Britain and its relation to a much wider cosmic history. Thus while his narrator considers the fire-bombing of German cities and the history of Belgian imperialism in the Congo, he does so while forming a network of connections that also includes the life cycle of the herring and the environmental damage of a 1987 hurricane. Political violence cannot remain sovereign in Sebald's novel because it emanates from and is caught within processes of constant obliteration and

production. By multiplying the forms of violence in his novel, Sebald diminishes the magnitude of human history, making the violence of capitalism one among several forces in motion.

This scalar shift in perspective throws any historical perspective into question: how do we grasp the contemporary world, composed of many temporary gravitational centers but no sovereign principle organizing the things and people in it? Sebald is only one among several novelists to raise this question, but his response sets him apart. David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) for example, suggests that human subjectivity, like the world to which it attempts to bring a type of conceptual order, might be better understood as a transgenerational process narrated by individuals. Each manages a privileged grasp of his or her moment, but none can see the entire field of forces that demolishes each epoch in order to create the next. Sebald's only narrator, by contrast, struggles to distinguish between the inner world of consciousness and the external world it confronts. His problem is not one of limits, but, on the contrary, the disorientation that results from experiencing none at all. Lacking a gravitational center, the narrator has no way of organizing a world of personal experience around that center and no boundaries to limit what he can experience through others. Via narration, his consciousness expands freely into the world of things, allowing him to recount the changes brought about by the War without imposing a logical order on the world he reveals. On such a landscape, as the narrator of Sebald's better known *Austerlitz*

demonstrates, any centered subject would try in vain to construct a personal history from the debris of what was once the everyday life of European people. This protagonist, to the contrary, resembles Deleuze and Guattari's figure of the "Body without Organs" (BwO).

Rather than believe in its individual coherence over time, the Body without Organs is an assemblage of part objects that resist cohering as the integrated and consistent whole that would constitute a recognizable organism (*Thousand Plateaus* 158). Deleuze and Guattari compare the process of disassembling the organism to a philosophical perspective committed to overturning forms of signification and subjectification, making the subject resistant to being interpellated as already entrapped within a particular mode of existence (160). This figure does not indicate a static entity, as a result, but a process of self-shaping that allows it to experience and host flows of intensity without collapsing in upon itself. As if to offer a guide for the novelist, they caution,

> You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it… you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality…the BwO is always swinging between the surfaces that stratify it and the plane that sets it free. If you free it with too

> violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe. (160-61)

Deleuze and Guattari's invocation of a black hole that could result from radical and unthinking destratification rather than a careful negotiation of opposing forces can help us to clarify Macharey's figure of the "absent sun," which itself could well imply the presence of a black hole formed by the implosion of a sun. Sebald's figure of Saturn's rings—that require the planet to provide the gravitational pull that prevents the fragments of the shattered moon from dispersing throughout the larger universe—frames the implosion of a celestial body in quite different terms. The rings that are produced from this event instead suggest the leveling of the cosmic hierarchy that organizes the solar system according to the power of size and velocity relative to gravitational pull.

The individual fragments of the rings of Saturn occupy no fixed position within their orbits of the planet but are constantly being reshaped by the systematic interplay among the gravitational pulls of Saturn and its multiple moons. "Although small nearby moons have only a weak gravitational pull on the particles in the rings," Kenneth Lang clarifies, "the pull is repeated over and over again at certain resonant locations. Just as we can make a child on a swing arc high above the ground with a gentle, repeated push in the same place of the swing, so the repeated gravitational pull of a small external

moon during each orbit can give an unexpectedly large perturbation" (Lang 2). Neither controlled nor ordered by what appears to be the central gravitational source of the planet they encircle, the rings are actually active players in an unpredictable field of competing gravitational pulls. Just as the fragments of a shattered moon, though dispersed, retain and perhaps even intensify the force of that moon, so, too, does Deleuze and Guattari's model of the human subject conserve some its former capacity for violence in the forms of significance and subjectification. This allows the otherwise free-floating subject to retain a kind of equilibrium among flows and forces that might otherwise coagulate into a continuous, static form. By drawing this analogy, I want to insist that Sebald is less concerned with the destruction of the great centers of Europe, or even with the shattered individuals that survived it, than most assessments of his work would suggest.[50]

The figure of the ringed planet is also part of a system where virtually nothing evades destruction and dispersal but everything nevertheless retains its capacity for force, which counters the mechanisms of consolidation and inertia. The solar system, the novel, and the Body without Organs all exist as elements of a forcefield where anything that might look or behave like an exercise of strategic power operates on a level playing

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[50] Naomi Stead's "Architecture and Memory in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*" understands the novel's architecture as engaging with and representing a certain degree of traumatic and/or melancholic experience, both personal and collective. David Kauffman's "Angels Visit the Scene of Disgrace: Melancholy and Trauma from Sebald to Benjamin and Back" contends that the melancholic nature of Sebald's texts create a closed and limited circuit, wherein his protagonists are repeatedly compelled to link their loss or incompleteness to traumatic historical events of the twentieth century.

field where it is but one of several intensities. Though "saturnine" was the adjective that medieval alchemists used to denote what they saw as the planet's bleak character, Sebald points to the rings of Saturn to remind us that the force of destruction is one and the same as that of creation. The interplay of the two makes the planet one of the most beautiful in our solar system. Thus while Sebald's writings, for the most part, consider the interrelation between various forces of destruction that have shaped and re-shaped the world we know, the landscapes that emerge are often stunning and awe-inspiring in their complexity.

After the 1987 hurricane that decimates entire forests' worth of trees along the English coast and causes widespread power outages, Sebald's narrator has the opportunity to behold a scene of beauty and intensity that would otherwise be inaccessible. "There was no glare from streetlights or houses to dull the sky," he recalls, and as a result,

> …the stars had come out, in a display so resplendent as I had seen only over the Alps when I was a child, or over the desert in my dreams. From the extreme north right down to the south where the view had before been blocked by trees, the sparkling constellations were spread out, the Plough, the tail of Draco, the triangle of Taurus, the Pleiades, Pegasus, the Swan and the Dolphin… more magnificent than ever before, they revolved above me. (*Rings* 267)

The transformation of the landscape wrought by the hurricane makes it possible for him to experience a sense of cosmic power, a moment echoed in Sebald's discussion of Dunwich, the town that "dissolved into water, sand and thin air" (159). "If you look out from the cliff-top across the sea towards where the town must once have been," he notes, "you can sense the immense power of emptiness. Perhaps it was for this reason that Dunwich became a place of pilgrimage" (159). These two observations by the narrator have roots in both Kantian forms of the sublime; the mathematical and the dynamical. He reads both as emanating from nature, especially nature rendered and observed through artistic form. Frances Ferguson classifies Kant's dynamical sublime, observable in the "power" of a place like Dunwich that has been eroded into dissolution, as "one in which the representation of the power of an object can seem overwhelming until we recognize that we are not threatened" (316). The mathematical sublime, on the other hand, indicates the difficulty encountered by the human mind when beholding the entirety of the galaxy above, and trying to conceptualize the vastness of an idea like infinity with the tools of traditional mathematical logic.[51]

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[51] Ferguson actually contends that Kant's notion of the mathematical sublime undercuts the ways in which he defines the sublime and what is capable of producing its sensation. The mathematical constitutes "a peculiar reversal of his restriction of the sublime to natural objects. In the mathematical sublime – the movement from counting or measuring to a notion of infinity – he describes something like the pleasure of thought at its least sensory. Whereas Burke had catalogued the various senses that make it possible for us to apprehend the world as beautiful, as sublime, Kant relies on mathematics, a completely artifactual and man-made universe, to get at the ways in which our aesthetic experience of the supersensible is more representational than sensible" (316).

Both types of the sublime are engendered because of the way that they catalyze a tension—unresolvable through any recourse to dialectical synthesis— between pleasure and displeasure, and between the capabilities of the imagination and those of human understanding. As Janice Richardson puts it, the experience of feeling "weak" (as one does before the power of nature) or in "failing to achieve an aim" (when one's mind comes up against its own limits in imagining the infinite) can also empower those who undergo the experience. As she explains, the

> attempt to imagine the infinitely large was caused by (and provides evidence of) their ability to reason. Reason demands that they imagine the vastness of nature as one image. In other words, the imagination's failed attempts to imagine the infinite prompts viewers to be aware of their own ability to think. (841)

The manner in which the mind "feels itself moved" in response to the sublime, Kant writes, "may be compared to a vibration, i.e. to a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object" (140-41). Lyotard disagrees with Kant's formulation on the grounds that he establishes a unity between incompatible faculties of the mind. The oscillation between reason and imagination "felt in the sublime is not," as Kant describes it, "the proper proportion in the free play of the two faculties that are being exercised, but their disproportion and even their incommensurability: an 'abyss' separates them… The paradox of Kant's analysis is that it discerns in this cacophony a secret euphony" (24). Maintaining the difficulty and tension in the sublime is essential

for Lyotard. The fact that imagination and reason are so opposed that each endangers the other's existence is what makes it possible for them to achieve this agonistic unity. If "[t]aste promises the happiness of an accomplished subjective unity," he contends, then "the sublime speaks to a few of another unity, much less complete, ruined in a sense" (25). Rather than try to repair the subject, Lyotard sees the sublime as a perspective from which to "critique the notion of subject" (26). In the face of the sublime, the "ruined" subject maintains a tension between faculties and affective states without the possibility of resolution, remaining in a state of internal flux. In *The Rings of Saturn*, this formation mirrors the reality of the world itself, challenging any easy distinction between the decentered subject and the sublime world. Thus as Thomas Huhn contends, "The sublime… is the uncanny attempt by subjectivity to feel something other than itself" (91).

3.2 The Decentered Subject as Schizophrenic Narrator

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to attribute the curious landscape of Sebald's novel to the absence of a center of organization and the profound emptiness that his sublime moments sometimes reveal. The discontinuous landscape of the novel is virtually overflowing with objects, events past and present, and places in various stages of various forms of change. Notably lacking the temporal sequence we call a plot and hold responsible for character development, and without the temporal-spatial coordinates to locate the process of description that unfolds before us within a particular

period of time and region of the world, we have no option but to follow the narrator as he recalls and/or revises a walking tour of the eastern coast of England sometime during the twentieth century. Stripped of the usual identifying information that would determine this narrator's relation to both novelist and reader, and yet intimately familiar with the landscape he encounters before it was reduced to rubble, the narrator undertook this journey before being hospitalized with a nervous breakdown brought on by "the paralyzing horror that had come over me at various times when confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past, that were evident even in that remote place" (3).

Mention of a small and grated window in his hospital room provides cause to think that the novel to follow may be the record of an out-of-body experience, or an unwelcome flashback based on memory if not pure hallucination, but there is just as much reason to believe that the narrator is recounting an actual tour of the devastation produced by European warfare, extreme weather events, and natural decay. The narratives that emerge are rarely tethered to this historically specific landscape but tend instead to turn away from a clear sense of place that might provide a spatial center and a temporal orientation capable of distinguishing past from present and future. They defeat any such attempt to assimilate the bits of historical information, photographs, diaries, reflections on philosophy, travelogue-style memoirs, and descriptions of geologic and meteorological phenomena that make up Sebald's text. These singular artifacts of an

opaque narrative consciousness simply accumulate without a clear trajectory, indicating that their coming together might signal a critical moment of transformation, perhaps like the time immediately before the constituent pieces of Saturn's rings were pulled into their distinctive formations.

Written in the first person singular, the "I" of Sebald's narration is omnipresent yet invisible, more a traveling blip on the reader's radar rather than an active participant organizing the description he provides.[52] As he shows us the world he sees, we are meant to understand that even were Sebald's narrator not there to narrate it, this assemblage would still exist. Rather than recreate the world presented to us in *Rings* as remembered personal experience, he proves uniquely equipped to see and to navigate it. He locates us in a world that is unmistakably anchored by familiar geographies, chronologies of past events, and verifiable vignettes from the personal lives of other people, yet he renders these components in such utterly defamiliarized terms that it is hard to feel that the world we share with this narrator is actually ours at all. So eccentric is his perspective that it suggests that he is unfamiliar not only with the world we know

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[52] Sebald's narrator does reveal—or locate—himself visually in a single photograph in the novel, which can be found on page 263 of the 1999 New Directions paperback edition. The figure resembles Sebald enough that it could very plausibly be a photograph of the author, although the distance of the subject from the photographer makes it impossible to determine this conclusively. He stands in front of a large tree trunk as Sebald's narrator describes the trees in the park by Norwich's Ditchinghim Hall, before launching into a description of the droughts, diseases, and hurricane damage that plagued the trees of the region in the 1970s and 1980s. Sebald's narrator introduces the picture abruptly by referring directly to it, whereas most of the photographs in the text are not remarked upon by the narrator. The text reads "This picture was taken at Ditchingham about ten years ago… The Lebanese cedar which I am leaning against, unaware still of the woeful events that were to come, is one of the trees that was planted when the park was laid out" (263-64).

but also with the conventions for describing it. He could easily be a visitor from a different universe, accidentally providing a revisionist history of the earth because he does not know or will not abide by the historical teleologies that we take for granted. The narrator's fascination with Borges' short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," which Sebald describes as "a tale which deals with our attempts to invent secondary or tertiary worlds," provides clear insight into the way that Sebald understands the relationship between fiction and history.[53] Borges' work imagines a context in which fabricated records of a fictional society ("Tlön") have become so popular and widely accepted as to displace "factual" histories of our actually-existing world. Emphasizing the ease with which Tlön ultimately comes to dominates education, culture, and law, Borges' story suggests that history is merely a series of fictions competing for prominence, making it impossible to distinguish fully between the two.

Sebald compounds the confusion between fiction and history that pervades Borges' work by bringing to life the "first-person novel" hypothesized in the beginning of the story, "that would fly in the face of palpable facts and become entangled in

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[53] Borges' story details the discovery of documents and records that supposedly prove the existence of Tlön, an historically and geographically elusive society that has actually been fabricated by a transgenerational fellowship of members committed to producing a rigorous new "past" world. A postscript to the text composed by an unnamed narrator identifies it as an entry in an *Anthology of Fantastic Literature*. But the most obviously fictionalized element of the story is also that which claims historical facticity, as the narrator references the fact that the discovery and popularization of Tlon's culture has ultimately eclipsed that of the actually existing world. As he laments, "already the teaching of Tlon's harmonious history (filled with moving episodes) has obliterated the history that governed my own childhood; already a fictitious past has supplanted in men's memories that other past, of which we now know nothing certain—not even that it is false" (81).

contradictions in such a way that few readers—very few readers—would be able to grasp the hidden, horrific, yet at the same time quite meaningless point of the narrative" (*Rings* 69-70).[54] Having described the novel as one that points to "an atrocious or banal reality," however, Borges's narrator never mentions it again, as if to say that just such confusion and irresolution is required to capture a truth that he finds at once "atrocious" and "banal" (*Labyrinths* 3). It takes a narrator as alienated as Sebald's to defamiliarize the horrifying, exposing its roots in the banal, while also revealing the ways that the banal and the everyday can give rise to atrocious forms of violence. The co-existence of these two modes is evident in Sebald's non-fictional account of the aftermath of the bombing of the German city of Halberstadt during World War II: "Frau Schrader, employed at a local cinema… gets to work with a shovel commandeered from the air raid wardens immediately after the bomb falls, hoping 'to clear the rubble away before the two o'clock matinee.' Down in the cellar, where she finds various cooked body parts, she clears up by dumping them in the washhouse boiler for the time being" (*Natural History* 41). The scene is so jarring precisely because the banalities of an ordinary workday occur

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[54] The implied connection between Sebald's narrator and Borges' narrator is taken to an extremely suggestive conclusion when one considers that the postscript that concludes "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (echoed through *Rings of Saturn*'s use of free indirect discourse) ends with the narrator's statement "I go on revising (though I never intend to publish) an indecisive translation…of Sir Thomas Browne's *Urne Buriall*" (81). Thomas Browne is a figure of the greatest importance to Sebald's narrator, and musings on his philosophies, published works, and biographical history recur more frequently throughout *Rings* than any other subject. Themselves both guides to unique and idiosyncratic universes, the respective narrators of Sebald and Borges are oriented and guided by the figure of Browne himself.

alongside horrifying levels of death and destruction. Thus the terrifying and the mundane constitute two opposing types of elements circulating and modifying one another in Sebald's novel as well as Borges' story. To explain how *The Rings of Saturn* exploits this polarity to access the decentered forcefield of a postwar twentieth century world, we must consider how Sebald's narrator reacts to the intensities that move throughout the novel.

Sebald uses this reference to Borges to make us anticipate an episode depicted in *The Rings of Saturn* that links the horrifying to the banal in this way. Passing by Orford's military installations, his narrator notes that "behind thin plantations of Scots pines, weapons are concealed in camouflaged hangars and grass-covered bunkers, the weapons with which, if an emergency should arise, whole countries and continents can be transformed into smoking heaps of stone and ash" (228). Here the instruments of mass destruction blend into otherwise unremarkable natural landscape. The scene of potential violence lies dormant until, as the narrator explains, "this notion took possession of me when I was hit by a sandstorm" (228). This description of a scene not only puts evidence of human violence on the same plane with a raging storm but also uses one to intensify the narrator's confrontation with the other. The commingling of distinct forces obscures the source of the terror; it is unclear whether the sandstorm gives the narrator cause to reflect on the human capacity for wartime destruction, or whether the sandstorm overcomes him as he contemplates how completely the weapons

blended into the everyday landscape they could easily destroy.[55] By concealing the horrifying within the banal, the stage is set for the storm to obscure the narrator's vision and force him to relive human violence on an atmospheric scale. "In the space of a few minutes," he recalls,

> the bright sky darkened and a wind came up, blowing the dust across the arid land in sinister spirals. The last flickering remnants of daylight were being extinguished and all contours disappeared in the greyish-brown, smothering gloom that was soon lashed by strong, unrelenting gusts… As darkness closed in from the horizon like a noose being tightened, I tried in vain to make out, through the swirling and ever denser obscurement, landmarks that a short while ago still stood out clearly, but with each passing moment the space around became more constricted. Even in my immediate vicinity I could soon not distinguish any line or shape at all… Gasping for breath, my mouth and throat dry, I crawled out of the hollow that had formed around me like the last survivor of a caravan that had come to grief in the desert. A deathly silence prevailed.

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[55] The seemingly intentional uncertainty of the temporal relation between the sandstorm's onset and the meditation on past military violence calls to mind what Paul Saint-Amour calls the "future conditional anxiety" of twentieth century conflicts that he reads as a central characteristic of modernist literature. Considering Lewis Mumford's description of the particular temporality of air raids, Saint-Amour points out that in this era of violence, "pre- and postwar periods will be belligerent; simulated and actual disasters will inflict equal psychic damage; and anticipation will be a condition in which one can 'die a thousand deaths'" (7). This kind of temporal logic speaks not only to the circular cycles of violence that characterize Sebald's cosmic alternative history, but signals the way that qualitatively different types of threats carry the same sense of imminent danger.

> There was not a breath, not a birdsong to be heard, not a rustle, nothing… This, I thought, will be what is left after the earth has ground itself down. (228-29)

The "greyish-brown, smothering gloom" that Sebald's narrator experiences, on its own, captures both the quotidian register of a rainy morning walk in the countryside and the post-traumatic confusion of Londoners emerging from Underground tunnels and bomb shelters during the Blitz. In order to do so, the storm erases the difference between past and present to situate us in an eternal present of recurring destruction.

Taken in isolation, this passage might imply that this nightmare of perpetual threat is merely a fear-based phantasm brought on by the lingering reminders of aerial bombardment. Whatever the cause for the narrator's temporal confusion, however, it is the result that matters: a perspective capable of collapsing the qualitative difference between sources of violence, rendering manmade equivalent to natural violence in its capacity to destroy human life. His uncanny feel for the forcefield through which he guides us allows the narrator to describe the scene as it impacts his senses rather than cognitively mapping the point of origin or purpose of various forces. In this respect, his experience calls to mind Burke's description of the sublime as producing "astonishment," "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (101). The subject consumed by the Burkean sublime is "so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (101). Though usually understood as a

phenomenon located in or caused by the natural world, the simultaneous terror and wonder characterizing the experience spills over into the political sphere. Burke compares the "unmanageable fierceness" of wild wolves that gives rise to the natural sublime with "the power which arises from institution in kings and commanders" (110). Both types of the sublime achieve their impact by wresting the image of power from the authority by which human beings claim to be able to know and thus control it. To Burke's Romantic sensibility, this overpowering and unnamable affect afforded an escape from the known and knowable to overpowering sensations that expand the imagination. Such effects of this encounter with the sublime, however, come at a price for Sebald's narrator.

When the sudden sandstorm outside of Orford bears down upon him, the narrator displays all of the symptoms of the Burkean sublime, most notably, a loss of any sense of time or space and a simultaneously physical and mental paralysis. As in Burke's description of the sublime, furthermore, the combined awe and horror that accompanies the narrator's utter disorientation arises from both the "unmanageable fierceness" of the sandstorm and the power that inheres in human institutions. His confusion of the two forms of power is what disables his cognitive abilities and immobilizes his body. But his reaction to this scene, we are meant to understand, sets

him apart from other subjects who may encounter it.[56] The power of the sublime does not emanate from the landscape around the narrator so much as it is *produced* by and in his particular perception of it. The destructive power of the military institution, when he encounters it, has been disembodied, dissembled, dispersed, and concealed in the woods. The Burkean sublime, in such a setting, inevitably collapses under the pressure of the quotidian nature of the war machine and its integration into the lives of those who carry on as if it had never existed. Sebald's narrator, however, does not have the option to escape the sublime and to live in such a way as if the violence of the world war had passed; for him, such occurrences are "always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end" because the world he perceives is always in the process of making and breaking connections across time and space (*Thousand Plateaus* 21). Sebald's narrator is much closer in nature to Lyotard's "ruined" subject than the model Kant proposes. Having been transformed and fragmented by an encounter with the sublime, Lyotard's subject—like the narrator— cannot reassert himself as stronger and more unified. The "sense of freedom but also… the paralyzing horror" that causes the narrator to be institutionalized after the cessation of his walking tour mirrors the conviction he voices

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[56] Instances in which others acknowledge evidence of natural or political violence but are not consumed by it occur throughout *The Rings of Saturn*. When, for example, William Hazel, the gardener at the Somerleyton estate, learns of the narrator's German heritage, it prompts him to relay—in a rather dispassionate, matter-of-fact manner— the ways in which the violence of the Second World War made itself known around him. "Every evening I watched the [Allied] bomber squadrons heading out over Somerleyton," he shares, "and night after night, before I went to sleep, I pictured in my mind's eye the German cities going up in flames" (38).

while ventriloquizing the Vicomte François-René de Chateaubriand, that "I have become almost invisible, to some extent like a dead man" (3, 255). This sense of himself as a lost or "ruined" subject produces the curious affect—a strange mix of apathy, mournfulness, and ambivalent indexicality—that pervades *The Rings of Saturn*. Although Sebald's narrator never gives any indication that he was actually involved in the combat operations of the world wars, the nature of his paradoxical detachment from and immersion in the universe he inhabits suggests a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. The recurrent and omnipresent nature of violence in Sebald's novel—lying dormant in the landscape, and ready to be revived and reconnected to other objects, places, and times at any moment—literalizes the experience of being forced to relive a traumatic encounter, as in PTSD.[57] Since Sebald's narrator understands himself to be precisely this kind of "ruined" and fragmented subject, his narration responds by animating, ventriloquizing, and inhabiting a range of other characters and voices, usually by using

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[57] The experience of Sebald's narrator has an interesting relation to that of Woolf's Septimus Smith, perhaps the most famous victim of PTSD in modern literature. Both men experience a kind of terrifying sense of the sublime, in which they are confronted with and implicated in a limitless universe of places, things, and sensations. For Septimus, "leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched, he, too, made that statement" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 22). While this description of a human being's constitution by and disappearance within an overwhelming circuit of forces reads almost exactly like the experience of Sebald's narrator, where the narrator sees a decentered world, constantly expanding and branching off in contingent and infinite directions, Septimus observes a "gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames" (15). Because Septimus is a veteran having experienced direct personal loss in the First World War, his experience of PTSD is notably different than that of Sebald's narrator, who encounters a longer and less specific history of damage toward the end of the twentieth century.

free indirect discourse to render the distance between narrator and, for example, a French Vicomte, imperceptible.

Just as the boundaries between Sebald's narrator and other subjects of the novel prove porous, so too does the narrator seem inseparable from the landscape, to a degree that there is little if any distinction between what he remembers or imagines and what might actually be there. Insofar as he is a kind of living casualty of constant encounters with natural and political violence, and an incarnation of Lyotard's ruined subject, his narrative reads as if bits and pieces that presuppose a once unified subject have been dispersed to wander at liberty through both time and space. This makes it possible for the narrator to provide multiple traveling focal points, allowing Sebald to represent reality as the process of assembling and disassembling a world that existed before war and will continue to exist after it. Held together only by seemingly apathetic and arbitrary narrative development, this way of knowing materializes Deleuze and Guattari's model of schizophrenia as a literary text.[58] They might well describe Sebald's narrator as one for whom to exist means

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[58] In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze rereads Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in order to identify the ways that an encounter with the sublime causes the imagination to understand its own boundaries. This encounter is one that Deleuze specifically characterizes as violent, but it is a particularly Sebaldian violence, in which a kind of breakdown in one's reasoning faculties provides the opportunity to move beyond forms of limited self-understanding and traditional boundaries between self and world. This pivotal moment, and the transformation that ensues, seems to provide the basis for Deleuze and Guattari's development of schizophrenia in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

> to be in contact with the profound life of every form, to have a soul for rocks, metals, water, and plants, to take into himself, as in a dream, every element of nature, like flowers that breathe with the waxing and waning of the moon… There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. (*Anti-Oedipus* 2)

Freed from the primary distinction between culture and nature, schizophrenia can generate a boundless affect. The imperial manor house of Somerleyton illustrates just this principle. The house is "famed for the scarcely perceptible transitions from interiors to exterior; those who visited were barely able to tell where the natural ended and the man-made began… one had the illusion of complete harmony between the natural and the manufactured" (*Rings* 33-34). Attracted by this site of description as conducive to his thinking, the narrator uses the house to enter a world that strips those who would observe nature of their ability to determine where distinct types of objects, places, and eras begin and end. The novel confirms the simultaneously enriching and disorienting nature of this experience while suggesting that any attempt at cognitive mapping will be futile.[59] Somerleyton—like Sebald's novel itself—places visitors into the position of the

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[59] In *Against Nature*, Lorraine Daston describes the kind of self-generative ecology that seems to displace previous attempts to curate the objects of Somerleyton. She argues that the constantly shifting forces of the natural world implied by the term "ecology" are naturally opposed to the type of order that could be planned or mapped. Daston points out that the term ecology is "derive[d] from the ancient Greek word for household (oikos), a self-contained unit dependent on a…continuous give-and-take among its elements. The…oikos is dynamic because it is achieved through tension, a rope made taut and straight by a tug-of-war between opposing forces. Its harmony emerges only at the

"schizo," who exists "in intimate contact with the profound life of all forms or all types of beings" (*Anti-Oedipus* 4). In the schizo, "the disjunctive synthesis of recording therefore comes to overlap the connective syntheses of production" (*Anti-Oedipus* 12-13). Rather than record the world of objects to which he is attracted or repelled in legible emotional terms, as a traditional travel narrative would do, Sebald's narrator follows the flows of feeling that make connections between disparate forces and the creatures they impact at various points in time. The narrative of *Rings* thus disrupts the processes of ownership and accumulation legitimated by traditional histories. In so doing, it prevents this provisional and non-linear history from becoming an allegory of progress, and challenges the presupposition that humankind can produce the world according to its own desires.

As this world levels time into a boundless scene rather than a steady movement forward, the narrator trades the false sense of depth that comes from layering different moments of time for the reader to excavate for the ability to inhabit the central sensibility of any scene. On his way to Orfordness a hare startles the narrator as it bursts from the grass and the distinction between the two creatures is blurred:

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macroscopic level, both in space and time; viewed microscopically, at a pinpoint place and moment, the members of the household—or the organisms of an ecology—incessantly jostle, elbow, and adjust to one another" (18-19). In this way, the schizophrenic perspective of Sebald's narrator is coterminous with Daston's "microscopic" view of natural ecology.

> In that very fraction of a second when its paralysed state turned into panic and flight, its fear cut right through me. I still see what occurred in that one tremulous instant with an undiminished clarity. I see the edge of the grey tarmac and every individual blade of grass, I see the hare leaping out of its hiding-place, with its ears laid back and a curiously human expression on its face that was rigid with terror…turning to look back as it fled and almost popping out of its head with fright, I see myself, become one with it. (*Rings* 234)

This overtly Whitmanesque passage—where human being and hare collide in a single experience of fear—repeats in miniature the figure that presides over the novel, namely, the collision that produced the rings of Saturn. In mirroring Whitman's totalizing lyrical narcissism, I am suggesting, Sebald's narrator displays his complete inability to hold the world together in a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Compared to the almost ghostly "I" who is able to jump between times and places without being subject to physical or spatial limitations for much of the novel, the "I" who emerges in this passage is fully embodied and anchored to his immediate surroundings. Rather than existing as one fluid component of a shifting alternative history, in this scene, the narrator is acted upon by his environment, transformed into a fully embodied organism. The experience, for him, is not one of grandiose Whitmanesque recognition and self-celebration, but a terrifying ordeal. He feels utterly trapped in the moments when he feels himself to be a coherent and organized body, endangered by the landscape around

him rather than functioning as a constantly shifting expression of it. To exist as a unified self in Sebald's world, rather than as the kind of malleable and unfinished entity represented by the Body without Organs, is to subject that self to constant threat. Since both human and hare experience precisely the same fear response, they are collapsed together; when the narrator looks at the "other" figure before him, he sees the equivalent of a human subject, something with "a curiously human expression on its face" (234). Rather than opening up a world of possible connections and exchanges, this scene suggests that both figures are being identified as—and limited in—their shared status as self-contained subjects.

It is worth noting how this scene differs from the human-animal encounters in Coetzee's novels. In *Barbarians* and *Diary*, such meetings emphasized the way that singular entities can co-exist. The mutual confrontation of narrator and hare is not so much a meeting of what were and remain two separate entities, but function as the means of multiplying intensities within the scene of narration. If everything in the narrator's field of vision is both himself and other, than these modulations indicate which combinations empower vs. arrest the type of endlessly proliferating and re-forming narratives of Sebald's novel. In a more realist world that we might find in an earlier form of the novel, fear could be understood as an instinct that protects an organism from dissolution and thus preserves the autonomous perspective that gives meaning and structure to the work. But here fear functions very differently, threatening

to obstruct the connections that drive the narrative. Moreover, in Sebald's universe, a feeling or emotion like fear cannot be traced to a point of origin because it suffuses the landscape itself, lying dormant until small catalysts—like the sudden appearance of the hare—capture the narrator's attention. The pervasive apathy that results from his broken or "ruined" subjecthood, in turn, is modulated to reveal a spectrum of potential emotions that characterize the shifting networks around him. This mode of thinking through feeling only allows emotion to be taken up and made evident through one's environment rather than projecting a kind of affective logic onto one's surroundings in an enactment of the pathetic fallacy. Sebald suggests that this process is necessary in order to capture the nature of a world in which forces that emerge in encounters with the sublime cannot be grasped according to human logic, including the invented physical laws of time and space.

By re-organizing our perception of the world in such a way, the novel forces its readership to consider a broader set of actors and forces at play in the text rather than attending only to the ways in which humans have demonstrated the power to harness, modify, or destroy that environment. Sebald's concern, for example, with the relationship between the creation of life *and* its dissolution pervades his oeuvre, including his published series of lectures and essays on the World War II Allied

firebombing of German cities *On the Natural History of Destruction*.[60] This work targets what Sebald saw as an absence at the heart of German culture, as it exposes the oppressive silence around the effects of the bombing and considers why that event occupies so little space in Germany's national history and collective memory. In explaining the lingering effects of the devastation wrought by the wartime campaign, Sebald also considers how this legacy has been materially disrupted and effaced by natural decay and regeneration, making it clear that the difference between forms of destruction and creation is a question of point of view, or where one happens to be located in space and time. In a passage that invokes specific descriptions in *Rings of Saturn*, he writes, "Many of the more than seventy airfields from which the war of annihilation was waged against Germany were in the county of Norfolk… most were abandoned after the war. Grass has grown over the runways, and the dilapidated control towers… stand in an often eerie landscape" (*Rings* 77). These two forms of

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[60] *On the Natural History of Destruction*, the English title of the volume, was originally intended as the title for a report on the aftermath of the bombing of German cities to be published in the journal *Horizon* under its editor, Cyril Connolly (31). The German title for the volume is taken from the title of the first lecture contained therein, *Luftkrieg und Literatur,* or "Air War and Literature." Sebald's translator for the English edition, Anthea Bell, has pointed out that the apparent difference between the two titles has caused consternation in the academic community, leading to the assumption that "surely… wording so different from the original had been disgracefully foisted on Max by a publisher taking advantage of his death" (Bell). Her response that "Neither Hamish Hamilton as publisher, nor I as translator… would have taken such a liberty on our own initiative" strongly implies that Sebald himself was a central part of the decision-making process to adjust the work's title (Bell). This fits with the evidence that Sebald was an active collaborator in the production of the English-language versions of his works.

effacement—of nature by man and of man by nature—overlap in this passage to elucidate the paradox of Sebald's title, *On The Natural History of Destruction.*

For a volume ostensibly focused on the legacy of mass human violence in the Second World War, the "natural history of destruction" that Sebald invokes makes the point that natural, geologic, and atmospheric events have sculpted the surface of the planet we presently occupy (and that of Saturn, the celestial figure that hangs over Sebald's novel) and will eventually destroy it. Despite the virtually unimaginable length of time it presumes to cover, this history is no demonstration of Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence,[61] which assumes what might be called a negative anthropocentrism in understanding humans as the actors who have irreparably damaged their environment. By contrast, the deep-time historical scale on which Sebald's history operates depicts the violence that human beings have unleashed as a relatively feeble force that natural violence has no difficulty subsuming and turning to another and undiscoverable purpose. Moreover, it does so without regard for human life and in violation of narratives that put such life at the center of world historical events. In a lecture collected

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[61] Nixon defines the now well-known concept of slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is typically not viewed as violence at all" and which includes "climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans…" (2). Nixon's take on slow violence, however, focuses mainly on a moment and logic of the Anthropocene, in which humans have become a geological force. Thus in attempting to diagnose a problem that humans have caused, he still tells a story in which humans—and the forms of violence they deploy— are at the center of the proverbial universe.

in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Sebald poses the question this way: "Is [such] destruction… irrefutable proof that the catastrophes which develop, so to speak, in our hands and seem to break out suddenly are a kind of experiment, anticipating the point at which we shall drop out of what we have thought for so long to be our autonomous history and back into the history of nature?" (*Natural History* 66). Perversely, given its still highly charged subject matter, *The Rings of Saturn* seem to answer in the affirmative. Yes, war is an experiment that anticipates the moment when the cyclical process of destruction and rebuilding that constitutes human history confronts the history of the planet in something like the n-body problem; at a certain point the orbits of the two forces may collide. Sebald's suggestion that we will "drop out of what we have thought for so long to be our autonomous nature and back into the history of nature" indicates that human war will prove to be the less durable formation. The implication is that natural destruction works by its own law, and that, whether or not we acknowledge it, human affairs are ultimately subject to that law. Human history, to the extent that it acknowledges the sublime power that the natural world holds, does so in order to try to control, adjust, postpone, or deny its possibilities to override the autonomy of human narratives.

In a contemporary context, Mike Davis considers the way that this type of rhetorical manipulation functions in reference to the catastrophic meteorological and geologic upheavals of the southern California region. He explains, "the social

construction of 'natural' disaster is largely hidden from view by a way of thinking that simultaneously imposes false expectations on the environment and then explains the inevitable disappointments as proof of a malign and hostile nature" (*Ecology* 9). Quoting the 1941 novel *Storm* by George Stewart, he asks whether "perhaps there was something about the human mind that made it feel comfortable to think of a storm as a person, not an equation" (*Ecology* 161). For those who believe there may indeed be "something about the human mind" that makes it prefer to imagine nature in terms of the pathetic fallacy, whereby it expresses our own destructive tendencies, Sebald's novels provide the antidote. His radically decentered universe and narrator push back against the stubborn human belief that the planet has a center, and by implication a set of natural laws, whose sovereignty depends on its relation to human life— whether that takes the form of subjection or of violation. The corrective to this assumption does not take the form of a traditional plot from which a lesson can be derived but of protracted description, the basic aesthetic premise of which approximates what architectural historian Keller Easterling calls "subtraction."

Subtraction, in her view, is "not simply absence, but a moment in a set of exchanges and attritions that are part of most active organizations… They are capable of orchestrating… ebbs and flows" (3). To understand nature the way she understands a city—as a type of subtraction economy—we would have to see it as a series of procedures. These procedures are autopoietic, triggered by various temporalities, and

regulated by internal feedback loops. To understand how subtraction folds creation and re-generation into acts of destruction, she contends, one must see it *not* as "an aggressive evacuation or replacement," but as part of an "alternative artistic repertoire [that] takes subtraction in hand and shapes it as a construction rather than a negation" (34). Thus, "[w]hile urban destruction is often viewed with sorrow and outrage, it can also produce powerfully productive landscapes. Even the most devastating disasters potentially rewire building and landscape networks with new associations and adjacencies (Easterling 34). Sebald give us every indication that he would agree with Easterling's proposition that to speak independently about demolition or creation is to mischaracterize the way that opposing forces interact and sometimes collide to produce reality. The act of subtraction is necessary in order to prevent landscapes and assemblages from congealing into a predictable, static trajectory. Rather than seeing subtraction as the opposite of a certain kind of creative impulse, the co-presence of both forces ensures that different constituent elements of any multiplicity are constantly renewed in their relation to one another.

Rhizomatic networks, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, rely on this logic of subtraction. "The multiple *must be made*," they claim, "not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather… with the number of dimensions one already has available—always *n-1* (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at *n-1* dimensions" (*Thousand*

Plateaus 6). Whatever allows such a component or combination to constitute itself as whole must be subtracted in order for what is always potentially a rhizome to be connected at "any point to anything other" (9). The constant act of subtraction is what makes the multiplicity an ongoing process and distinctive mode of transformation. If, as Deleuze and Guattari say, a rhizome "may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (9), then in destroying its form, paradoxically, subtraction makes its form. Open to recombination, Sebald's narrator comprises only one offshoot or line among many, which not only means that his narrator will continue to be broken up, but also ensures his continued existence in shifting forms. We could say that his ongoing breakdown is actually a form in its own right, as the fractures that characterize the narrator as a figure allow his narration to branch out continuously in unpredictable directions. By breaking lines and recombining its elements with those of its environment, the rhizome can respond to the pull of various centers of gravity without being drawn to and captured by any single one. This is what I understand Deleuze and Guattari to mean by the claim that "there are despotic formations of immanence and channelization specific to rhizomes, just as there are anarchic deformations in the transcendent system of trees" (20). The rhizome functions differently than an arborescent network model, or a map from a tracing, but the two forms are one interdependent process in which each modifies the other. Deleuze and

Guattari consider literature akin to a theory of this interdependency in that it understands

> how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings… *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away. (25)

Understanding Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* as precisely this kind of rhizomatic text—that disrupts traditional chronologies, and changes, destroys, and reinvents the nature of subjects, objects, and places as it links them together in shifting ways—allows us to see the novel as "an antigenealogy… an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system…without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states" (*Thousand Plateaus* 21). Since this type of logic is at odds with the progressive and causal mechanisms by which we articulate traditional historical narratives, the metonymic nature of Sebald's text provides a way to think about how this rhizomatic model stages historical inquiry, even as it shatters and re-constitutes the familiar methodologies of such writing.

Eelco Runia, in considering how forms of discontinuity are made manifest in historical terms, points out that an "old-fashioned substantive philosophy of history was adept at suggesting meaning by constructing continuity—whereupon

representationalism unveiled the mechanics of this process and so deconstructed the substantive attempts at meaning. But, unfortunately, discontinuity is not what is left when you have deconstructed continuity" (6). Coupling together continuous and discontinuous modes of understanding history to function in concert like Deleuze and Guattari's arborescent and rhizomatic systems, Runia then turns to the figure of metonymy, "the trope of 'presence in absence'" as "a metaphor for the entwinement of continuity and discontinuity" (6). Drawing out the implications of this argument, Adam Bencard suggests that metonymy allows for the realization that "history is much more that our conscious reflection or narrativization of it, but rather an example of the fact that we exist on different levels that have different structuring logics simultaneously" (34). Unlike metaphor, which establishes equivalencies between two quite different things so that the one can "represent" the other, metonymy indicates a conflation between things of entirely different orders, drawing our attention to the elided gaps and other objects and processes that exist in the spaces between those two things. In other words, metonymy forms connections even as they highlight the strange and contingent nature of those connections. Runia puts it in these terms:

> Metonymy might be described as the willfully inappropriate transposition of a word that belongs to context 1… to context 2… where it subsequently stands out as just slightly 'out of place'… metonymies are, as Cicero said, *mutata*: 'displaced words.' In the displaced word or phrase, different 'contexts,' different 'spheres of

> appropriateness,' or…different 'places,' are connected as well as juxtaposed. In fact, a displaced, metonymical word might be visualized as a 'fistula'—an 'abnormal passageway'—between two different *topoi*. (16)

Runia then turns to the illustrations and photographs that recur across Sebald's oeuvre as an example of "nonverbal metonymies," which function as "fistulae or holes through which the past discharges into the present" (16). Because, in her reading, the photographs are designed to stage irruptions of past moments into the boundless present of narration, his text "maximize[s] their out-of-place-ness. They are not on separate pages and there are no captions to frame the metonymies and lessen their abrupt contiguity" (16). The photographs, however, are only one example of the ways in which metonymy governs Sebald's novelistic world as a whole, suggesting that the "abrupt contiguity" Runia notes is the rule, rather than the exception, in *The Rings of Saturn*. Moreover, the forms of simultaneous connection and juxtaposition engendered by the text are not merely chronological in nature, but capitalize on what initially seem to be displaced geographies, subjects, memories, and mechanisms. To see *Rings* as a truly metonymic universe would be to acknowledge that its various contexts are all equally connected even in their apparent discontinuity, and thus that it has not necessarily "been written for consecutive reading" (*Imaginary Beings* xv). As Borges writes in the preface to *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, itself a work referenced multiple

times across Sebald's novel, "the curious [should] dip into it from time to time in much the way one visits the changing forms revealed by a kaleidoscope" (xv).

Despite what sometimes appears to be the purely contingent movement of narration, it pauses at strategic moments and turns metaphoric, allowing one of its component parts to draw equivalencies that generate a stack of such components whose shared meaning is then made clear. The text's conclusion features a discussion of silkworm lifecycles in nature and state-sponsored programs of silk cultivation. One of the last, most disturbing vignettes of the novel discusses the revitalization of sericulture under the Nazi regime, "revived by the German fascists with that peculiar thoroughness they brought to everything they touched" (291). A film on German silk production found by the narrator "promised the best and cleanest of all possible worlds" (291-92) while silkworms proved "suitable for a variety of experiments… They could be used to illustrate the structure and distinctive features of insect anatomy, insect domestication, retrogressive mutations, and the essential measures which are taken by breeders to monitor productivity and selection, including extermination to preempt racial degeneration" (294). The efficient deployment of propaganda, the collective patriotism and utopian future this project imagines, and the inclusion of key phrases—"selection," "extermination," and "racial degeneration"— all set up a chilling connection between the Third Reich's focus on sericulture and their Final Solution. But the moment when the

metonymic tie between these two contexts reaches its apex occurs during the process-driven scenes of murder that the narrator watches play out in the propaganda film:

> In the film, we see a silk-worker receiving eggs despatched by the Central Reich Institute of Sericulture in Celle, and depositing them in sterile trays. We see the hatching, the feeding of the ravenous caterpillars, the cleaning out of the frames, the spinning of the silken thread, and finally the killing, accomplished in this case not by putting the cocoons out in the sun or in a hot oven, as was often the practice in the past, but by suspending them over a boiling cauldron. The cocoons, spread out on shallow baskets, have to be kept in the rising steam for upwards of three hours, and when a batch is done, it is the next one's turn, and so on until the entire killing business is completed. (294)

In the span of this quotation, the metaphoric distance between that which is being represented and its form of representation collapses. The metaphor essentially collapses in on itself; the language of the world-historical event of the Holocaust so completely infiltrates the description of silk production that the two are rendered as the same kind of process on different scales. The minute, dispassionate detail with which this standardized process of extermination is rendered in the film invokes the banality of evil that Hannah Arendt diagnosed as characteristic of the Nazi bureaucracy.[62] The silkworm

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[62] In defending her choice to employ the unexpected phrase "banality of evil" in relation to a Nazi agent, Arendt points out that "massacres of whole peoples are not unprecedented. They were the order of the day in antiquity, and the centuries of colonization and imperialism provide plenty of

vignette, in addition to being extended outside the terrain of the novel to suggest a connection to forms of unspeakable violence like the Holocaust, also reaches back into the text to link to the narrator's recall of the parable of the mad Gadarene[63] and the discussion of the human impact upon the life-cycle of the herring.[64]

In noting the extent to which such apparently endless associations can be formed within and beyond the text itself, I want to raise the question of how *The Rings of Saturn* organizes the chain of associations produced by a schizophrenic narrator into a networked structure that readers recognized and lauded as a novel. Adam Bencard suggests that it is much the same thing that makes a museum a museum.[65] Fittingly, Bencard identifies the "schizophrenia" of the historical museum, which exists as a "storehouse of discontinuity" in which "objects are torn from their contexts, removed from the flows that bore them, but the museum works to create continuity, to connect us to the past. By their very natures, historical museums function as a repository of metonymies, of things out of context" (36). What the museum—and the figure of the

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examples of more or less successful attempts of that sort" (288). Thus the dispassionate, bureaucratic, and systematized logic that went into this genocide was a product of certain administrative logics.

[63] Sebald's narrator wonders whether "this parable was made up… to explain the supposed uncleanliness of swine; which would imply that human reasoning, diseased as it is, needs to seize on some other kind that it can take to be inferior and thus deserving of annihilation" (67).

[64] Sebald describes experiments being carried out on the herrings in terms that echo types of German experimentation on silkworms, "cutting off their fins and mutilating them in other ways." Considering the extent of the violence suffered by the herring, "the natural historians sought consolation in the idea that humanity was responsible for only a fraction of the endless destruction wrought" (57).

[65] For explicit discussions of various museums in *The Rings of Saturn*, see especially page 10 and page 271.

archive that implicitly stands behind it—prompt us to ask, given their relevance to the form of Sebald's novel, is how its various artifacts and records, taken as a whole, seek to collect certain types of information and to curate them into a form that is at once distinct from—and connected to— the world. How does the museum, like Sebald's novel, preserve and honor a principle of discontinuity so radical that anything can be connected to anything else, a principle that conducts readers through a continuous experience of what has been broken and artificially reassembled for this purpose?

3.3 The Time and Politics of Information-Gathering

The website of the German Museum der Unerhörten Dinge, or Museum of Unheard (of) Things, describes its unusual collection in the following terms:

> …everything is always there, nothing is missing, nothing that could…be there. When something new, a new object comes into the museum, takes its place in the depot, it is usually a coincidence. An unexpected, unwanted, but possible encounter... The prerequisite is a mutual openness, a willingness to meet, to perceive that is not always and constantly given. (Albrecht, "About the Depot")

Founded by Roland Albrecht, the museum's collection, which is comprised of strange and quotidian objects assembled haphazardly in the space of a few rooms in Berlin, follows no specific logic; instead, he deliberately rejects a curatorial approach that would subordinate it to "any ordering system such as natural science, humanities, technology or geology" (Albrecht). The objects contained in the collection are those that have, by

"coincidence," come into contact with him, and by extension, with the other items of the museum, establishing unplanned and unmappable connections with one another in the process. Albrecht's description of the process by which objects come to reside in the museum, in this spirit, undercuts the agency we might cede to him as founder and curator. Instead, he emphasizes the exchange-based nature of an "encounter," wherein each possible addition to the collection must demonstrate its capacity to connect and transform itself and the objects and stories with which it engages. As he puts it, "the things themselves…have relationships with and to one another, and it is the associations of the things to me and with each other that produce this intertwining 'depository-entanglement'" (Albrecht 274).

Indicating that the physical nature of each object does not necessarily represent or limit the mode of its networked existence, the catalogue's individual narratives often bear little resemblance to the objects they describe, which often indicate a process or an idea rather than a material thing and may not have any basis in acknowledged fact.[66]

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[66] The nature of the elements Albrecht discusses, the style of his prose, and the uncertainty as to whether his accounts have actually occurred or only been imagined, are all strikingly similar to Sebald's narration in *The Rings of Saturn*. The description of an object labeled "The Wasp Honeycomb Collection Point in Kröte," for example, contains the following Sebaldian text: "If you ask an art historian specializing in the Baroque about the town of Ludwigslust, first he will speak about the local papier-mâché sculptures, then describe the papier-mâché manufacturer, and finally begin to rave about the Ludwigslust Carton Company. But very few indeed will know about Gottfried Keiser—Keiser spelled with an E. Over 200 years ago Arthur Gottfried Keiser of Kröte was a key player in the refinement and transformation of waste paper into art and into sculpture. And, in fact, he is responsible for one of the most important contributions to improving and stabilizing the famous Ludwigslust cardboard: thanks to him, the sculptures could be weatherproofed for the first time" (Albrecht 9).

The catalogue itself begins with a table of contents—organized by weight—labeled "Inventory," that starts at > 0.000 g ("The Void and the Spontaneous Decay of the Vacuum, or New Proofs of God") and goes up to 3.800 g ("The Story of a Piece of Iron") (Albrecht v-ix).[67] There is no introduction and no attempt to contextualize these objects in a greater unifying narrative; the hand of Albrecht—who literally assembles the items and their stories into the kind of provisional displays we encounter—remains invisible. Having taken responsibility for recognizing and excavating these things, places, and ideas from the ruins of history, Albrecht acts as a kind of guide through an alternative, open-ended, networked historical reality just as Sebald's narrator does. However, he distances himself even further from the objects he introduces, leaving museum visitors to choreograph their own movements through the range of possible connections and meanings implicit in his collection. Melanie Fisher understands Albrecht's project as part of a collective German effort to "re-collect the vestiges of [the] unassimilated past" ("A Review of *Museum of Unheard (of) Things*").

In Fisher's reading, Albrecht's museum resists the tendency for the passage of time to erase the evidence of things and narratives that do not support a progressive

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[67] It is no coincidence that the question of the "void," which acknowledges an absence even while it creates a space (and the expectation) for something to fill that absence begins Albrecht's catalogue, just as I have argued that this same paradox animates Sebald's textual universe. If this void is one of the "unheard" or "unheard of" things that demands to be rescued from obscurity and displayed as an essential component of the world, then it would seem that the failure to acknowledge an absent center (or, put differently, the stubborn insistence that there must be some sort of center) to the world is a common feature of both the museum and Sebald's novel.

notion of development. The past, then, becomes not just a way to organize time, but a bounded space like the archives or storage of the museum, where elements deemed peripheral to history are relegated.[68] The point of the Museum der Unerhörten Dinge, like *The Rings of Saturn*, is to retrieve these people, events, and objects and to recognize their immanent potential to rewrite the history of the world as a series of contingencies. Both the museum and Sebald's novel resist situating their objects in linear time, just as they resist organizing their component elements according to any perceived order of significance, for that would require a traditional mode of historical orientation around a past or a future, by way of a central event or turning point. Instead these objects exist in the eternal present of metonymy, where, as in Albrecht's description of his museum, "everything is always there [and] nothing is missing." Any one item participates in any number of connections. Critics understandably charge Sebald's novels with attempting to resurrect the past in the present, usually in response to the ethical obligations of cultural memory surrounding the Holocaust and the firebombing of German cities.[69] What Sebald offers, in my view, is not a re-staging of historical trauma that memorializes and lends meaning to the past. Instead, the temporality organizing his novels results from the collision of multiple chronotopes at a single point.

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[68] It is particularly noteworthy that the Museum of Unheard (of) Things has no traditional storeroom separate from its display areas; all of its objects are available for public viewing, and Albrecht uses the terms "depot," "storeroom," and "gallery" interchangeably.

[69] See Sefanie Boese, "'Forever Just Occurring': Postwar Belatedness in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*" (2016); Nina Pelikan Strauss, "Sebald, Wittgenstein, and the Ethics of Memory" (2009); and Kathy Behrendt, "Scraping Down the Past: Memory and Amnesia in W.G. Sebald's Anti-Narrative" (2010).

One of the objects in the Museum of Unheard (of) Things, "Bruno Retlau and His Tone-Neutralizer or The Audible Silence of Anti-Sound," explains what forms of time emerge from this order of collision. Installed in the museum by means of a scientific sketch of a wavelength, this particular object tells the story of Bruno Retlau's use of the principle of destructive interference to attempt to build a sort of noise-canceling "Tone Neutralizer" in mid-twentieth century Germany.[70] Destructive interference, "also called anti-noise," the museum's catalogue reads,

> arises when a sound, tone, or noise—whether pleasant or disturbing—is eliminated. In other words, when a real existing tone or noise is rendered inaudible by another one. The original source of the tone, as well as that of the newly generated one, is not heard… The tones block each other so that no further sound waves can emerge. What is obtained is silence in the truest sense of the word—an audible silence, so to speak, for both the original tone as well as the newly created opposite one. This audible silence, however, is fundamentally different from simple inaudible silence. In the latter there is no tone, sound, or noise… In audible silence not only is a tone present, but it has been doubled, for a new sound, equal in strength and quality, has been set against the original one,

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[70] Albrecht's catalogue entry for Retlau's Tone-Neutralizer notes that "all of his equipment as well as the records…were destroyed in the 1944 bombing of Berlin" (13). The chronicle of a scientific breakthrough-in-progress whose evidence was destroyed by human violence and consequently, lost to history, is indicative of precisely the types of objects most frequently revived and celebrated by the museum.

> albeit in negative form. A doubled sound is virtually present, although neither the original nor the newly emerged one can actually be heard. (12)

The manner in which distinct sounds are combined, producing a new unified tone while rendering the initial individual sounds inaudible, mirrors the way that the chronotopes of Sebald's novel, like the objects in the museum, resonate together at a different historical frequency than their original contexts would suggest. This process captures both the iconoclasm inherent when Sebald detaches particular components of history from their original frameworks and the possibilities of meaning that emerge when new composite forms are produced as a result. When Monika Kaup suggests, by contrast, that "*Rings of Saturn* fulfills the definition of historical realism according to Georg Lukács," because "every significant figure… is anchored at a precise location within a complex and clearly articulated historical and geographic network," her reading would imply that each element of Sebald's novel is clearly foregrounded and preserved throughout (684). I would contend, however, that each figure—person, place, or event—that appears in Sebald's text always already consists of the collisions of multiple chronotopes.

If we understand the chronotope, as an imaginary space in time that defines a genre and links it to a particular context, then the Sebaldian collision of chronotopes effectively shatters the self-contained integrity of all previous genres. The example of Thomas Browne's skull, one of the first objects discussed—and pictured in a

photograph—in *The Rings of Saturn,* illustrates this principle by offering an account of the afterlife of a human being. No longer a subject, the Thomas Browne of *Rings* exists only as part object. The story of Browne as object begins in 1682, the year he died and was laid to rest in the Norwich parish graveyard. What amounts to a strangely inverted *bildungsroman,* a story of development and change after death, recommences in 1840, when the skull was damaged and fell into the hands of a man who willed it to a local hospital museum. After his death it was displayed as a medical curiosity until 1921 (10-11).[71] The story of the skull perverts the genre of biographical narrative by proceeding without the center of awareness that held Browne together and moved him through time and space as a living subject. We never learn how the destruction of this historical figure occurred or how the skull took over this story, advancing it in a very different form, but we do know that Browne's death occurred just before the onset of the modern period of British history. His skull's re-internment in a medical museum occurred during the period when psychology emerged in competition with the established "science" of phrenology. This new development sought to establish the relation between the human subject and the body it occupied. The medical museum is the location where the skull, at the intersection of these concerns, connects to the narrator, who goes in search of the "relic" of a dead philosopher that he believes may be housed in the former

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[71] The image of a skull inevitably suggests the famed skull of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. That image of the skull, fittingly, indicates a chronotope in which "the time is out of joint": a Denmark in political crisis and haunted by spectral breakdowns between past and present, and between fiction and reality.

medical museum of the hospital. The history of the skull, in effect, is nothing other than the history of periodic upheavals of everyday life from the beginning of modern history through the post-war period in the twentieth century. The collision of the two different narratives—a postmortem bildungsroman and a walking tour—transforms what otherwise might seem his personal meandering in search of new sensations into a new narrative of pilgrimage.[72] The fragments of other places in time that surface during his micro-cosmic "voyage" through hospital administrative structures in search of the skull expand and alter the narrative implications of an object that invokes multiple chronotopes: a hospital in Norwich in 1992, a graveyard in Norwich in 1682 and 1840, a museum of medical curiosities in 1921, and a destroyed cliffside English town in 1870, all of which are simultaneously present.[73]

To stave off the impulse to synthesize these singular forms into a larger historical narrative, the narrator offers a description of the estate of Somerleyton that layers various moments in history within the present tense of his narration. As he puts it, in terms that might well refer to the novel itself,

> There are indeed moments, as one passes through the rooms open to the public at Somerleyton, when one is not quite sure whether one is in a country house in

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[72] In German, the original title of the novel is *Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine Englische Wallfahrt*, or *The Rings of Saturn: An English Pilgrimage*.

[73] By logical extension, this contemporary chronotope of Sebald's brief voyage through hospital administrative structures (page 10) generates an automatic connection to the lost city of Dunwich in the Victorian age, "a place of pilgrimage for melancholy poets" including Algernon Charles Swinburne (page 159).

> Suffolk or some kind of no-man's-land, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean or in the heart of the dark continent. Nor can one readily say which decade or century it is, for many ages are super-imposed here and coexist. (36)

It may seem odd, at first glance, to identify Somerleyton's palatial collection of imperial artifacts—including a "camphorwood chest which may once have accompanied a former occupant of the house on a tour of duty to Nigeria or Singapore… hussars' sabres, African masks, spears, safari trophies, [and] hand-coloured engravings of Boer War battles"— with a Sebaldian chronology (35). *The Rings of Saturn* explicitly rejects the notion of history as comprised of sovereign violence unleashed in the name of progress. Yet Somerleyton, like the massive state-affiliated museums of the nineteenth century (for example, the British Museum), seems to celebrate "successful colonial ventures with displays of empire" (Duthie 16). Despite the obvious kinship between the objects in such institutions and those at Somerleyton, however, one crucial difference separates the two. The estate that Sebald's narrator encounters "strikes the visitor of today no longer as an oriental palace in a fairy tale… The suites of rooms now make a somewhat disused, dispirited impression" (35). Observing the decaying artifacts of imperialism and coercive state power without the triumphalist trappings of curated national exhibitions, the narrator perceives a kind of productive entropy, akin to that of the Museum of Unheard (of) Things. As he recalls,

> …I was variously reminded of a pawnbroker's or an auction hall. And yet it was the sheer number of things…that won me over to what was, ultimately, a collection of oddities. How uninviting Somerleyton must have been, I reflected, in the days…when everything, from the cellar to the attic…was brand new, matching in every detail, and in unremittingly good taste. And how fine a place the house seemed to me now that it was nearing the brink of dissolution and silent oblivion. (36)

If Somerleyton was once curated to choreograph visitors into a recognition and affirmation of the "imperial archive," it now exposes the vulnerabilities and contingent nature of what was purportedly an "ever-expanding" and "'universal'" historical trajectory (Macfarlane 77). As the decay of imperial objects at Somerleyton overtakes the processes of accumulation and curation that compose official histories, the items are estranged from their political significance but still allow visitors to imaginatively reconfigure the personal associations that made them once essential parts of a living world.[74] As the only remaining relics of such a world, the forces that connect such objects to one another overpower those that would place each object in a progressive national history. The question of which of the "many ages" and places that coexist at

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[74] One of the most noteworthy elements that catalyzes Somerleyton's "dissolution" and descent into "silent oblivion" is the encroachment of the natural world into and against the remains of political violence. As Sebald writes, "The grounds, in contrast to the waning splendour of the house, were now at their evolutionary peak, a century after the heyday of Somerleyton… the trees… filled the air above the gardens, and several of the ancient cedars, which were there to be admired by visitors even then, now extended their branches over well-nigh a quarter of an acre, each an entire world unto itself" (37).

Somerleyton ultimately emerge as dominant may be contingent on the vicissitudes of political power, but the smaller, quotidian manner in which its objects were organized, used, and granted meaning over time is what attracts the narrator's attention.

Commenting on the way that contemporary state-run museums continue to present their collections as a manifestation of political world-building rather than as records of the forgotten, Orhan Pamuk sees the problem as one of both scale and genre. "Big museums with their wide doors call upon us to forget our humanity and embrace the state," he argues. "Instead, we need modest museums that honor the neighborhoods and streets and the homes and shops nearby, and turn them into elements of their exhibitions" (*Innocence of Objects* 54). Linking the mode of curation to narrative genre, he maintains that "transitions from palaces to national museums and from epics to novels are parallel processes. Epics are like palaces and speak of the heroic exploits of the old kings who lived in them. National museums, then, should be like novels; but they are not" (54). Pamuk's use of parallelism makes it clear that the best museum is a modest museum, since the modest museum conserves the quotidian elements that would otherwise be lost to history precisely because they challenge the claim that people live in relation to government. In place of the dialogic interplay of the grand and the quotidian,

the factual and the invented, political events and the routines of living, the museum should conserve the relationship between people and the things they lived with.[75]

Sebald brings the form of the novel and that of the museum into direct collision as he nears the end of *Rings.* Returning to Thomas Browne, the philosopher whose shadow hangs over the entirety of the novel, Sebald describes among his papers a

> catalogue of remarkable books, 'Musæum Clausum' or 'Biblioteca Abscondita,' listing pictures, antiquities, and sundry singular items that may have formed part of a collection put together by Browne but were more likely products of his imagination, the inventory of a treasure house that existed purely in his head and to which there is no access except through the letters on the page. (271)

Browne's imaginary library, paradoxically filled with material objects, blurs the line between imagined and material objects, as it is also the narrator's habit to do. Containing a wide range of mythological texts and items supposedly lost to history, as well as factual accounts, this catalogue serves as an analogue and companion to *The Rings of Saturn*: the novel composed of the same type of meticulously catalogued yet inaccessible and shifting archive, perceived only by Sebald's schizophrenic narrator and perhaps Thomas Browne. What I consider important about these Sebaldian museums is

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[75] Orhan Pamuk's "Modest Manifesto for Museums" is contained within *The Innocence of Objects*, a catalogue for an actually-existing museum in Istanbul that collects and displays objects that materialize the world of his novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2008). The museum's displays tell the story of the protagonists depicted in *The Museum of Innocence*. Like the Museum of Unheard (of) Things and Sebald's novel, the objects featured in the collection are often of an unclear provenance and their narratives are not necessarily based in fact.

not the status of items in the collection so much as that of the reader they address. These museums would not "speak to" just anyone but require a particular subject to access them in a particular way. To open a perceptible space for the spontaneous and ungovernable connections between disparate elements requires a perspective immersed within a leveled forcefield of people, places, things, and events. Such immersion subjects the observer to a world of contingencies whose elements are in a constant state of combination and recombination. This, I would argue, is how uncivil consciousness functions in Sebald's world.

Rather than willfully disengaging with the state as a way to reject sovereign forms of control, uncivil consciousness operates in Sebald by forsaking the individual will of a centered subject. It requires a recognition and acceptance of one's position as an incomplete and fragmented subject, composed by and of forces and sensations beyond one's control. These forces include the political violence that occupied a central and privileged place in Coetzee's narratives, but Sebald makes its impact provisional and unpredictable. In a world where the story of human progress—and its destructive methodologies, including political conflict at the level of world war—is just one narrative among many, military conflicts are merely another agent of change alongside the flooding and erosion that can swallow an entire cliffside town into the sea. Sebald suggests that even if the narrator of *Rings* were not a shattered and dispersed subject, then the world he describes would still be one that had been repeatedly shattered and

dispersed. Although every object in that world can and does potentially connect to any other, they never reify into a perceptible or lasting order. Thus there can be no hierarchies in this world, and without hierarchies, there is no way for political power to assert itself as a totalizing authority.

It remains to be asked, given this forcefield and the form of subject required to navigate it, what the chronotopical collision of the story of Thomas Browne's skill with the perigrinations of a schizophrenic narrator means for the *bildungsroman*, arguably the form responsible through much of modern European history for enabling an autonomous and internally coherent individual to accommodate the violent upheavals of daily life that punctuate the advance of capitalism. How can such a decentered subject and non-citizen serve as the protagonist of a narrative form that has historically been devoted to formulating the very sort of individual Coetzee's JC struggles not to be and Sebald's narrator never was?

3.4 Becoming Debris: Austerlitz as Anti-Bildungsroman

Like *The Rings of Saturn*, *Austerlitz* features a similarly unnamed and peripatetic narrator who provides a documentary-style narrative of encounters, places, and people. *Austerlitz* also employs the technique of free indirect discourse that obscures the boundaries between the narrator of *Rings* and the material littering his transhistorical field of vision, but to different ends. Whereas in *Rings*, this technique results in a total loss of personal autonomy and a dispersed or schizophrenic perspective, in *Austerlitz* it

dramatizes the degree to which memory—and thus the perspectives of narrator and protagonist alike—have been appropriated and broken apart by world-historical events. Because it concerns one man's attempt to discover his origins, *Austerlitz* has been regarded as Sebald's most traditional novel, featuring a perceptible plot and the promise of progressive development toward self-discovery. In a curious way, the narrative derailments that distinguish the events of *Austerlitz* from the plot of a traditional *bildungsroman* offer the novel's own best theoretical model. Lacking the archive of personal memories that allow a protagonist of this genre to recognize and develop a self, Austerlitz can understand himself only as a fictionalized narrative construction, having been given a false identity and a trajectory of development that was never his own. As a result, the individualism on which the *bildungsroman* is premised gives way, over the course of the text, to a new collective phenomenon that marks an important moment in the development of the novel.

Raised by a Welsh couple as "Dafydd Elias," Austerlitz only learns his real name—and the first clue to his actual identity—before sitting for his advanced secondary school examinations. Lingering in European railway stations, rooting through civil service archives, circling former Jewish ghettoes, and revisiting the Prague neighborhood where he lived briefly as the boy Jacques Austerlitz, he comes to find that his Jewish Czech heritage, like his family, was lost to him when he was placed on a children's transport train to England at the age of five. Austerlitz's compulsive need not

just to know, but to re-stage and experience the formative possibilities that were denied to him as he re-traces his first journey from Prague to London, constitute an attempt to investigate the "vague sense that he did not belong…anywhere… in the world" (254). Austerlitz's subsequent experience is an attempt to find his place within society that both repeats and reverses the process of the *bildungsroman,* as Franco Moretti defines it, a novel whose protagonist "does not remain faithful to his youthful impressions but is able to break with them" (182).

Bernard Selinger identifies the contradictory possibilities inherent in this genre, which can be identified either in terms favored by Moretti and Lukács as "one that is concerned with the integration of the hero into society" or, alternatively, as "one that regards the hero as forever alienated" (39). Gabriele Lazzari echoes the idea that "the traditional *bildungsroman* was founded on the assimilation of a recalcitrant individual into society through a symbolic compromise" (108). Austerlitz's quest to narratively locate his personal history within a political history of Europe is undertaken willingly, but his attempt to make of himself a whole and complete subject cannot be achieved, by "compromise" or by any other method. Having experienced a life "broken up from within" such that he remains incomprehensible to himself, Austerlitz seeks to re-organize himself around a center (188). To develop with full knowledge of his own past, he believes, would have rendered him a complete subject. The problem is that to succeed in becoming an individual, as formulated in a traditional *bildungsroman,* is to subject

oneself to the very national authority and logic of progress that eliminated Austerlitz's possibility, as a child, of becoming one.[76] This option is not open to Austerlitz in Sebald's novel, in which he sets out to collect the pieces of the life he should have lived that were previously scattered throughout England, France, and the Czech Republic. Just as Austerlitz's past has been dispersed across Europe as a result of German violence, negating the possibility that he could have developed into an individual anchored to a national culture and to a personal history, other postwar patterns of everyday life have reorganized these pieces into new arrangements, making them impossible for Austerlitz to recognize or remember. Instead, his quest is driven by contingency; he does not direct himself toward any particular objects, places, or people so much as he feels inexplicably drawn to certain things. He wanders throughout Western Europe until he stumbles across something, which might include a voice, an image, or a curious sensation, that inexplicably captures his attention.

These pieces of historical rubble demand that he negotiate between their defamiliarized arrangement in the present and their legibility as lost pieces of a self he did not become. Moving between the great cities and archives in Europe to discover a

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[76] Even a generically strange work such as Rousseau's *Émile* understands the education and development of pupils as intended to produce neither the generic individual understood as a "citizen" nor one so specialized as to take up a particular profession, but as a specific type of subject that is prepared to maintain his individual autonomy and self-possession while being prepared to contribute to a republican and collective system of governance. In this way, the fact that the work exists simultaneously as a pedagogical manual and a portrayal of a specific pupil's educational development means that *Émile* theorizes itself as a kind of ideal prototype of the *bildungsroman*.

pre-war biography that he never had a chance to experience, Austerlitz positions himself to access the past by understanding the way that its remnants have been re-distributed in the present. Standing before a junk shop in a Czech town where his mother was presumably imprisoned in a ghetto, Austerlitz observes that

> the items on display in the windows… exerted such a power of attraction on me that it was a long time before I could tear myself away from staring at the hundreds of different objects… as if one of them or their relationship with each other must provide an unequivocal answer to the many questions I found it impossible to ask in my mind. (195)

Whereas the narrator of *Rings* remained indifferent and only provisionally linked to the remnants of the past that confronted him at any given point, Austerlitz feels himself resonating together with the objects in the shop window. The inaccessible story of how they came to exist in that particular place at this specific moment, to Austerlitz, might well be one that he shares with them. Insofar as the "oakleaf-embroidered jacket… the fishing rod, the hunter's bag," all function as synecdochic substitutions for their owners, he is right to recognize the way that their journey of dispersal and re-arrangement mirrors the form of his lost personal history (196). Because they have "for reasons one could never know… survived the process of destruction" Austerlitz feels a connection with these objects that he cannot fully explain, projecting his "own faint shadow…among them" (197). Although his personal past remains stubbornly

inaccessible and foreign, Austerlitz is attracted to the vanished order of daily life to which they once belonged and to the idea of belonging with them. While there is nothing definite to mark these objects as possessions stolen from Nazi victims, the intensity with which he views the haphazard and provisional assemblage of things in the shop window situates them in the context of a before-and-after relationship clarified when Austerlitz encounters the "handbags, belt buckles, clothes brushes, and combs" manufactured by internees and curated into a display in the "so-called Ghetto Museum" (197). None of these items are meant to serve as recognizable components that Austerlitz can pick up and fit seamlessly into his known history; they are significant because they have the potential to disrupt the archive of memories he has established as Dayfdd Elias, an archive that has already proven to be a false construction. The sensory information to which Austerlitz is inexplicably attracted constitutes whatever *might have been* part of an entirely different memory, one that might have substantiated the personal experience of Jacques Austerlitz. Without access to this memory, he is stranded between two fictions, the story of a false identity vs. the story of a true one he was not allowed to live.

The extent to which Austerlitz's fabricated English past has blocked him from accessing both the limited archive of memories he had formed before emigrating and the memories he could have added to such a cache—had his real identity not been withheld from him—plays a role in the strange nature of the relationship between the unnamed narrator and the protagonist of Sebald's novel. In the traditional *bildungsroman*, the

organic relationship between the narrating function and the developing subject is usually established within a single consciousness. When narrator and protagonist are the same figure, the narrator is able to relay forms of personal memory as a coherent whole because he has lived them, and in so doing, develops the qualifications to author his own history. Instead, in Sebald's novel, the protagonist is an academic who cannot write his way beyond his dissertation and the narrator is a figure with no apparent interest in retrieving or sharing his own past. Coming together to fill complementary deficiencies in one another's narrative functions, the experience of Austerlitz intersects with the authorial compulsion of the narrator through a sequence of chance encounters. The only times that the narrator actually provides a first-person viewpoint of his own experiences are in the spaces between his meetings with Austerlitz; he contextualizes scenes or notes the passing of time as if they constitute interludes that artificially link together his interrupted, indirect first-person narration of Austerlitz's story. The narrative we encounter, for the most part, is a written record of the experiences that Austerlitz has chosen to share with him at any given time, and there is little if any evidence to suggest that the narrator has reshaped that information to form a biographical narrative.

The strange partial capabilities of narrator and protagonist, as well as their dependence on one another, further unravels the traditional *bildungsroman*; in this novel, the narrative function is totally detached from the first-person experiences contained

therein. Functioning as two halves of what was once a single character, Austerlitz and the narrator recognize each other as alike, even reliant upon one another to some degree, but their relationship is not personal or emotional. Austerlitz experiences a kind of compulsion to share the story of his attempts to reconstruct his lost memory with the narrator, and the narrator finds his purpose bound up in the imperative to hear and relay this story. Sebald's text sets the two up as linked and complementary mechanisms that fulfill different parts of the same operation. When Austerlitz and the narrator meet again by chance in a hotel bar in London, years after their initial encounter in Belgium, Austerlitz informs the narrator that he has become convinced that "he must find someone to whom he could relate his own story…for which he needed the kind of listener I had once been… Contrary to all statistical probability, then, there was an astonishing, positively imperative internal logic to his meeting me here in the bar…a place he had never before entered in his life" (43-44). This is as close as the narrator ever comes to admitting that the meetings of the two that produce the narrative of Austerlitz's experience operates by the same "internal logic" as the narrative, as if the work itself recognizes them as split components of some former novelistic unity. Austerlitz exists as nothing but a series of contingent movements and encounters, devoid of the recognizable consciousness and continuity of self that can be measured and developed over time. The narrator, meanwhile, acts as a kind of organizational force attempting to structure and present a coherent plot. However, the disjunction between

the archive of the novel—the events and places that emerge in shifting formations in lieu of plot development—and its narration means that we, too, only experience broken and non-continuous glimpses of Austerlitz's story when his path happens to intersect with that of the narrator.

Indeed, Austerlitz's inability to narrate his own story is also evident in his inability to author other types of narratives. Although Austerlitz is himself an architectural historian, overly qualified to analyze the material nature of his surroundings, he has been attempting unsuccessfully to write a treatise on the "family likeness" between buildings constructed in the "architectural style of the capitalist era" for at least thirty years (33). Austerlitz explains the endless nature of this project as "an impulse which he himself, to this day, did not really understand, but which was somehow linked to his early fascination with the idea of a network such as that of the entire railway system" (33). The reason why this impulse is simultaneously insightful and somewhat misguided is explained early on in the novel by Austerlitz's secondary school teacher, who has an oft-shared "thesis" that "our concern with history…is a concern with preformed images already imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered" (72). Both Austerlitz and his teacher assume that "truth" must be located where one would be least likely to recognize it in some undiscovered archive. Sebald, by contrast, locates truth in a lack of access to the vanished everyday life that Austerlitz

spends a lifetime trying to recover. In this way, though Austerlitz may be able to find some of the people, places, objects, and facts that did and could comprise parts of his biography, the truth that he ultimately seeks represents a sum that is greater than all of these constituent parts. Founded on absence, the missing archive contains all the lost possibilities and vanished human ties that can never be experienced through memory.

Like his fascination with shop windows and empty corridors, Austerlitz's interest in trains summons up the formative moments of this absence and the logistics that created it. Not only is a railway station the first location where the narrator crosses paths with Austerlitz and begins curating his story, the railway station is also the beginning of the decoy *bildungsroman* of Dayfdd Elias that Austerlitz struggles to reverse—namely, the process that carried him to Wales and his mother to the camps. Though railway station waiting rooms serve as a kind of transition point between the private and public—passengers bid goodbye to their loved ones and trade their private personas for those of a public traveler, or reunite with those who know them personally after being in the company of strangers—the initial meeting of Austerlitz and the narrator displaces these types of reunions and departures. Their first conversation occurs when the narrator asks Austerlitz a "question about his obvious interest in the waiting room," and he, in turn, "answered at once, without the slightest hesitation" but did not "tell me very much about his origins and his own life" (7-8). In this early phase of the novel, before the "I" of Austerlitz's retelling has, for the most part, displaced the

"I" of the narrator's perspective, before the two have come together to fulfill the kind of joint function that gives rise to the content of the novel, Austerlitz gives some indication, in chronological terms, of why he is unable to narrate his own life, and needs the narrator to do so. Ostensibly discussing a painting, Austerlitz shares his belief that little accidents and missteps were "always happening over and over again, and nothing and no one could ever remedy it" (14). If Austerlitz understands the condition of his life to be one of "accidents," constantly recurring and repeating themselves in a kind of temporal loop, rather than moving forward with any kind of progressive narrative logic, it explains why he needs the narrator to give structure to Austerlitz's expansive descriptions of various scenes and feelings that occur across places and times.

The narrator implicitly contrasts Austerlitz's stalled and repetitive notion of time with the systematic, progressive time produced by and in the railway station. Of the clock that serves as the centerpiece of Antwerp Station, where the men meet, he claims that its presence indicates that "Time…represented by the hands and dial of the clock, reigns supreme" as the "governor of a new omnipotence" (12). The authoritative nature of this installation means that "movements of all the travelers could be surveyed from the central position occupied by the clock… conversely all travelers had to look up at the clock and were obliged to adjust their activities to its demands" (12). If the sovereign power to divide, measure, and order chronological time is the prerequisite to the production of historical time, as Austerlitz's analysis of the clock's symbolic purpose

suggests, it is also the prerequisite for a genre like the *bildungsroman* to produce a specific type of subject. Such a subject, paradoxically, becomes fully realized as an individual at the same time that he accepts the teleologies of development and progress suggested by the political philosophy of the state. The placement of the clock in the center of the station only draws attention to the way that it, in its consistency and predictability, fails to capture the temporality of Austerlitz's story and by extension, that of the novel itself, which cannot be regulated or measured by such instruments.

Just as Sebald shows that the ambitions of pre-war Europe to produce time according to a linear notion of progress were nothing more than smoke and mirrors, Austerlitz's fascination with bourgeois architecture also shows that the government cannot control space in any lasting capacity. Even grand architectural testaments to capitalist power such as the Palace of Justice or military fortresses that illustrate a "compulsive sense of order and the tendency towards monumentalism" are marked by their paradoxical co-existence in two different registers of time (33). Austerlitz notes their power to provoke in onlookers "a kind of wonder which in itself is a form of dawning horror, for somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins" (19). Such structures appear as through a prism, alternately whole or destroyed in the same instant depending on the particular perspective of the onlooker. Even in its time of glory, bourgeois architecture was already

in a process of decay that was repurposing its component parts one at a time. Rather than asserting the panoptic view of Empire that arranges both time and space around it, the clock within the train station—along with Austerlitz's detailed account of it, complete with architectural drawings—challenges the narrative temporality of the classical *bildungsroman* that renders the life of an individual as an allegory of progress. At the very place where he crosses paths with Austerlitz, the narrator situates these monuments to state control of time and space within a network that is perpetually dispersing groups of people and their things in a process that makes new configurations of them.

Austerlitz demonstrates a sensitivity to these pulsations of the everyday, a sense that everything he encounters is "both familiar and utterly alien" (212). In addition to the Freudian uncanny, Austerlitz's relation to his material environment evokes Giorgio Agamben's definition of what it means to be contemporary, based on Agamben's reading of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*: "a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it" ("*What is an Apparatus*?" 41). According to Agamben's argument, to be contemporary one must be

> with respect to the present, in a disconnection and out-of-jointness. Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands… precisely

> through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time. ("*What is an Apparatus?*" 40)

Austerlitz's relation to his time is one that vacillates between the present of his split identity and a past that would have shaped and enabled his biography in a very different way, were it not for the violence and displacement caused by German conquest. In reference to what state power does to individual memory, Sebald points out elsewhere that realizing that being "bound…to the nation that has done harm to you" puts one in a "particularly devastating form of double bind" (*the emergence of memory* 47). True to this formulation, Austerlitz's journey back through England, France, Germany, and the Czech Republic—though intended to fill in the missing pieces of *bildung* that would restore his original identity— only brings him into repeated proximity with the horrors of Nazi violence and "so menacing a void" as the recognition of his own lack of cultural, national, or kinship ties (114).

As Austerlitz navigates through the landscapes of his lost past, they appear "familiar and utterly alien" precisely because he is bringing a simultaneously retrospective and cotemporaneous perspective to these encounters, which sees the potential wholeness as well as the partial realization of each component of his past (212). This is perhaps why his French companion describes him "a machine working by some unknown mechanism" (215). This mechanism, a result of his split nature, allows him to access the contemporary through two different partial or obscured perspectives: one that

has been displaced and artificially constructed in Wales, and one that should have been but was never experienced. The extreme bouts of depression that plague Austerlitz as he attempts to recompose himself can be attributed to the fact that he fails at every turn to unify these twin perspectives and alternative personal histories. "It was as if an illness that had been latent in me for a long time were (sic) now threatening to erupt," he recalls, "as if some soul-destroying and inexorable force had fastened upon me and would gradually paralyze my entire system. I already felt in my head the dreadful torpor that heralds disintegration of the personality" (123). The "illness… latent… for a long time" suggests that this moment does not capture the dissolution of an already-existing subject so much as the revelation that it never really existed at all, torn between two biographies and two possibilities for subjecthood, neither of which are ever realized. Even more tellingly, Austerlitz details "the almost total paralysis of my linguistic faculties…my endless nocturnal peregrinations through London, and the hallucinations which plagued me with increasing frequency up to the point of my nervous breakdown in the summer of 1992" (140).[77] The inability of one narrative thread to incorporate the other periodically stalls out the narrative, bringing the protagonist to a standstill that he

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[77] The symptoms of this realization are described in strikingly similar terms to the way that Sebald's narrator articulates the post-traumatic breakdown that opens *The Rings of Saturn*. Sebald's narrator in *Rings* begins his own walking tour of Suffolk similarly "in August 1992, when the dog days were drawing to an end" and notes that "a year to the day after I began my tour, I was taken into hospital in a state of almost total immobility" (3). The near simultaneity of these experiences, and the manner in which their symptoms mirror one another, suggests that despite the different causes of such breakdowns, there is something fundamentally traumatic about existence in Sebald's worlds.

describes in Agambenian language as one of "disjunction, of having no ground beneath my feet" (109). This unstable ground suggests the precarity of an existence that seeks resolution and self-discovery through what amounts to a series of contingencies. Austerlitz is guided and redirected by objects and places that resonate with elements of his self that remain foreign and unknown even to him. As a result, it locates him in an eternal present whose elements come from nowhere in particular and imply no coherent teleology, but are endlessly reshuffled and defamiliarized. Gazing at a painted river on a circular lampshade, he wonders "what…might be the significance of the river never rising from any source, never flowing out into any sea but always back into itself" and links this arrangement to a "timeless" existence in which everything was already "perpetuated but forever just occurring" (196-97). This model of time exists in an epiphenomental relation to the circular and repetitive temporality of the novel itself, in which the past is repeatedly re-summoned and re-encountered as if for the first time.

Because he has undergone the doubled trauma of first losing his original identity and then the promise of a recovered personhood, Austerlitz is uniquely positioned to glimpse another future. As the identity he hopes to recover continues to elude him, Austerlitz inadvertently establishes a very different order of social relations. At those points in the novel when Austerlitz feels a resonance with unknown part of himself and his story, he experiences a fleeting kind of fulfillment through intimations of belonging that are sensory, rather than factual, in nature. One of the most notable examples of this

kind of experience occurs while he is browsing in an antiquarian bookshop he visits regularly. "It was quiet in the shop except for soft voices coming from the little radio," he recalls (141). These voices

> …which at first I could hardly make out but which soon became almost too distinct, cast such a spell over me that I… stood there as still as if on no account must I let a single syllable escape me. I was listening to two women talking to each other about the summer of 1939, when they were children and had been sent to England on a special transport… only then did I know beyond any doubt that these fragments of memory were part of my own life as well. (141)

Austerlitz does not know the women and never comes face-to-face with them; their connection retains a kind of public distance rather than taking on the kind of private quality that would situate them as fully formed individuals in relation to one another, rather than anonymous bodies of the same collective. Nevertheless, when their accounts reach out from the airwaves, they sync up with something in Austerlitz's consciousness that has been inaccessible to himself, thus implicating him not just in their narrative, but as part of the multiplicity he forms with them in that moment. Their lives, like his have been broken off from one form of personal history and recomposed as the disjointed figure of Agamben's "contemporary." Though strangers and destined to remain so, they share the same void, or lack of memory. Like him, they are carriers of the partial and dispersed archive that his story unfolds. Like them, he is animated by the gaps in that

archive; the resonance of their voices, for Austerlitz, represents the lost populations of which he should or could have been a part.

This deliberate and permanent hole in the archive of early twentieth-century world history provides the center around which the relationship of Austerlitz and the narrator is organized. Sitting in the waiting room of Antwerp Station, both men are virtual captives in a tableau that collapses the distinction between fact and fiction as well as between past and present. The narrator notes how closely the railway passengers around him resemble captive animals in a zoo he has just visited, as if "they were the last members of a…race which had perished or had been expelled from its homeland and that because they alone survived they wore the same sorrowful expression as the creatures in the zoo" (7).[78] Austerlitz recounts a separate instance in the waiting room at Liverpool Street Station in which the partially-remembered, partially-projected image of himself as a child just off the Kindertransport manifests before him as a kind of apparition, marked most keenly by "a sense of…sorrow" (137). The waiting room of a railway station, itself already a mechanism designed to link together distant people and places, connects the two men who see the way that it breaks apart boundaries and frees

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[78] The narrator's comparison of the train station waiting room to the Nocturama also connects to Austerlitz's experience of the Paris zoo, where his companion Marie points out that "captive animals and we ourselves, their human counterparts, view one another *à travers une brèche d'incompréhension*" (264). The inability for humans and animals, two qualitatively different types of populations, to understand one another recalls the narrator's comparison of his fellow travelers to animals in the zoo he has just visited. Of all these beings, Austerlitz is the one to whom the narrator is drawn, and the two instinctively seem to understand one another. The fact that incomprehension does not separate the two men suggests that they are, in fact, part of the same population.

lost memories. But even though they may seem to form the most personal and private of relationships—as Austerlitz shares traumatic details of his past not even available to himself until quite recently—in fact they enact a kind of public connection. As Austerlitz shares the details of his journey, it becomes a public narrative, in fact only reaching the reader in a form mediated by the narrator and his use of free indirect discourse. More importantly, however, as *Austerlitz* progresses and deviates from its initial identification with the *bildungsroman*, the narrative that tacitly promised to construct its protagonist as an individual instead maps the temporary populations[79] that Austerlitz's journeys catalyze.

If Sebald's novel were to stay true to the logic of the *bildungsroman*, we could expect the moment in which Austerlitz literally encounters himself as a child—at the point when he believes his autonomous individualism to have ruptured—to function as a climactic moment of self-recognition. On the contrary, when he sees a photograph of himself taken only months before being sent to England, he "could not recollect myself in the part… I examined every detail under a magnifying glass without once finding the slightest clue. And in doing so I always felt the piercing, inquiring gaze of the… boy

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[79] I use the word "population" to describe this collective formation without intending to suggest the Foucauldian and biopolitical valences of the word that are generally ascribed to it, particularly within the context of the contemporary novel. Instead, I acknowledge that a "population," unlike, for example, a "community," relies on a kind of structural likeness or the possibility for a kind of exchange along lines of biological similarity. A population, in my use of the term, does not imply the formation of durable personal ties between individuals; on the contrary, populations are provisional and temporary public formations that eclipse and negate the very form of the individual.

who had come to demand his dues" (184). Unable to identify the boy in the photograph with the man who holds it, Austerlitz discovers that the story of his derailed *bildung* began with the primary rupture that made him someone else. The next day at yet another railway station, he recalls feeling "as if I were not there at all… I could not imagine who or what I was" (185).

Though unable to connect his origins in Prague with the personal history that began with his evacuation from that city, Austerlitz does feel the spark of recognition denied to him by the photograph when in proximity to people and things that are similarly detached from their organic and communal origins. Walking in the Cimetière de Montparnasse, he comes upon

> gravestones erected in a vaguely segregated part in memory of members of the Woelfflin, Wormser, Mayerbeer, Ginsberg, Franck, and many other Jewish families, and I felt as if, despite knowing nothing of my origins for so long, I had lingered among them before, or as if they were still accompanying me. (258)

Confronted with a space commemorating a population whose lives remain totally inaccessible to him, Austerlitz nevertheless feels somehow connected to that space marked with Jewish names. What he feels is the same vague attraction that he did on hearing the voices of the women on the radio. This not a feeling that comes from a nostalgic attempt at reattachment to a lost past but rather the presentiment of a connection he is yet to establish with those who have also been involuntarily cut off

from their origins. In this population, we nevertheless glimpse the possibility of an afterlife, as the discovery of its loss creates a still implicit connection among those who carry it within them. This shift in perspective defines a project for the contemporary *bildungsroman* that operates counter to the formulation of a coherent individual. *Austerlitz* situates its protagonist as one among countless pieces of debris composing the field of rubble that postwar Europe is intent on paving over, thereby relegating the collateral damage of this modernization process to the stagnant spaces of commemoration and personal depression. But in more expansive, still-living instantiations of the population represented by the women's voices on the radio, we might be able to understand the novel's protagonist not as the once-unified object that begged to be put back together, but as only a single piece of the debris that constitutes a larger field of rubble. The question implicit in this co-transformation of modernity and the novel form itself is what shape such ruined protagonists might take, were they to arise from an emergent neo-liberal modernity in ways that do not fight against its characteristic dispersal and reconstruction in the name of progress, but exemplify it.

3.5 Style Beyond the Bourgeois Novel

As a boy at boarding school in the Welsh countryside, Austerlitz describes the way that his early encounters with a variety of literature prepared him for the kind of interconnected reality he comes to fully experience as an adult. "I read everything in the school library, which contained an entirely arbitrary selection of works," he remembers,

> works on geography and history, travel writings, novels, biographies—and sat up until late in the evening over reference books and atlases. My mind thus gradually created a kind of ideal landscape in which the Arabian desert, the realm of the Aztecs, the continent of Antarctica, the snow-covered Alps, the North-West Passage, the river Congo, and the Crimean peninsula formed a single panorama, populated by all the figures proper to those places. As I could move into that world at any time I liked… I never fell into… depression. (61)

Apart from the way that this ability to perceive a networked array of places collapsed into a single unending present links him to Sebald's other protagonists, the genres that he mentions read like a list of those that connect in constantly shifting ways to produce the open-ended novelistic style of his works. The types of writing, therefore, that create the particular world of Sebald's works are contemporary in their ability to acknowledge and borrow from narratives modes just as they decontextualize, disempower, and link them to other contexts in unpredictable fashion. Even as Sebald makes his readers rethink the individual modes of, for example, travel writing and biography, he also uses the juxtaposition of these component styles to render the overarching style of the novel different and unfamiliar.

The style of Sebald's prose remains observational and understated even as it covers an unthinkably wide range of topics with radically different affective valences. Unfolding through a series of winding sentences, with minutely rendered description

standing in for plot-based action, Sebald uses his narrators as living camera lenses who notice and chronicle the world around them. In an essay entitled "Between History and Natural History," a phrase which could easily be appended as a subtitle to both *The Rings of Saturn* and *Austerlitz*, Sebald celebrates the German writer Hans Erich Nossack for his use of the

> prosaic genre of the report, the documentary account… to make room for the historical contingency that breaks the mold of the culture of the novel… If familiarity with social and cultural circumstances is the crucial prerequisite for both writing and reading novels, then the attitude of an agency that simply presents a report conveys a sense of reality that appears foreign. (*Campo Santo* 77)

In bringing to life such "reports" and making them the substance of the novel, Sebald suggests, one renders the novel itself a defamiliarized literary object, which does not depend upon nor convey the nature of social and political life in recognizable terms. Noting as he does the way that the "novel form…owes its allegiance to bourgeois concepts," Sebald specifically argues that "an attempt to write a literary account of collective catastrophes…if it is to claim validity, must break out" of that form (*Campo Santo* 84). For him, this is a matter of truth: the personal pretensions and feelings of a narrator who is intimately implicated in such a transformational event—and thus cannot see it from a defamiliarized and unfinalized perspective—interfere with the accurate representation of that event (81-82). In considering the kind of narrator who is necessary

to represent the cycles of destruction that constitute capitalist and neo-liberal histories, Sebald brings up a work by Nossack, "Account of Mankind by a Strange Creature," and points out that Nossack "ascribes to the narrator the 'strangeness' in the title" (*Campo Santo* 77). However, he also asks

> whether the reason for the strangeness is not a mutation in mankind that makes the author an anachronistic figure. The wide distance between the subject and the object of the narrative process implies something like the perspective of natural history, in which destruction and the tentative forms of new life that it generates act like biological experiments in which the species is concerned 'to break its mold and abjure the name of man.' (77-78).

Identifying a potential counterforce to modernization, Sebald turns away from the focus on war and its aftermath that runs throughout both *The Rings of Saturn* and *Austerlitz*. Instead, the "tentative forms of new life" to which he alludes suggests something like the evolution of a new form of protagonist in the contemporary global novel that finds its early expression in his works. If this new species is defined by any positive but indefinite sense of possibility at this early stage, this possibility suggests that the forgotten and displaced people, who form collective populations on no basis other than that shared displacement, may be capable of wielding a new kind of resistance to a new form of neo-liberal power.

4. Collateral Damage as the Neo-Liberal Norm

4.1 City of Flows

The political and economic logic that shifts the scene of action in W.G. Sebald's novels from the pastoral debris of the English coast to the great cities of Europe simultaneously exposes global flows of information, places, things, and affect that move freely across borders and must subsume difference in order to continue uninterrupted economic growth. Such movement is facilitated by global citizen-consumers, a population severed from anything resembling lasting personal relationships, or indeed from emotional ties of any kind. These figures map out the city as the point at which these various flows converge and expel their goods, people, and information, all of which will be broken up, reassembled, and moved along various pathways to other sites. These agents establish a fiction of the world as an intricate network of invisible flows that become visible as they converge, mutually transform one another through exchange, and reassemble. We might understand this interplay as the logic of movement that one experiences in a travel hub such as an international airport, in the expanding and increasingly heterogeneous array of things and services for sale via the online retailer Amazon, or in the crowded streets of a global city. This seemingly magical fluidity with which people, things, and information can be routed and re-routed anywhere at a moment's notice gives the citizen-consumer a rapidly expanding set of

choices. But the other side to this paradigm is that if goods and information can be effortlessly routed through space, their progress along that route can also be tracked. The same is true of the humans who believe themselves to be presented with the opportunity to make more choices among more options than ever before. In reality, the surveillance built into these systems enables its architects to track, predict, limit, and choreograph the next movements and the future choices of the traveler, the consumer, or even the city pedestrian.[80] The neo-liberal market, in other words, has made the process of gathering inhuman collations of information on our preferences, impulses, and personal habits a matter of scientific efficiency. This information can itself be bought and sold. It constitutes the most valuable, though also relatively invisible, commodity of the global marketplace.

Writing about the response to the 2008 global financial collapse, Oosterlynck and Gonzàlez contend that "the crisis is equally taken as a given and 'naturalized' as a source of creativity and innovation in urban development and governance" (1079). Neo-liberalism understands a major economic crisis as an opportunity to engineer rather than restore a given neighborhood for purposes of the real estate market and as a means of

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[80] A classic example of this logic would be the tendency for online retailers, represented by Amazon.com, to "recommend" other products in which you might be interested based on your browsing or purchasing history. Spending any time at all browsing for a new piece of furniture will yield insistent pop-up suggestions and conveniently direct links to click that will bring the consumer to similar objects, both within the same website and on other completely unrelated web pages. The speed and ease with which one such search can yield infinite omniscient nudges toward the same sphere of consumer goods suggests that the purchase and transmission of information is so central to the neo-liberal economy that it has become both fully automated and instantaneous.

controlling who lives there and how. It understands the ruins of earlier iterations of political sovereignty and capitalism—as well as the stagnant spaces they ignored—as sites that can be mined for resources or reconstructed for citizen-consumers. Catastrophe and destruction give this system the opportunity to take up the fantasy of world-building power that unfolds in and through novels. During the postwar period, as Hardt and Negri's *Empire* explains, a coalition of governments under the leadership of the United States seized the opportunity to materialize political and economic world-building projects, representing a "new imperial form of sovereignty," that novels were simultaneously developing techniques to expose and renounce (xiii-xiv). My first two chapters demonstrated how late twentieth-century novels by Coetzee and Sebald might be read as engaging in precisely this kind of critique. *Austerlitz*, for example, exposes the ways that its protagonist's personal history was scattered first by the Nazi infrastructure and then displaced again by an international rebuilding project that transformed the rubble of World War II into an emergent neo-liberal modernity. This process simultaneously turned many of the missing pieces of Austerlitz's former life into commodities for sale in junk shops across Europe (195-96). The forces of this new global order reconceptualized what had been a patchwork of private and public property overseen by an earlier generation of infrastructure from the "architectural style of the capitalist era" as, instead, a smooth set of abstract spaces that promoted the free flow of international goods, people, and capital. In overwriting past spaces and routes in order

to facilitate and accelerate this flow, the new neoliberal order made it impossible for Austerlitz to assemble, *post facto*, a bildungsroman, by retracing the path of his displacement back to his natal home in prewar Europe. In this way, Austerlitz represents the type of global citizen who cannot be so easily distributed within and choreographed into the new flows of neo-liberalism; he struggles to swim upstream rather than submit to its arbitrary currents. As a result, he feels increasingly disconnected and dispirited rather than invigorated by his immersion in this rebuilt reality. Austerlitz's attempt to recover a private life that has been lost and rendered inaccessible stands in contrast to the way that the ideal neo-liberal citizen-consumer's lack of personal attachments actually facilitates his smooth integration into public flows of information.

As Alissa G. Karl explains, definitions of neo-liberalism are themselves liable to re-appropriation insofar as they depend upon "a distinct tension between diffusion and totalisation that often plays out in corporeal terms. It has become commonplace to describe neoliberalism not as a comprehensive political or economic agenda or ideology, but as a series of tendencies and strategies" (Karl 340). The collaboration of these two opposing tendencies—diffusion and totalization—account for the development of certain cities into centers of a new geopolitical order facilitated by the "increased mobilisation of capital under global economic flows" (Kaethler et. al 176). The "divisions between public and private, state and society, are increasingly difficult to determine" in

the neo-liberal city, since "shifts in the organisation of production" are "followed by corresponding shifts in the organisation of society" (Kaethler et. al 177). These shifts produce a mobile population that facilitates and follows dispersals of the means of production into previously neglected pockets in the new world order. As one hub among many, the city may contract and expand but the process of urbanization is virtually unlimited. It is simultaneously global and local in nature, an essential part of the machinery of the new global order and an aesthetic expression of its success.

Wendy Brown describes neo-liberalism as a fundamentally "constructivist project" in that it does not "presume the ontological givenness of a thoroughgoing economic rationality for all domains of society but rather takes as its task the development, dissemination, and institutionalization of such a rationality" (40). Seeing neo-liberalism as a continuously unfolding process, even while at any point it appears to represent a stable and controlled state of affairs, is a necessary step toward understanding how the individual is implicated in this process. Neo-liberalism, as Brown explains it,

> figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care'—the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. In making the individual fully responsible for her- or himself, neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action…The model neoliberal citizen is one who strategizes for her- or himself among various social, political, and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or

> organize these options…The body politic ceases to be a body but is rather a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers. (42)

Interestingly, Brown equates the transition from the sovereign power of classical liberalism to the economic power of neo-liberalism with a loss of collective possibility. If, as she says, the body politic is reduced to a series of detached individuals, then we might assume that these figures would have to be devoid of the "inner world" of the type of individual whose formulation was at the core of the realist novel. Unable to form emotional connections of any kind, the neo-liberal protagonist is not defined by the existence of any subjective inner life but rather by his or her ability to adhere to a set of depersonalized standards required of an agent of late-stage capitalism. This individual must, as Brown says, be defined by a purely public existence without becoming "public-minded" (Brown 41). His or her choices are consequently limited and illusory in nature.

As neo-liberal city dwellers, these individuals imagine themselves determinants of the routes they travel. Whether they travel by public transit, private jets, walking, or by way of electronic media exchanges, however, they must travel along pre-determined routes. Neo-liberal city dwellers are shaped by the tension between this highly regulated mode of existence and the fiction of freedom that powers their movements. Joshua Newman and Rachel Shields explain how this paradox works on a corporeal level:

> If we concede that the body is always already placed (in spatial and temporal ways) within and against the dominant rhythms of power, then we might also

> surmise that on most days and in most places, the body—by way of banal *conductions of its conduct*—is turned against itself as it moves in cadence with the geographies that render it docile; it becomes complicit in its own spatiotemporal subjectification. It is the body's propensity toward transformation in space-time that enables the concert of individuals and the built environment (particularly in the form of cities) as well as the subjugation of itself to the city's attendant order. (521)

As the unacknowledged basis for this model for the spatial regulation of bodies, Foucault's concept of *dispositif*, as articulated by Deleuze, can clarify just how a space divided by the architecture and animated by the infrastructure of neo-liberalism operates almost invisibly to persuade its inhabitants to "follow directions, trace processes that are always out of balance, that sometimes move closer together and sometimes farther away" (*Two Regimes* 338). Rather than a homogenous space fueled by predictable forces and operating according to consistent rules (like that of Levittown, Pennsylvania), the neo-liberal city is designed to negotiate among various forces and resistances by modulating, in Foucault's words,

> precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogenous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking

> a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field. (*Power/Knowledge* 194-95).

Consider, for example, the way a means of public transportation may be tied to or made to deviate from establish routes that circulate city dwellers through certain points of aggregation. Buses break down and trains may unexpectedly bypass certain stops and run express. The means by which the city produces masses of individuals, intended to maximize their responsiveness to new flows of production, is also necessarily the means of their dispersal. When a train makes its usual stops and deposits the usual individuals at their places of work or takes them shopping, it functions as would the "programme of an institution." But should that train unexpectedly skip between stops, causing workers to miss hours of labor and rerouting would-be shoppers to the wrong neighborhoods, it will undermine the neo-liberal agenda that it was designed to carry out.

The train emerged as a device in a plot of displacement and was itself displaced as a symbol of imperial order in *Austerlitz*. The railway lines that forcibly re-distributed millions of people to ghettoes and camps reconnect the novel's protagonist to a past lost in transit between London and Prague, just as they move commuters between sites of production and consumption in the post-war period. Austerlitz must place himself within these circuits in order to see how they emptied vulnerable European communities of their populations, first by sending children to safety abroad and then, under Nazi control, by carrying those who remained to the camps. Although

contemporary economic strategies purport to create a continuous horizontal plane on which the free market can reach its fullest expression, this system of circulation creates anything but a level playing field. The distribution of goods, people, and information enabled by transit systems like the railway funnels disproportionate amounts of wealth to some areas while others are mined for resources and drained of their productive potential. The train provides a microcosmic model of the globalized arterial system that feeds some locations and starves others. Instead of taking up its utopian promise to rehabilitate the ruins of earlier capitalist eras and sovereign destruction, then, neo-liberalism actually establishes patterns designed to distribute inequities. Projects of gentrification spreading through and beyond individual cities rely on precisely this logic; they seize on spaces that have been ignored or denied the resources required to attract the new citizen-consumer and redesign the patterns of living to drive up the cost of real estate. The neo-liberal ability to reclaim and "save" spaces that it has specifically designed to be deprived is a direct expression of its marketing impulse. By framing industrial development as a charitable action that promises a higher standard of living, neo-liberalism "sells" the pace and tensions of late-stage capitalism as a valued commodity in their own right.

4.2 Navigating the Neo-Liberal City

If neo-liberalism draws its power from a circular logic that repurposes the very spaces it has devastated to expand and intensify the flows of resources, people, and

information, then the novel will, by contrast, draw its power from disrupting this closed system, exposing the operations of the global city, and finding ways of reoccupying certain spaces and diverting the flow of capital. Since the novel itself constitutes a commodity that circulates within these same flows of consumption and exchange, it can perhaps serve as a view from within the system that acknowledges the ways in which the capture and transmission of information that creates its form is driven by neo-liberal sensibilities. The very title of Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) reads like both an advertisement for neo-liberalism and an exposé of its insufficiencies. To promote the notion of novel-as-commodity, Cole builds a narrative by means of his protagonist's ability to appropriate the inner lives of other city dwellers for public consumption.[81] In doing so, he fashions his protagonist as the quintessential neo-liberal figure who consumes others' stories in order to produce his own.

Julius, Cole's narrator-protagonist, is a Nigerian doctor completing his medical training and living in New York. Within and beyond his professional life, he forms fundamentally impersonal relationships in order to gather others' personal stories. Julius is a psychiatrist, and so the very structure of his occupation requires that he profits from the commodification of other people's narratives. He is professionally trained to capitalize on the inner lives of those who have been damaged by the pace and

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[81] Lily Saint reads in Julius a kind of "pathological, macrophagic cosmopolitanism" that ultimately "juxtaposes the urge to connect that constitutes the global cosmopolite with an equally powerful urge to escape, elude, repress, or even ignore others' suffering as well as their narratives of suffering" (325, 327).

repeated dislocations demanded of those who are implicated in neo-liberal flows. If, following Wendy Brown's logic, neo-liberal citizen-subjects are defined by their relative "ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions," then Julius' ability to collect and monetize pieces of private identity constitutes his identity and his purpose (41). A personification of neo-liberalism in this respect, it is second nature for Julius to transform the content of stories into capital. One of his patients, "M.," indeed contemplates the possibility that his private life might be marketed for its entertainment value, a possibility that materializes in the novel. "I can imagine that my suffering amuses people," M. tells his psychiatrist, "I don't find it amusing now, but I can imagine that it seems that way to other people" (48). M., despite the fact that he is, according to Julius, "completely in the grip of…delirium," recognizes the perverse logic by which there is a demand for, and a value accorded to, his own private distress (48). Julius is all too happy to exploit the truth of this observation; we see evidence of his willingness not only in the existence of the narrative of *Open City* itself, but in moments when he exchanges these private anecdotes in public settings to gain social capital.[82]

Sitting in a park with friends, Julius is asked, "Who's the craziest person you've treated recently? I bet you get some really whacked-out ones" (201). Julius admits, in response,

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[82] Along these lines, Rebecca Clark suggests that Julius' "objective, distanced, and analytic stance towards and view of the world and the other characters that populate it" initially makes him seem to manifest himself only as a "(view)point," when in fact he is better classified as a "parasite," whose involvement with others' realities and stories proves to be unidirectional and invasive (185-86).

> I indulged them, and told them stories about my patients, about the alien visitations and government surveillance, the voices in the walls, the suspicions of family conspiracies. There is always a *fund* of humorous tales from the horror of mental illnesses, particularly in the ranks of the paranoid… the sufferers of the disease were good storytellers because they engaged in world building. (202) (emphasis added)

In referring to the collected stories of his patients as a fund, he combines the languages of finance with that of human suffering and medical diagnosis. This lends an inhumane character to the mode of his own discourse, which participates seamlessly in the neo-liberal flows that lead to commodification. Julius' juxtaposition of completely distinct genres, humor and horror, suggests that he is alert to the kinds of marketing language and product classifications that help to "sell" his patients' narratives; he makes a calculation that in this instance, for the prospective consumers assembled in his group of friends, humor will be the mode in demand. Lest we mistake his distinctly neo-liberal perspective for that of the novel, Cole has Julius voice his limitations as the narrator of a novel. "The paranoid," he points out, are perfectly suited for storytelling because of their world-building abilities. But Julius, the actual storyteller in this instant and in this novel, is not a world builder at all. Instead, he acts more like the infrastructure that manages and distributes inhabitants of the neo-liberal city into productive arrangements. By appropriating the fragments of individual stories, Julius places them into the collective

shape of a novel. In short, he organizes, but he does not create. He exchanges information that he elicits from others, but he does not share personal information of his own. For the most part, Julius expresses himself only according to variations in the frequency, tempo, and manner of this exchange. This necessarily prompts us to ask whether what we might normally consider depth or complexity of character is, in his case, the result of the incorporation of the vexed inner lives of others.

Throughout the novel, Julius' connections extend across and beyond New York City and Brussels, branching out through history and literature to assemble a population that includes cab drivers, shop owners, former professors, his patients, and other assorted interlocutors. Making such connections neither increases the extent and diversity of what might be called his personal experience nor fosters empathy with others. Julius enjoys no perceptible private life of his own, nor does he display any desire for one. Instead, he turns away from any imperative to engage seriously with the private pain of others, making every encounter into a scene of impersonal interest. As the agent of a force that extracts economic value from the personal accounts of ordinary city dwellers, Julius cannot very well cultivate an inner life that resists that process. The novel never once suggests that he has motive or capacity to disrupt, much less counter the flows of resources, people, and information. Produced by them, he is committed to reproducing them in turn. In the neo-liberal city, his very lack of interiority makes him the ideal inhabitant of the *dispositif* whose limitations he has incorporated. The elisions

and inconsistencies in Julius' narrative that make those limitations apparent also make him the ideal guide to take us through the global city.

The fact that Julius' life is devoted to collecting and distributing the personal lives of others makes him an enigma even to himself, which in turn makes him a reliably unreliable narrator. On the few occasions when Julius claims to respond emotionally to a given situation, even he is bothered by an artificiality that causes him to retract it almost immediately. With repetition, this gesture builds a suspicious reading practice into the novel's world-building process. Recalling a restaurant in Belgium where he lunched with an acquaintance, Julius claims, "I was happy to be there," but only a few sentences later, he clarifies that he "became aware of just how fleeting the sense of happiness was, and how flimsy its basis… It took so little to move the mood from one level to another, as one might push pieces on a chessboard" (142). Despite his understanding of himself as someone who takes solace and pride in "the trust…patients had in me…their hope that I could help them get better" he points out in the same instance that "I no longer spent much time thinking about patients, usually not until the next appointment, and often, when I was on rounds, I needed the chart to recall even the basics of a particular case" (44). Julius' failure to remember the details of such stories—which, in composite form, given his lack of any discernible individual personality, constitute something like his identity—begs the question of whether the process of narrating the neo-liberal city costs Julius his capacity for personal memory. If so, then what qualities does he offer in

place of a surprising lack of the prodigious memory one would ordinarily expect from the kind of figure who functions as a repository of tales of the city?

Julius' unflappable impersonality and his ability to process and store what might be, for others, affectively taxing encounters, facilitates his smooth continued movement throughout the urban space of the novel. Never arrested in nor diverted from his own traveling voyeurism by the burden of emotions, Julius has cultivated techniques that allow him to represent himself in socially appealing ways even while freeing himself of the affective demands and investments that real social relationships would entail. When visiting a well-liked college professor, ninety years old and in failing health, Julius feels proud of his ability to fake a private connection while maintaining a consistent distance from the encounter. While reading a newspaper to Professor Saito and discussing a wide variety of topics, Julius confesses, that although he "expressed…delight in [the Professor's] ramblings,"

> as I read out stories about satellite radio and about civil unions in New Jersey, I became like one who was no longer there… When Professor Saito asked me not to stop at the second paragraph but to read the civil unions story all the way to the end, I did so, fully understanding the printed words but without engaging with them. Afterward, we discussed the story, and that, too, I did at a certain distance. It was a kind of party trick, to continue a conversation of this kind and remain the whole while perfectly distracted. (171)

He knows that his professor has "cared for a long-term partner, a man who had later died" (172). But that personal dimension of his professor's story has come to him by way of the mediated public mode of the newspaper and magazines.[83] Julius had previously learned of Saito's relationship

> not through a conversation with him, but from a biographical profile…when I did find out, there had been no reason to bring it up in conversation. But at no time did I have the impression that Professor Saito was trying to avoid talking about his sexuality… I wish I had asked what his late partner's name was. He would have told me…But in spite of myself, unable to be fully present to our conversation, I could not lead it in this new direction. (172)

The fact that Julius proves to be so ineffective at inferring the feelings that motivate certain forms of behavior calls his diagnostic acumen into question. First, he describes his detachment as a kind of intentional "party trick" but then suggests that the missed opportunity to ask Saito about his private life occurred "in spite of [himself]" because he was "unable" to do so. He vacillates between assigning himself the agency to reject private life and indicating an inherent limitation that prevents him from existing as a

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[83] It is on this basis that I agree with Lily Saint's reading that Julius's "encounters with people in the novel" serve as evidence against "those theories that claim that intimacy with alterity—either in person *or* through reading—can be treated as equivalents that instantiate an ethical relation" (327). Instead, his closed-off detachment is rendered even more starkly by the contrasting ways in which he displays an orientation toward noticing those people, places, and things, that demand a kind of affective investment; paradoxically, we can note the manner in which Julius "so agilely lunges toward and then away from endless forms of social and historical horror" (Saint 329).

part of it. Whether the cause lies in himself or in his environment is not at issue; the point is how he feels, namely, "anonymous to myself, lost in the sensation that the world existed but I was no longer part of it" (130). It is precisely this ability to be outside the world itself that allows Julius the perspective to translate his observations into the basis for commodified modes of exchange. He remains uninhibited by any notion of personal allegiance that might give him a stake in the fates of others and implicate him back in "the world" of their stories.

This detachment characterizes Julius' personal and professional relationships alike, as demonstrated by the way he responds to the patient who occupies the most space in his narrative. V. is a professor afflicted by depression brought on by her research on the history of northeastern Native Americans and European settlers during the seventeenth century (26). Despite the professional objectivity required of her work, "with all the scholarly apparatus and with much of the emotional distance typical of an academic study," Julius explains, even her "patient recounting of these crimes" affects her on "a profound and personal level" (26-27). By carrying the burden of the emotions that Julius does not feel, V. represents a narrative foil to Julius in Cole's novel. Public information presents itself to V. as private encounters that demand a kind of intimate reckoning, while Julius is focused on collecting, repackaging, and transmitting information without any affective implications or apparent difficulties. The difference between the two is amplified by considering their respective abilities to relay the

collateral damage of economic "progress" that would otherwise be lost from human memory. For V., the persecution and displacement of entire populations of Native Americans is "not in the past, it is still with us today; at least, it's still with me" (27). Julius, by contrast, brings up past tragedies to use in casual low-stakes exchanges of anecdotes. Apart from the time he spends extracting such stories from his suffering patients, these exchanges comprise the entirety of his social relationships. Although Julius' present-day encounters seem to activate the automatic retrieval of what were once highly charged experiences, this dispassionate record of information is his only means of connection to them.

One such experience, we learn briefly in passing, occurred when Julius was a child, being ferried to school by his driver. Their vehicle struck and killed a young girl "in a poor neighborhood" in Nigeria (225).[84] "I didn't think about the little girl later that day, or the day afterward, or at any time at all afterward," Julius recalls coolly, "I didn't talk about her to my parents or to anyone else… it was as though the little girl in the

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[84] While the novel clearly establishes Julius as an affluent cosmopolitan subject of German and Nigerian heritage, who is both economically and culturally confident enough to situate himself in a range of spaces throughout the globe, it often elides opportunities to consider his status as a non-white immigrant in America. When V. discusses what she perceives as the inherited trauma of belonging to a group that suffered exploitation and death in the United States, Julius displays no echo of awareness that would signal the manner in which his national forebears were forced into American slavery. In fact, when confronted with the remnants of a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century African burial ground in the middle of Manhattan, Julius finds it hard "to truly believe that these people, with the difficult lives they were forced to live, were truly people, complex in all their dimensions as we are" (221-22). In other words, he reacts to the evidence of the way that a group to which he belongs has been oppressed with no more personal investment than he does to the recollection of the dead Nigerian girl, for whom he bears partial responsibility.

pale green school uniform, dead on a cool morning…was something I had dreamed about, or heard in a telling by someone else" (226). Where V.'s relation to Native Americans who died three centuries ago is so persistently all-consuming as to prevent her from functioning in a present neo-liberal reality. Julius, can navigate seamlessly through the world unimpeded by the difficulties that an empathetic individual would confront. More like a computer program than a subject with interiority, Julius stores and presents the event to readers free of the emotional entailments that would mark it, from his perspective, as qualitatively different from any of the numerous vignettes through which his narrative proceeds.[85]

Julius' mode of engagement with other people ultimately determines V.'s fate. Away for several weeks in Brussels, Julius checks in by phone at the hospital to take care of business, which includes ordering a change in V's prescriptions. When informed that "V. had wanted to know how I could be reached," he told the nurse, "I can't be reached…have her call Dr. Kim, the resident covering for me" (102). Having experienced the "vigor of ticking things off my list," Julius proceeds about his day (102). Despite his claim that V. occupies his attention beyond their appointments, she is no different from

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[85] Julius actually functions as the kind of human incarnation of Amazon.com when he sends a Belgian acquaintance named Farouq a book that his inner algorithm decides would appeal to him. "The memory of my conversations with him," Julius asserts, "had convinced me to send him Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism*" (186). The fact that Julius not only appears as a mechanism that predicts literary-consumer tastes and then distributes products accordingly, but that he sends along a work explicitly concerned with the nature of transnational flows and connections, is a comically good indicator of the ways that he is formed and driven by neo-liberal logic.

his other patients in that once out of sight, she is out of mind. It comes as no surprise, then, that while watching a performance of Chinese music and dance back in New York, Julius drops the remark that "*The Times* had said, in the obituary I read that day, that V. wrote of atrocity without flinching. They might have said, without flinching visibly, for it had all affected her far more deeply than anyone's ability to guess" (165). The manner in which the news of V.'s death flits across Julius' radar, only to be disrupted by unrelated internal musings and observations of external stimuli, seems downright sociopathic. This jarring discrepancy between the narrator's response (or lack thereof) to the information he relays and the socialized response of the typical reader, however, is exactly how the novel warns that it would be a mistake to think that a recognizably human being is engineering this narrative. Indeed, Julius' impulse to tell a man reading in the park "all about V.'s life, the depth of her work, her tragic death," can be understood as an attempt to compete for an audience's attention against the account in the *Times*. (166).[86] Driven exclusively by the urge to collect and peddle information that will attract a community of isolated listeners and readers, Julius recognizes that he can add the private details of suffering and madness capable of giving mass appeal and

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[86] This dispassionate and objective perspective echoes the "prosaic genre of the report" that Sebald places in contrast to the novel form. In imagining his response to V.'s death in terms of this mode, and revealing it within his text through the mediated form of an obituary, Julius "conveys a sense of reality that appears foreign" (*Campo Santo* 77). In contrast to Sebald's methodology, however, this act of defamiliarization does not provide room for the realization of "historical contingency" that makes us understand the range of possibilities and connections that could be, rather than our limited understanding of what has been.

affective depth to an otherwise pro forma obituary, broadening its possible audience beyond private acquaintances to any and all potential consumers. Indeed, it is this form of personal life that his readers are interested in purchasing.

Although he markets himself as a psychiatrist, Julius' professional access to patients, contrary to what they assume, offers countless readers the opportunity to participate vicariously in the turbulent inner lives of suffering people. The novel never provides a bit of evidence to suggest that he performs any kind of analysis or effective therapeutic interventions. In the way that he briefly discusses Freud, moreover, Julius explains how his own methodology counters the stated logic and purpose of psychoanalysis. "I read Freud only for literary truths," he avers, "…not as a professional seeking professional insight, but as I would read a novel or poem" (208). Freud's case studies are, for Julius, literary vignettes rather than records of therapeutic treatment. By extension, the patients depicted in Freud's accounts are not people to Julius, but literary characters whose aberrant private experiences might well appeal to a wide range of readers beyond the psychoanalytic community. It is for this reason that so many of the case studies observe the formal logic of literary genres, in particular, that of the Gothic.[87] In the account of Freud's Wolf Man, for example, the patient's origins are traced back to

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[87] The literary, according to Freud's own acknowledgment, serves as a better model for the uncanny than psychoanalysis does in some ways. He invokes E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "The Sand Man" to point out that "the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation," creating a kind of meta-fictional suspiciousness and hesitance that only exacerbates the affect of the story itself (1919).

a childhood played out between two grand and remote estates where he served, for his peasant nurse, as "a substitute for a son of her own who had died young," thereby making him the eerie double of a ghost child (*An Infantile Neurosis* 14). This same nurse was "repeatedly called…a witch" by another governess, and, as if possessed, the child experienced uncontrollable and inexplicable fits during which he "flew into a rage and screamed like a savage" (*An Infantile Neurosis* 15). While this personal history brings to light the formative experiences that (mis)shaped the patient's sense of self, it also provides a horror story, intended to produce specific and calculated sensations in readers by employing many of the same techniques that overtake the narrative plot of a work like Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. No matter how he may have existed as an individual, the Wolf Man is now first and foremost a literary figure, and only secondarily a means of understanding the causes and treatments of a particular set of neurotic symptoms.

What Freud accomplishes by turning patients into literary figures is precisely what Julius does by mining his patients for material that can become the stuff of publicly traded anecdotes and ultimately, the text of *Open City* itself. When Cole invokes Freud, he does so in order to distinguish his narrator's literary methodology from that of a clinician who enters into a therapeutic relation with his patients. When Julius contrasts his plagiarized accounts of his patient's inner worlds to their paranoid storytelling, which endeavors to rebuild an irreparably broken world, he makes it clear that he has

no interest whatsoever in rehabilitating them as full-fledged individuals. Julius has neither the ability nor the interest required to mine and excavate the depths of such problems. He works horizontally, according to something like an algorithmic logic, to gather and classify what information there is available rather than what has been lost in the catastrophe of 9/11 whose specter hovers over the entire novel. To do so, Julius collects the stories of people who have been compromised and rendered incomplete according to a standard of wholeness that no longer orders life in New York City. Like Freud's case studies, the narratives of Julius' patients form a composite whole insofar as they all proceed according to a unifying logic and exhibit similarly literary techniques; however, the commonalities that unite Julius' cast of characters requires us to read them according to pathologies that are the opposite to those of Freud's patients. While Freud's clients come to him to exorcise demons that they could no longer keep bottled up, Julius' patients are partial people, collateral damage from the crises that both interrupt and enable a historical trajectory that gives rise to neo-liberal progress. Julius articulates this fragmented sensation in a fleeting moment wherein he understands something like the logic by which his patients' lives unfold: "my mind was empty, subject to a nervous condition," he thinks,

> this was the expression that came to me as I stood there, as though I had become a minor character in a Jane Austen novel. Such sudden mental weakness, I thought…was from a simplified version of the self, an area of simplicity where

> things had once been more robust. This was true of a broken leg, too: one was suddenly lessened, walking with an incomplete understanding of what walking was about. (161)

The experience of this "lessened," "simplified" condition, to some degree, stands at the center of all his patients' issues. But Julius' experience with this widespread condition shows us that, contrary to the assumptions underlying the practice of psychiatry, his patients do not constitute a group of those who have been prevented from attaining coherent subjecthood by virtue of their abnormal mental processes, defined against some imagined ideal of normality and completeness (204-05).

The novel has already made it clear that it is populated not by living and developing people but rather inert stories. What may once have been a subject has, by some gruesome means, already been turned into an object. The global city of neo-liberalism, then, is one in which the distinction between subject and object does not hold. The entire population consequently functions as if half-dead, hovering between being a person and becoming merely another story of loss. Julius uses Freud's ideas of mourning and melancholia to diagnose the city population in this way and ends up revising Freud's definition of melancholia in the process. Describing melancholia as "mourning in which something has gone wrong," he goes on to suggest that in place of normal introjection, the internalization and assimilation of the lost into the living,

> This benign internalization does not happen. Instead, there's an incorporation. The dead occupy only a part of the one who has survived; they are sectioned off, hidden in a crypt, and from this place of encryption they haunt the living. The neatness of the line we had drawn around the catastrophic events of 2001 seemed to me to correspond to this kind of sectioning off. (208-09)

If we understand melancholia as a kind of self-destructive and unresolved anger in the wake of loss, then we have to see that "the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it onto the patient's own ego" (*Complete Psychological Works Volume XIV* 248). In addition to the omnipresence of the lost object, this anger is integrated into the melancholic personality. When Julius invokes the events of 9/11 as capable of producing a kind of collective melancholic response—"the mourning had not been completed, and the result had been the anxiety that cloaked the city"—he suggests that catastrophe has affected the way the global city fails to fully integrate lost parts of its own narrative into its collective ego. Melancholia, in this case, does not illuminate the way that individual people deal with the loss of other individual people; it becomes a new literary narrative that compulsively attempts to gather parts even though a whole can never be reconstituted.

The cemeteries that emerge as an integral part of the city's architecture provide a sense of how this mode of thinking operates in spatial terms. Stumbling upon strange edifices placed into the middle of an alley, Julius observes,

> a memorial for the site of an African burial ground. The tiny plot was what had been set aside now to indicate the spot, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the site had been large, some six acres, as far north as present-day Duane Street, and as far south as City Hall Park. Along Chambers Street and in the park itself, human remains were still routinely uncovered. But most of the burial ground was now under office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government…the land had been built over and the people of the city had forgotten that it was a burial ground. It had passed into private and civic ownership. (220)

Julius' response to this site shows why melancholia is not a useful diagnostic framework with which to understand the condition of neo-liberalism. At a surface level, the way that the novel describes the loss of an entire collective history of a population and the loss of the individual stories contained therein does replicate the conditions that produce melancholia in Freudian terms. These components of the city become unreachable even as they are literally integrated within the foundations of urban life. Notably, though, the city's reaction to the inescapability of this loss is neither one of a melancholic anger nor the sense of incompleteness that Austerlitz experiences during the post-war period.

Rather, the cemetery scenes in both *Austerlitz* and *Open City* are near-exact inversions of one another; both protagonists, Julius and Austerlitz, confront the evidence

of lost populations—to which they might once have belonged—that have been integrated into the city. For Austerlitz, this experience is traumatic because he constantly senses the lost presence of these others. Their absence, for him, indicates the loss of an entire way of life that the modernizing impulses of neo-liberalism begin to obscure during the mid-twentieth century rebuilding of Europe. Where Austerlitz is paralyzed by this awareness, Julius remains unencumbered by it, which explains why he is able to understand the graveyard as an example of the logic of economic progress. Where Austerlitz feels affective resonance in proximity to his lost community, Julius articulates and acts according to market rationality. Of the debates around the size of a potential monument to be constructed to mark the paved-over burial ground, Julius claims that "The squabble…did not interest me," well aware that "There was certainly no chance that six acres of prime real estate in lower Manhattan would be razed and rededicated as holy ground" (221). Julius makes what would constitute an unnatural or traumatic state for an earlier protagonist in a different setting simply a matter of dispassionate observation and even opportunity. In the absence of encounters with the living that could yield stories for Julius to harvest, a process that transforms people into literary objects, Julius simply stores and shares stories of the objects the dead have already become: "Many of the skeletons had broken bones…Disease was common, too: syphilis, rickets, arthritis" (221). The figure of the graveyard, which "sections off" a lost population through a process of "encryption," mirrors the way the death and

destruction of 9/11 has been absorbed into new sites of construction and commodified tourism without being fully processed, leaving the narrative of the city incomplete. In this way, what might have constituted a trauma in Freudian terms simply exposes the operations of a neo-liberal system that capitalizes on and builds over crisis and loss to fashion the global city.

Julius indicates the way that 9/11 both gave rise to profitable commodity forms and continued a course of destruction that predates that particular catastrophe. He claims that "marketable stories of all kinds had thickened around the injured coast of our city" in the wake of the attack, indicating that Julius' modus operandi, in capitalizing upon narratives of the damaged or lost, is a widespread phenomenon. The impulse to form new products and stories by juxtaposing partially or fully obscured elements of the past with the present also emerges in the city's physical makeup. Julius observes the tendency for hospitals to feature "new constructions [that] not only sat close to the older buildings but were in many cases grafted right into them, shiny and strange as prosthetic limbs" (232). In other instances, the evidence of older structures and lost populations retains no purchase in the visible present. The repetitive process by which such things are buried, the novel suggests, builds upon the logic of displacement in the name of progress inaugurated by earlier capitalist eras (58). "Before the towers had gone up," Julius clarifies,

> there had been a bustling network of little streets traversing this part of town. Robinson Street, Laurens Street, College Place: all of them had been obliterated in the 1960s to make way for the World Trade Center buildings, and all were forgotten now. Gone, too, was the old Washington Market, the active piers, the fishwives, the Christian Syrian enclave that was established here in the late 1800s…And, before that? What Lenape paths lay buried beneath the rubble? The site was a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten… human beings had lived here, built homes, and quarreled with their neighbors long before the Dutch ever saw a business opportunity in the rich furs and timbers of the island and its calm bay. (58-59)

Here, Cole's novel explicitly presents this small square of real estate, indicative of the city as a whole, as a text constantly in the process of being "written, erased, [and] rewritten." Each erasure capitalizes on irruptive disasters like 9/11.

But while these events are spectacularly disruptive rather than continuous, they nevertheless advance an ongoing process that characteristically folds demolition and construction into a single event. This process dismantles what exists at any given moment so that it might serve as the foundation of what is next to come. The neo-liberal turn in the later twentieth century does not have a monopoly on this type of operation. On the contrary, the turn to collecting and monetizing human pain is perfectly in keeping with the basic logic of capitalist circulation, as set forth by Marx in *Capital,*

Volume 1. Although the production of capital and its movement constitute an abstract process, it also requires the physical movement of tangible goods, including physical commodities and money. As Marx points out, however, circulation can also "take place without…physical movement" (226), as we see when the site of the World Trade Center repeatedly changes hands, circulating between different groups. Each successive owner rebuilds the means of production based on that site in order to circulate new types of goods and enable widening circles of exchange—of tangible commodities like timber and fish, and then of speculative forms of financial capital—that penetrate into other neighborhoods of the city and the world. Thus the circulation that defines the neo-liberal city occurs primarily in time rather than through different spaces. The condensed nature of urban geography allows us to see the way that the circulation of capital can continue indefinitely, even within the same location, through cycles of destruction and rebuilding.

That the goal is not to preserve or encourage success on the part of any particular owner(s) of production or businesses, but to encourage circulation *as a process* to function at the highest levels, is evident when Julius notices that

> Businesses that had seemed unshakable a few years previously had disappeared in the span, seemingly, of a few weeks. Whatever role they played passed on to other hands, hands that would feel briefly invincible and would, in their turn, be

> defeated by unforeseen changes. These survivors would also come to be forgotten. (19)

The language that he uses to draw out the logic of neo-liberal progress-as-circulation invokes that of the human cost of catastrophes like 9/11, marked by "disappearance," and "survivors." Thus the inherent lack of mourning in neo-liberalism does not distinguish between the loss of business and the loss of life; all are collateral damage that ensures the kind of turnover predicated on construction and reconstruction, erasure and re-conceptualization, that ensures the circulation of neo-liberal flows.

On entering the subway stop near the construction site that formerly housed the World Trade Center, Julius shows exactly what it means for New York's population to be comprised of dead and damaged figures. The route to the trains brings commuters down into the same "encrypted" space that "sectioned off" victims of 9/11. In doing so, explains, it brings those who are still living into contact with the lost portion of their population. From the overpass above the damage, as Julius puts it,

> nothing separated them, nothing separated us, from the people who had worked directly across the street on the day of disaster. When we descended the stairs into Vesey Street, we were hemmed in on both sides by a chain-link fence, penned in, 'like animals' stumbling to the slaughter. But why was it permitted to treat even animals that way? Elizabeth Costello's questions showed up in the strangest places. (58)

Stopping neither to notice nor to mourn the lost, Julius and his fellow commuters pass by unmoved by their vanished remains because the living, too, are always already potentially collateral damage of the violent displacements that they consider progress. Julius' invocation of Coetzee's protagonist Elizabeth Costello positions the individuals participating in the circulation of capital—moving themselves through space in order to get to and from their jobs—as lambs on an inevitable path to the slaughterhouse, who could be killed at any moment to satisfy a system that depends on death. When animals are slaughtered, as Elizabeth Costello points out, we do not mourn. Yet the meat industry nevertheless constitutes "an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing…an enterprise without end, self-regenerating" (*Elizabeth Costello* 65). What does this enterprise suggest, if not the kinds of neo-liberal impulses that decimate native populations, build new infrastructure using the stolen labor of enslaved peoples, and turn sites of collective disaster into either unremarkable backdrops for commuters or museums that sell tickets to commodify devastation?

Fully integrated within the circulation that drives neo-liberal capitalism, Julius can justify this collateral damage in a way that Elizabeth Costello cannot. In an additional mention of Coetzee's text, Julius "wondered, as Coetzee did in *Elizabeth Costello*, what the use was of going into these recesses of the human heart… Was it not enough to be told, in imprecise detail, that bad things happened?" (31). In other words, if the story of neo-liberalism is one "told, in imprecise detail," of "bad things [that]

happened," it is not necessarily one that Julius can fully perceive, nor does he have any interest in doing so. With psychiatry in mind, Julius points out that "the source of our information about the mind is itself the mind, and the mind is able to deceive itself…what are we to do when the lens through which the symptoms are viewed is often, itself, symptomatic" (238). In other words, Julius' refusal to mourn the dead and his tendency to take for granted scenes and buried histories that would constitute, to another protagonist, forms of atrocity, can be understood as the self-justifying perspective of a consciousness inseparable from the system that produced it. Neo-liberalism is not built to condemn itself; it is built to perpetuate itself by fostering flows of circulation in the name of progress, turning even individual stories into commodities. For Julius, as a kind of machinic expression of neo-liberal logic, forgetting and discarding the memory of that which is no longer useful, or that potentially inhibits productivity, is a means of ensuring his continued functioning.

Therefore, we must regard Julius' ostensible failures of memory not as involuntary or unconscious mental processes, but as strategic displacements that allow him to continue on as a productive system in his own right, just as a certain degree of "forgetting" is necessary to proceed over gravesites and construction zones around destroyed buildings throughout New York. The most shocking example of this strategic dislocation of memory occurs in relation to Moji, a fellow Nigerian immigrant and the sister of one of Julius' childhood friends. When he runs into her in a New York City

grocery store, Julius describes the episode as an "irruptive…reencounter, in the present, of something or someone long forgotten…a friend, or rather an acquaintance whom memory now made convenient to think of as a friend, so that what seemed to have vanished entirely existed once again" (156). By calling up a memory that diminished to a matter of little consequence for him, Moji's re-appearance violates the logic on which Julius' existence depends. He has previously buried any recollections of her or their shared experiences in order to make way for more profitable alternatives. Julius' response to Moji is telling. He asserts his professional authority, as a psychiatrist and a collector of narratives, to judge the veracity of Moji's story: "I am only too familiar with bad stories—badly imagined, or badly told," because, he says, "I hear them frequently from patients. I know the tells of those who blame others…There are characteristic tics that reveal the essential falsehoods of such narratives" (243). More like a digital diagnostic program than a therapist, Julius suggests that any story can be accepted or rejected based on a set of publicly consistent criteria, by searching out flaws in their coding rather than intuiting affective signals.

Contrary to expectations, Julius' narration uses such criteria to attest—objectively and dispassionately—to the apparent authenticity of Moji's account. He admits—before we even know what her allegation is or was—that "what Moji had said… had nothing in common with [his patients'] stories. She had said it as if, with all of her being, she were certain of its accuracy" (243-44). Julius has spent time casually with Moji as a friend

throughout the novel. He has even noted, in a nonchalant manner, his sexual attraction to her. Thus when she accuses Julius of raping her at a party in 1989, in an impassioned recounting over the course of multiple pages at the end of the novel, it comes as a complete shock to the reader. Moji demands of Julius the kind of recognition of her experience that he has consistently withheld throughout the novel, challenging him, "But will you say something now? Will you say something?" (245). His (non-)reaction to her, comprised only of a kind of mental retreat, seems to confirm her account:

> At that moment—and I remember this as exactly as though it were being replayed in front of me right now—I thought of how, in his journals, Camus tells a double story concerning Nietzsche and Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola, a Roman hero from the sixth century B.C.E. Scaevola had been captured while trying to kill the Etruscan king Porsenna and, rather than give away his accomplices, he showed his fearlessness by putting his right hand in a fire and letting it burn. (*Open City* 246)

Julius' deferral serves as a kind of admission that he has been "captured" in this moment by Moji's accusation. He emerges not only as the chronicler "of bad things [that] happened" but also as the architect of the exploitation that he has observed, collected, and disseminated throughout the novel in the form of others' stories. Rather than render him a perverse version of a psychiatrist, however, this makes Julius the incarnation of a

neo-liberal sensibility. The "callousness" that Moji reads in Julius recognizes that the destructive and self-justifying impulses of this system define his mode of existence.

For neo-liberalism to function properly, people, like things, have to be expendable. It relies on constant cycles of turnover as a way to promote circulation, sees nameless commuters instead of individually damaged people, and understands narratives of trauma as commodities to be collected and exchanged. For Cole's text to truly build a novelistic world from the logic of neo-liberalism, Julius must remain unmoved by appeals such as Moji's that attempt to resuscitate old ideas of justice and morality to rebuild the individual subject. But neo-liberalism has neither the interest nor the resources to devote to such a project; instead, it knowingly accepts the fact that collateral damage is the cost of ceaseless development. The novel ends with a discussion of the light of the Statue of Liberty's torch when it served as a working lighthouse in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Meant to guide ships into the busy commercial port of Manhattan's harbor, the light had a secondary effect: it

> fatally disoriented birds. The birds…somehow lost their bearings when faced with a single monumental flame. A large number of birds met their death in this manner. The officials of the island saw an opportunity there and, as was their custom, sold the birds off …to New York City milliners and fancy stores… one Colonel Tassin, who had military command of the island, intervened and was

> determined that any birds that happened to die in the future…would be retained in the service of science. (258-59)

The birds, in other words, were the collateral damage resulting from New York's advancement as a global economic center. This destruction never constituted a problem for a process that was not concerned with the loss of life, but on how best to make that loss productive. Selling carcasses to commercial enterprises and shipping them off to various museums is another way of turning collateral damage into an "opportunity," as the birds become fashionable goods or tourist attractions. In ceaselessly finding ways to extract value from destruction, late-stage capitalism, Cole shows, comes uncomfortably close to the logic of the contemporary novel.

4.3 Bringing the Outside In

In November 2015, an exhibition named "Bhopal: Facing 30" opened at a gallery in London's Brixton neighborhood. On display was a series of photographs taken by Francesca Moore, grouped into two distinct collections. In one, families living in areas around the factory site of the 1984 Bhopal Union Carbide disaster pose for formal portraits in a makeshift tent adorned with rich velvet drapes and Oriental rugs. Although the photographs record the disaster's human legacy and the families' continuing health issues, that damage is not the point. Moore has said that she intended for the photos to communicate "positivity, resilience, and optimism" (Moore, "Project Synopsis"). The other series of photos features the entire length of the boundary wall

that separates the Union Carbide factory—and its residual toxins—from the surrounding area. Moore has described her surprise at the porousness of the wall that was intended to set "the boundary between what is safe, and what is not," but provides easy access to the site through gaps, open gates, and ledges (Moore, "Project Synopsis"). It has become, as a result, a popular location for children to play games or for livestock to graze. What Moore found so shocking, in other words, was that the local residents continued to live in a place that not only serves as an archive of criminal damage and negligence, but also continues to jeopardize the life around it. Moore's photographs of the boundary wall also reveal another, more subtle tension. Less evident to those who see the photographs as depicting a landscape in stark moral terms is the evidence of natural life that stands in contrast to the devastation produced by the factory. Trees loom behind the fence and erupt from the arid soil in front of it as if to intrude in the image and displace its intended subject matter. Roots creep along the ground, and weather has eroded large patches from the flaking surface of the wall. The scattered humans and goats in the photo add to the sense that the disaster, like the wall itself, is on its way to being obscured by the functions of everyday life.

In the eruption of ecocriticism as a field over the past ten to fifteen years, such images of environmental violation, corporate destruction, and political inaction have come to the forefront of a discourse that seeks to expose and thereby reckon with the "discounted casualties, both human and ecological that result from war's toxic

aftermaths or climate change" or even the daily exploitative opportunism of late-stage capitalism (Nixon, 2). Particularly in the postcolonial turn spearheaded by writers and scholars like Nixon, ecocriticism focuses the attention of a concerned readership on the peripheral regions and peoples who have suffered disproportionately under global capitalism. The Bhopal disaster offers an especially vivid example of a spectacularly destructive moment of catastrophe that initiates long-term, cumulative degradation of the environment that Nixon terms "slow violence," an adaptation of Galtung's theory of structural violence. Rather than focus on direct or unmediated forms of violence, slow violence draws our attention to the "vast structures that can give rise to acts of personal violence and constitute forms of violence in and of themselves. Such structural violence may range from the unequal morbidity that results from a commodified health care system, to racism itself" (Nixon, 10). Nixon turns us away from the spectacle, in other words, to the violence that "occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2).

The Bhopal disaster, as Indra Sinha novelizes it, requires a different lens than the x-ray vision that revealed the layers of Cole's New York City produced by ongoing cycles of construction, demolition, erasure, and re-construction. This perspective defined present-day city dwellers as collateral damage. To understand how post-disaster Bhopal works as the setting for a novel, Cole's lens needs to be adjusted in three significant

ways. The pockets of stagnation and death within the city, none of which are exempt from future development, have to be extrapolated and imagined on a global scale—where the flows of goods, people, and information that converge to form the global city of New York distribute inequity throughout the geopolitical world. Second, Sinha's novel requires us to focus not on those who participate in those flows but on the abject spaces produced by and beyond them. Having shifted the reader's attention there, Sinha requires us to acknowledge a discontinuity between the past and present that it is so pronounced it is hard to imagine a future for the people who remain at the disaster site because they have nowhere else to go. The fictionalized account of the Bhopal disaster ultimately unearths the logic by which global levels of circulation identify developing nations and their peripheral communities as disposable. The very fact that the chemical factory was placed in this remote location suggests that violence and erasure of local infrastructure, damage to local environments, and health risks faced by local populations are not just an unintended side effect of late-stage capitalism. Zones that are inadequately equipped to conduct global flows must be transformed, even if that process occurs at great cost to local populations and ways of life. The Bhopal chemical leak, then, functions as the calculated disaster of a company that locates its most dangerous operations in areas where the population has managed to live without the infrastructure that would bring it to world attention. Bhopal was exploited precisely because it failed to meet neo-liberal standards of visibility, productivity, and

connectedness that would make its destruction as remarkable as the collapse of the twin towers on 9/11.

The effects of the Bhopal disaster persist, mutate, and replicate over time and across generations, emphasizing the way that the slow violence of late capitalism becomes self-perpetuating. In contrast to the wounding of New York, however, this damage does not open up spaces from which new value can be extracted by renovating, repurposing, and reselling the disaster site. Francesca Moore makes a point of emphasizing that the Bhopal residents she photographed were "all receiving treatment for resulting health issues… the third generation of children born to the sufferers of the Bhopal disaster, and subsequent water contamination, are continuing to be born with birth defects" (Moore, "Project Synopsis"). Given the archetypal perfection of the Bhopal event as a case study for Nixon's theory and ecocritical scholarship as a whole, it is fitting that the first chapter of Nixon's 2011 book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, focuses on Indra Sinha's fictionalization of the disaster's aftermath, *Animal's People* (2008). At first glance, the novel seems to model precisely the narrative arc of most self-conscious literature of the Anthropocene. A neo-liberal corporation (here rendered vaguely and phonetically as the "Kampani," but obviously intended as a stand-in for Union Carbide) establishes a dangerous manufacturing facility for pesticides in the slums of an Indian city (in the novel, "Khaufpur"). Sheer carelessness leads to a disastrous toxic gas leak that kills thousands. Health problems from airborne and

waterborne forms of contamination persist for generations, destroying the land and subjecting the residents to repeated cycles of socioeconomic depression.

By virtue of the spectacular character of the trigger event, both nature and culture have been dealing with the after-effects of the chemical leak when the novel opens. *Animal's People* focuses on the slower forms of violence that were initiated by the spectacle and confronts the environmental consequences of capitalist development that are usually deferred into a distant future. Many of these long-term effects have taken center stage in recent literature through a focus on global warming. As Ian McEwan's protagonist in the 2005 novel *Solar* thinks along these lines, rather casually, "…The Gulf Stream would vanish, Europeans would freeze to death in their beds, the Amazon would be a desert, some continents would catch fire, others would drown, and by 2085 the Arctic summer ice would be gone and the polar bears with it" (87). Whether instantaneously visible or slow-burning, global warming damages some sector of the natural world, setting off an accelerating feedback loop that increasingly dislocates and imperils human life. Recent novels demonstrate the side effects of the general degradation of the planet by depicting hurricanes and rising floodwaters in the southern United States in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011), changing tidal patterns in the Sundarbans of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and drought and displacement in California in Claire Vaye Watkins' *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015).

Graham Huggan and Ellen Tiffin make the point that postcolonial literature doubles the tendency already manifest in climate change literature "to focus on the conspicuous socio-economic inequalities that underlie politically motivated attempts to address global warming" (81). They call attention to the fact that global capitalism uses "evidence of global warming as an opportunity to implement technocratic forms of 'planetary management' that reinforce boundaries between rich and poor, the 'developed' global North and the 'developing' global South" (81). Whether novels focus on the political oppression of imperialism or the economic exploitation of neo-liberalism, "the environment" remains the setting in which human action must play out. By logical extension, the burgeoning canon of "eco-critical" literature and scholarship inevitably registers the cost of the catastrophe in anthropocentric terms. The assumption that the story of human beings in the age of climate change and planetary exploitation is one of victimization, however, is at odds with a growing collection of novels that situate their protagonists in the forgotten pockets of neo-liberalism. Novels including Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* (2010), Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011), and Rachel Kushner's *The Mars Room* feature human beings who successfully adapt to their abject positions in these spaces. These works suggest that those who can appropriate the systems of destruction that have now become self-perpetuating are actually more human than those who would abandon them to a dismal fate. In so doing, such novels offer a sustained critique of the anthropocentrism of both eco-criticism and human rights discourse.

I attribute the fundamental anthropocentrism of eco-criticism to two main factors: its social call to action and the established conventions of the novel form that it takes up. Nixon pre-emptively warns against the dangers of romanticizing the rebellious "noncompliance" of natural elements in the face of plans to instrumentalize or deplete them. As national superpowers and corporations dredge the developing world for resources, Nixon believes that

> …the resistance posed by nature itself should not be overstated. The recent turn within environmental studies toward celebrating the creative resilience of ecosystems can be readily hijacked by politicians, lobbyists, and corporations who oppose regulatory controls and strive to minimize pollution liability. Co-opting the 'nature-and-time-will-heal' argument has become integral to attempts to privatize profits while externalizing risk and cleanup, both of which can be delegated to 'nature's business' (21).

What his skeptical discussion of nature's "creative resilience" fails to explain is what exactly he means by "heal." If he means only to indicate that we cannot expect either for nature, once desecrated, to rebound to its Edenic condition, or for human beings to fully ameliorate the damage they have done to the planet, there is certainly no clear argument to be made to the contrary.

Throughout Nixon's argument, now nearly a decade old, there nevertheless runs a current of quiet optimism, despite his harsh critiques of economic exploitation. To

believe that human players have the responsibility to take on the challenges of undoing and minimizing the damage they have unleashed is to assume that it is still possible for such damage to be addressed in a meaningful way by humans. Now, in 2020, scientific analyses suggest that the tipping point for global warming may have been passed, limiting the extent to which the future history of the planet can actually be altered by any interventions. Evidence also points to the fact that many of the world's most powerful governments—including the United States—are determined to accelerate this process in the interest of short-term gains. As Kristin Ross points out, the logic of capitalism itself makes the very idea of such intervention a kind of absurd fantasy. Given that neo-liberalism relies on the ideal of "infinite economic growth," at the point where

> the limits of the resources on which that growth is based having well been reached, a critical phase presents itself—one that torments the managers of the world economy. Never mind! As worthy inheritors of western modernity, rather than working with the world, they will work against it: as long as our environment is a resource, it must be exploited, and if it becomes an obstacle, it need only disappear. (Ross 9)

In Ross' argument, the degradation of the environment poses a problem for capitalist logic only insofar as it interferes with processes of production and circulation. Although a livable planet is the precondition for the continuation of any form of existence, or

indeed, economic exchange, a planet in distress—so long as it remains profitable in the present—continues to satisfy the conditions of neo-liberalism. The managerial instinct of late capitalism refuses to acknowledge that the environmental responses to exploitation could become both so autopoietic and so self-defeating that the entire planet could become a hostile space whose systems no longer support human life.

The speculative turn of contemporary genre fiction that situates us imaginatively in an apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic world works within this paradigm to imagine what it would take to survive or even flourish in a world over which it is no longer possible to imagine human control. The question for the novelist that follows from the complete abandonment of the-world-as-property is what kind of narrator can help us imagine an alternative. Along these lines, Nancy Armstrong identifies a decisive shift in the contemporary novel away from centuries of "protagonists that mirrored… readers' norms and values" toward "forms of life so innovative as to make it next to impossible for us to recognize ourselves in them" ("Affective Turn" 441, 442). Both singular and radically biopolitical in nature, such protagonists deny readers the illusion of sympathetic exchange and identification based on the difference of our respective perspectives. Sinha's protagonist, Animal, is one of this new wave of contemporary characters, whose most remarkable quality is his singularity, or the fact he is one of a kind. Left with a severely deformed spine after being exposed in infancy to toxins from the Kampani's gas leak, Animal is bent double and has to move about on all fours, in a

manner more bestial than human. Despite the efforts of human rights activists who offer him forms of medical intervention, Animal is not sure he wants to approximate the physical appearance of a human being. "I'm not a fucking human being," he insists, "I've no wish to be one" (23).

In other words, Animal refuses to be interpellated as a human being. This adamant stance is reinforced in the text by the fact that his name, rather than identifying him as an individual person, identifies him as precisely the opposite: a non-human. Just as Animal resists becoming a recognizable subject, with all the attendant rights and responsibilities that such a position entails, so too does the environment around Khaufpur prove unreceptive to the impositions of neo-liberalism that attempt to bring the place into global patterns of circulation. The New York of *Open City* is one in which the flows of people, capital, and media capable of dictating development are on full display. In Khaufpur, however, we find a stagnant, underdeveloped space isolated even further by the toxic aftermath of commercial attempts to bring it into a globally productive sphere. Where the financialization of everyday life pervaded even the most intimate and abstract elements of Cole's novel, in *Animal's People* the corporate foundations that give rise to the "Kampani" are physically located elsewhere, in a metropolis whose reach extends far beyond its immediate borders. The Mauvaise Troupe Collective, a radical writing group that documents political movements by taking part in them, suggests that in this model, the very term "metropolis" actually

"designates…a worldwide fabric in which one tries to integrate more and more parcels of territory" (*The Zad and NoTAV* 116). The metropolis "does not so much refer to a real space, as it does to a diffuse will to assimilate the maximum of spaces into the flux of marketing and trade" (*The Zad and NoTAV* 116). Regions like Khaufpur prove particularly efficient territories to annex under this logic because what is produced at the peripheries can be easily circulated back through metropolitan centers. When these flows prove unproductive or even toxic, however, as in the case of the Bhopal disaster, they can be easily cut off, leaving those outside of the urban centers no way to access the flows of goods, people, and information on which they came to depend.

Represented by a towering concrete building in Sinha's novel, the architectural might and infrastructural complexity of the Kampani's metropolis stand in sharp contrast to the makeshift dwellings proliferating haphazardly throughout the neighborhoods of Khaufpur. As it appears in a dream, this fortress of the global city of neo-liberalism, is guarded by

> Soldiers with guns. Tanks patrol its foot. Jets fly over leaving criss-cross trails and its basements contain bunkers full of atomic bombs. From this building the Kampani controls its factories all over the world. It's stuffed with banknotes, it is the counting house for the Kampani's wealth… Chemists on a higher floor are experimenting with poisons, mixing them up to see which most efficiently kill. (229)

When Zafar, the leader of the Khaufpuri resistance movement, expresses his desire to "see my enemy's face," he is reminded that "the Kampani has no face" (229). In other words, the Kampani is not a human being, nor even a collection of human beings. To the contrary, it personifies the point at which a multinational corporation meets unpredictable human and environmental conditions, reaps the profits, and cuts its losses. As Animal advises his activist friends, "You are fooling yourselves if you think you can ever change the Kampani. It is too big and powerful, it cannot die, it will go on for all eternity" (237). If there is to be an effective mode of resistance against this impersonal unnatural force, it cannot be imagined as a traditional form of opposition. Moreover, such resistance must be imagined by someone who can imagine living and even thriving in the forgotten spaces of the global economy. It will take a new form of human being to imagine such a form of opposition.

Animal's People shows us what it would take to live in proximity to but unmotivated by neo-liberal violence, thus making him—in a non-oppositional way—resistant to the flows of late capitalism. By suggesting as much, I mean to rescue Sinha's novel from the moralizing and totalizing grip of eco-critical discourse that has coalesced around the novel. To understand the ostensibly unlivable environment of Khaufpur as a phenomenon created exclusively by human violence that can only be undone by human intervention perpetuates anthropocentrism in a changing world that may not even support recognizable forms of human life in the future. When Animal rejects the

imperative to become human, he also dismisses the forms of resistance that seek political reparations for damage that has exceeded human control. In so doing, his insistence on living fully and even joyfully in destroyed spaces simultaneously reclaims territory that has been abandoned by neo-liberal power and opposes the moralism that metropolitan actors mobilize in determining whether and how such a territory can be reclaimed. Animal has no interest in "fixing" himself or the patterns of life in his neighborhood to conform to the standards invoked by the agents of human rights discourse and reparation. As a result, he cannot be captured, subdued, or defeated by the political or economic logic with which the other characters unsuccessfully protest the Kampani's abandonment of the destroyed city. Rather than protest or try to counteract the processes that transformed Khaufpur, Animal imagines the ruins of his former way of life as the basis of a new one, re-appropriating materials, including his disfigured body, that have been rejected or deemed worthless according to the an economic and moral norm. Sinha's novel, then, is not so much a memorial to the victims of environmental violence as it is a kind of manual for how to live in and beyond a world that is composed, in Sebald's words, of "what is left after the earth has ground itself down" (*Rings* 229).

4.4 Off the Grid: Imagining Subversive Spaces

In the 2018 volume *The Zad and NoTAV: Territorial Struggles and the Making of a New Political Intelligence*, the Mauvaise Troupe Collective theorizes and tracks the lived

experience of those engaged in communal political struggles against two particular development projects: a proposed airport in the wetlands of France and a planned high-speed train in an Italian valley. Grounded in methodologies that rely on an occupation of these lands without claiming ownership, deriving profit, or establishing group hierarchies, the Collective emphasizes the ways that the location of these two particular sites beyond the metropolis enables a kind of political imagination that neo-liberalism is designed to repress. They point out that

> These spaces had the capacity to bring to life the idea of a livable secession whose imaginary, today, the cities seem to refuse, divided up as they are under regimes of control, surveillance, and counter-insurrectional urbanism. Could the dark corners and secret zones of our era, more and more eradicated in the big city centres, be lying nestled instead in the thickets and foliage? (127)

Those spaces that have not yet been divided up and conquered by urbanization lend themselves to forms of resistance that allow for a "secession" from economic flows, by enabling "a life lived closer to the means of subsistence from which we have been dispossessed" (127). Subsistence, in their account, can take many forms: environmental stewardship, human community, agricultural pursuits, and the cultivation of idiosyncratic values, priorities, and uses of time. At its heart, the movements against the never-ending encroachment of the metropolis aim to "reduce the distinction, inherited from modern thought, between nature and us" (127).

This claim can clarify the relationship between *Open City* and *Animal's People*, equally well-known novels that play out in such different places and in such different ways. The city novel shows us a protagonist who is entirely compatible with his urban context because he has been produced by it and reproduces it in turn. Julius is programmed by the logic of the city, which directs him to follow established flows and define the people and places he encounters in terms of their possible exchange value. In contrast, the "thickets and foliage" of abandoned space in Animal's People demands a kind of creativity through disorientation, because "something other than economy determines its geography" (Mauvaise 118). Navigating these geographies requires a doubled move wherein individuals must let themselves be lost so that the world around them can direct the pattern of life they live there. As the Collective writes, "To get your bearings here, you have to merge with a geography of the senses, a lived geography…The force of these…territories resides in its (sic) capacity to enrapture—that is, to take us out of ourselves by throwing us into the world that has become manifest there" (117-119). Such submission to an unproductive and ungovernable reality is anything but a passive exercise. It is a process of unthinking that enabled the creation of a world that does not replicate a model: "To create a world is thus not something to be done lightly, since it is a question of finding enormous strength in belonging to what surrounds you" (119). To succeed, individuals must both locate themselves in defamiliarized territory and produce a radically different world from the interplay of

"nature and us," both of which are transformed by the encounter. By invoking this model, I want to suggest that the unsettled geographies of the spaces outside of the metropolis can foster forms of political intelligence that neither conform with nor oppose the city's flows of people, goods, and information.

When the Kampani decides to incorporate such stagnant and underdeveloped spaces into its international economic project, it promises to integrate its people to the rest of the modern world. The fact that production can easily render these spaces not just uninhabitable, but also ineligible for renovation that extracts more economic value from the environment, poses an ontological problem for the system. When the Kampani abandons Khaufpur, it acknowledges limits to the ostensibly limitless ability of capital to replicate, generating even more capital. Thanks to the factory fire and the escape of toxins into the surrounding environment, capitalism has created a space that cannot be recuperated by its own forces. By abandoning this space, the Kampani opens the door for a new form of localism to take root, because the patterns of everyday life that pre-existed the Kampani's arrival and the disaster they unleashed cannot be recovered. In light of this, Animal's ability to fully inhabit the toxic environment left behind, building his own life and world in collaboration with the devastated natural world around him, lays claim to a space over which the Kampani cannot maintain ownership. Animal has no interest in restoring a way of life that pre-dated the construction of the chemical factory, because the conditions of his present existence have reshaped him to

successfully occupy the environment created by the factory disaster. As he puts it, "This is my kingdom, in here I am the boss" (30).

This is why, when a journalist ("jarnaliss," in Animal's phonetically rendered re-appropriation of the foreign term) comes to the slums of Animal's home in the Nutcracker to ask him to record his experiences for a book, he rails against producing the kind of story that an international readership demands. Well aware that there is a market for him to play the victim in this story, rather than a willingness to understand his success and vibrancy in the face of corporate destabilization, Animal lashes out against the jarnaliss and the constituency he represents:

> Such a look on your face…as you pushed aside the plastic sheet, bent your back through the gap in the wall. With what greed you looked about this place. I could feel your hunger. You'd devour everything…When you saw me, your eyes lit up…this is what you had come for. You were like all the others, come to suck our stories from us, so strangers in far off countries can marvel there's so much pain in the world. Like vultures are you jarnaliss. Somewhere a bad thing happens, tears like rain in the wind, and look, here you come, drawn by the smell of blood. You have turned us Khafpuris into storytellers, but always of the same story. (4-5)

Clearly not a damaged individual like those city dwellers of Cole's novel, Animal can recognize and resist the familiar impulse whereby agents of neo-liberalism extract and

commodify individual narratives. Just as he will not allow capitalist development and destruction to dictate the terms of his existence, he will not allow a narrative of his life to be manufactured, distorted, and disseminated for profit. Animal's success in this venture is evident in the framing of the novel itself in the opening "Editor's Note," which dissociates the text's creation from that of *Open City*. In a kind of promise not to market the experience of disaster, as Julius does in the post-9/11 city, the note that opens Animal's People reads: "This story was recorded in Hindi on a series of tapes…True to the agreement between the boy and the journalist who befriended him, the story is told entirely in the boy's words as recorded on the tapes. Apart from translating to English, nothing has been changed" (Sinha i). Within the textual universe of Sinha's novel, Animal's ability to maintain control over his own narrative reflects his ability to occupy, inhabit, and build worlds in environments hostile to the neo-liberal forces that appropriated the land and now seek to do the same with his story.

Even the landscape itself pushes back against the victim narrative that the jarnaliss so eagerly pursues. Despite the Kampani's chemical experimentation, Khaufpur reveals a remarkable ability to erase the effects of corporate production and "reset" its own geographies. To make this point, I would argue, Sinha inverts the anthropocentric logic of a classic work of eco-criticism like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Stepping through the broken wall depicted in Moore's photographs, one passes "into another world" within the factory grounds. As Sinha describes it, here there is "[n]o bird song.

No hoppers in the grass. No bees hum. Insects can't survive here" (Sinha 29). Decades earlier, Carson had imagined a community "in the heart of America" that experiences the onset of a "strange blight" as if "some evil spell had settled on the community." Unexplained illnesses and deaths soon proliferate (2). Carson goes on to describe the associated changes in the natural world, in language that eerily echoes Sinha's prose:

> There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example—where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed… It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh. …The apple trees were coming into bloom but no bees droned among the blossoms, so there was no pollination and there would be no fruit (2-3).

Carson's lost future, caused by the noxious effects of pesticides, has a clear cause: "The people," she writes simply, "had done it themselves" (3). However, while Carson suggests no possibility for recovery or regeneration once her hypothetical limit point of toxicity has been reached, in Sinha's novel, Animal quickly notes the ways in which the natural world will not remain dormant in Khaufpur, even within the hyper-contaminated territory within the factory gates:

> Look throughout this place a silent war is being waged. Mother Nature's trying to take back the land. Wild sandalwood trees have arrived, who knows how,

> must be their seeds were shat by overflying birds… Under the poison-house trees are growing up through the pipework. Creepers, brown and thick as my wrist, have climbed all the way to the top, tightly they've wrapped wooden knuckles round pipes and ladders, like they want to rip down everything the Kampani made. (31)

Locating agency exclusively in human beings, Carson can only sound a note of alarm before it is too late. Facing a situation where it already is too late, Animal celebrates the fact that this abandoned location on the contemporary geopolitical map is free of the agents of neo-liberalism that would try to repurpose it.

Not only has the Kampani has abandoned the factory and the neighborhoods around it, allowing nature to reinstate its own geographies and courses of development, but that it has become a "shunned place," where no one is expected or authorized to remain (29). In this sense, Animal's choice "to inhabit" that space "become[s] a political gesture" which is "indissociable from defending the territory" (Mauvaise 122, 124). His defense of the territory is as much about affirming its existence and relevance—counter to the judgments of the Kampani— as it is about supporting a community seeking to cope with the traumatic effects of neo-liberal exploitation. Animal's inhabitation of Khaufpur is really a kind of investment in the place that understands how they constitute one another. This form of inhabiting, in the words of the Mauvaise Troupe Collective, is about

> belonging to places as much as they belong to us. It is not being indifferent to the things that surround us, but being attached to them: to the people, the ambiances, the fields, the hedges, the woods, the houses, the plan that sprouts again and again in the same spot, the animal that shows up in the same area. It's to be taken, powerfully, by our spaces. It's the opposite of the nightmare of the metropolis where one only passes through. (Mauvaise 122)

In this sense, Animal's continued occupation of the destroyed spaces of Khaufpur constitutes a mode of resistance on two levels. First, the fact that he finds value in—and demonstrates a clear attachment to—the people, places, and things of this territory violates the logic that says a place has to be a viable node of global circulation in order to be valuable. Second, Animal takes a kind of perverse and self-satisfied joy in appropriating and using the damaged remains of the world that the Kampani tried to build in order to create his own. He sets himself apart from his fellow Khaufpuris in this regard, who appeal to the very forces that destroyed their home to ameliorate this damage, thus reinforcing the authority of neo-liberalism and the centrality of human actors in his environment.

Understanding that his existence is shaped by impersonal forces of destruction, Animal implicitly aligns himself with the plant life within the factory walls as the inheritors of an abandoned world. To explain why social formations that strike the

outsider as idiosyncratic often develop under occupation, Malala, a member of the Mauvaise Troupe Collective, draws on reasoning that approximates Animal's:

> …given the forms of life that get invented and embraced here, you are not going to be the most original one in the village. Here, there's room for "freaks," people "on the margin," it's a place on the margin where people who don't recognize themselves elsewhere can live a little more peacefully… Our life is largely made up of "récup" [scrounging]: trash that's useless to most people becomes our riches. (150)

Paradoxically, what sets Animal apart from the normal world allows him to participate in one of the accelerated micro-evolutionary processes that occurs in Sinha's novel—of the type we witness in *Rings of Saturn*—in spaces where natural processes that have been disrupted start up again. "[I]f I agree to be a human being," he reasons, "I'll also have to agree that I'm wrong-shaped and abnormal. But let me be a quatre pattes animal, four-footed and free, then I am whole, my own proper shape, just a different kind of animal from say…a cow, or a camel" (Sinha 208). Rather than participate in a global order that considers him a compromised or partial subject, Animal prefers to think of himself in extra-normative terms, as one of a kind. Neither paralyzed by a sense of incompleteness nor adapted to fit into the global economic order, Animal's response to its violence sets him apart from the protagonists of Sebald and Cole. He embraces his singularity as one

of the "forms of life that get invented" and claims the power to shape the environment that has shaped him (Mauvaise 150).

If trash easily becomes treasure in the communities of resistance described by the Mauvaise Collective, then it provides the foundation of Animal's existence. "How well I know this city's zameen, its ground," he declares, "from an altitude of two feet, this is my home earth, discarded things are my city's treasures, this wall is its history plus also where its history finished without warning" (272). That which repels others provides a refuge for Animal. He uses the dry grasses inside the abandoned factory "to make my sleeping nest. On warm nights I could dream in comfort under the stars with no insects to trouble me. During the rains and in cold weather there were rooms that the Kampani, when it fled from Khaufpur, left knee-deep in papers. The Kampani papers made a thick quilt" (30). In finding possibilities and the stuff of home where others see loss and the destruction of that home, Animal rejects the political philosophy of Zafar and the community of Khaufpuri activists who believe in "the power of nothing." Of the Kampani, Zafar repeatedly asserts that "Whatever we had, they have already taken, now we are left with nothing. Having nothing means we have nothing to lose. So you see, armed with the power of nothing we are invincible, we are bound to win" (55). For Zafar, the conflict between local residents and the corporation that poisoned them is staged in courts of law, and "winning" would force the Kampani to pays reparations and clean up the lingering impact of the disaster.

In pursuing this form of resistance, however, Zafar plays to the strengths of the Kampani, for whom a legal victory is merely another investment in a space they had already devastated. His expressed hope for justice is met with scorn from Animal:

> What a fool…to think that such a thing as justice is simple or natural. Why do you expect that the lawyers up at the Collector's office wear silly little wigs and funny collars? If justice were simple what need for fancy dress? Why do they charge so much? If there were such a thing as natural justice, wouldn't you be entitled to it, whether or not you could pay? (228)

Justice, in other words, is a charade that must perform its authenticity with costumes and rhetorical flourishes in court to distract from the fact that it is produced by the "armies of lobbyists, PR agencies, [and] hired editorialists" (282). Nevertheless, Zafar suggests that maintaining a moral opposition to the Kampani is of the utmost importance, even if it means playing a game that they can never win. "If we allow anger to rule us, if we break the law," he reasons to supporters,

> we place ourselves in the same situation as the Kampani…it might be that we'll never win against the Kampani. Maybe we won't ever get justice. But even if those evil ones escape punishment, they will still be just as bloodstained, just as wicked, in their hearts they themselves know it. Whatever happens they are ruined beings, their souls are already dead. (282-83)

Where Zafar ultimately chooses to respect and work within the law, a system itself manipulated by corporate influence, Animal does not believe in the "power of nothing," because his world and his power is not derived from lack and loss, but from the fullness of reclamation and counter-economic forms of rebuilding. As he puts it, derisively, "[t]o me, if I'm honest, we were just a bunch of fucking do-gooders… I couldn't be bothered with the political shit, I hated all that talk of 'poison victims,' I don't want to be pitied" (27). Ultimately, his singularity removes even the illusion of responsibility toward the legal and economic sphere, because "[a]n animal isn't subject to the laws of men" (284).

Having rejected anthropocentric standards of law and justice, Animal also violates the moral purity on which Zafar insists. This violation occurs directly in relation to Zafar, whom Animal begins to slowly poison using pills comprised of a mysterious mishmash of substances. He does so ostensibly because he wants to prevent the progression of the relationship between Zafar and Nisha, the girl Animal loves. In poisoning Zafar, he re-enacts the same kind of violence that the Kampani unleashed on him and their fellow citizens. Rather than do so for economic gain, however, this violence attempts to "purify" Zafar of the moralism that locks him into his commitment to opposing the Kampani through legal means. By exposing him to the same forms of poisoned victimization that other Khaufpuris have experienced, Animal tries to shift Zafar's struggle from the realm of ideology to that of a body trying to survive in a changed environment. This poisoning also acts out a kind of double negative, as it

negates Zafar's attempts to undo the legacy of violence and toxicity in Khaufpur. By mimicking the Kampani's own methodology, Animal registers his awareness that it is the poisoned and damaged landscape that allows him to maintain his position as a complete—and even exceptional—creature. Having successfully acclimated to this place, Animal recognizes that normalizing it would render him a partial and disadvantaged figure, which would put him at odds with his repeated and joyful refrain that "*I am Animal fierce and free/ in all the world is none like me*" (366).

For most of the novel, Animal's ambivalence toward the methodology and goal of the anti-Kampani resistance, as demonstrated by his poisoning of Zafar, makes it difficult for him to entertain the notion of community. The refrain of the Khaufpuri people, "we have suffered together, we will not be divided" has little to do with him, and he refuses to consider himself a victim (302). Indeed, he regards the claim of victimization as acknowledgement of the Kampani's power over the people it has poisoned. Although Animal takes up residence within the circle of Khaufpuri activists, it affords him a means of forming social relationships on an individual basis. Were he to adopt the thinking of the activist leaders, it would cancel out the pleasure of engaging with others on his own terms, because he would have assimilated to the other side of the same ideological binary that authorizes the Kampani. As with Austerlitz and Julius, Sinha's protagonist confronts the form of community no longer available to him in a graveyard scene. In the ruins of the chemical factory, evidence of the dead has been

frozen in time, and Animal can hear the voices of the past reach out to him. Addressing him as a fellow victim and co-conspirator, the voices urge him to take revenge, an injunction to which he responds with contempt and defiance for the very label of victim:

> I say to the dead, who the fuck do you think you are, to threaten me with your reedy fucking complaints? If you had power you would have long ago taken your revenge, you are as powerless as us living, all you can do is wail in empty pipes… Another thing, I yell, descending. You can hurl what curses you like, but I've already lost my place in the human world, plenty of people already despise me, but you are dead and I'm alive. (275)

Animal simply will not accept the dead's attempts to interpellate him as a member of their destroyed community, devoid of both Austerlitz's melancholia and Julius' indifference. Instead, he understands himself as a living challenge to the Kampani's power.

If Animal hesitates to become part of a community, it is because he feels encumbered both by the lost population of the dead and Zafar's community of legal resistance that seeks to capitalize on that disfiguration. He makes this clear in his response to a crisis that threatens to reproduce the original disaster of Khaufpur. The protests against the possibility of a closed-door signing of a deal between Kampani lawyers and local politicians somehow ignite a fire at the factory that unleashes a second round of noxious gas into the city. Delirious from the pills he has taken in a gesture of

self-mutiliation, believing himself to have been partially responsible for Zafar's supposed death, Animal escapes Khaufpur into the surrounding wilderness. This environment, rather than facilitating an Edenic retreat, is filled with such nightmarish hallucinations and further evidence of the violence plaguing Khaufpur that he understands it as the "Apokalis" (353). To prevent self-annihilation, he unleashes, on a more grandiose scale, the same negatively creative logic that allowed him to craft his own world in the toxic spaces of the city:

> I am a small burning, freezing creature, naked and alone in a vast world, in a wilderness where there is neither food nor water and not a single friendly soul. But I'll not be bullied. If this self of mine doesn't belong in this world, I'll be my own world. I'll be a world complete in myself. My back shall be ice-capped mountains, my arse mount Meru, my eyes shall be the sun and moon, the gusts of my bowels the four winds, my body shall be the earth, lice its living things, but why stop there? I'll be my own Milky Way, comets shall whizz from my nose, when I shake myself pearls of sweat shall fly off and become galaxies, what am I but a complete miniature universe stumbling around inside this larger one, little does this tree realise that the small thing bumbling at its roots, scraping at its bark, clawing a way into its branches, is a fully fledged cosmos. (350)

Having turned away from both institutional structures of power and organic forms of community, Animal creates the conditions for his post-human existence. Animal is, as

Zafar tells him, "especially abled," which means "okay you don't walk on two legs like most people but you have skills and talents they don't" (23). The novel recognizes the extent to which the damage Animal has suffered has prepared him for the tipping point when the violence of economic exploitation gives rise to its own alternative, a gleeful realization of the kind of territory beyond fences where Michael K imagined living free of state authority.

In citing the way that Animal is "especially abled" to survive in this post-apocalyptic garden, the novel also questions Animal's belief that he is alone in this respect. If, as Zafar tells him, "my brother, you are a human being. A full and true human being," then the implication is not so much that Animal has lost the qualities that made him one of a kind but that we must revise the notion of community as a standardizing force (364). If the poison has indeed disfigured each of its victims in different ways, then perhaps that the category of the human demands to be expanded in the contemporary age.[88] Such a conception of community would be necessary to realizing at a collective level the uncivil consciousness that Coetzee's protagonists begin to manifest at an individual level. This would entail the human recognition of their fate

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[88] Donna Haraway suggests that the phrase "posthuman," so often mobilized in and around her work, might actually be too limiting a concept since the movement to the limits of—and beyond—the human is more properly understood as a problem of species. She suggests, in a 2006 interview, that by understanding how *Homo sapiens* came to be defined as such based on our perceived biological and philosophical distance or proximity to other species, we can get a better sense of what it would mean to change our understanding of what it means to be human, which would in turn change the way we think about those species alongside whom we live ("When We Have Never Been Human, What is to Be Done?" 2006).

in common with a heterogeneous population of living things that have always made a living among the damaged remains of what came before.

In keeping with the intellectual ethos of the Mauvaise Troupe Collective, such a community would have to recognize "something that can affect each and every person, beyond sociological or political characteristics" (Mauvaise 71). This recognition would in turn require "putting into question one's own positions" because

> [t]he motivations for engaging in struggle are as various as the kinds of action, and are sometimes just as incompatible. Overthrowing capitalism, defending a landscape and countryside dear to us, preservation of agricultural land, saving trees or concern about global warming—if it is not about giving up on what one believes, the articulation of aspirations calls for real finesse in order to make them reinforce rather than neutralize each other. (91)

If Animal is to belong to a community without relinquishing the mode of occupation that allows him to live without reference to neo-liberalism, he will have to recognize all ways of continuing to live in Khaufpur as acts of resistance in their own right. The forms of struggle will necessarily vary, as the Mauvaise Collective points out, but granting them validity is the only way to survive in a future that depends on co-evolution rather than competition. Animal indeed comes to recognize how he might blaze a trail for those who come after him, by registering and preserving his conviction through the refusal to normalize himself physically.

Given the opportunity to go to the United States and undergo an operation that could cure his misshaped spine, a possibility that holds forth the promise that he could become a full member of the human population, Animal implies that the human population needs to become more like him in order to thrive in the landscapes of the contemporary world. His reasoning goes like this:

> I reckon that if I have this operation, I will be upright, true, but to walk I will need the help of sticks. I might have a wheelchair, but how far will that get me in the gullis of Khaufpur? Right now I can run and hop and carry kids on my back. I can climb hard trees, I've gone up mountains, roamed in jungles. Is life so bad? If I'm an upright human, I would be one of millions, not even a healthy one at that. (366)

Animal is best equipped as he is—not as he could be with medical intervention designed to "humanize" him—to navigate both the urban spaces that neo-liberalism has abandoned and the violent unpredictability of natural landscapes reacting to systemic destruction. The novel thus suggests that he is hyper-typical of the "people of the Apokalis," that Sinha's novel predicts will continue to evolve in the future precisely *because* he is "the one and only Animal" (366). Representing a collective "people" capable of mobilizing an uncivil consciousness on a radically inclusive non-human scale, Animal ends his narration by predicting that "[t]omorrow there will be more of us" (366). As a new form of species that changes our understanding of what it means to be

human and/or to be in proximity to such new forms of life, as reflected in Donna Haraway's modification of her notion of the posthuman (Gane 140), Animal does not signal the end of the human; he inaugurates a new phase of existence that will understand its population as one that depends upon the proliferation of difference.

5. Conclusion: New Conditions of Possibility for Political Intelligence

I have identified two forms of the novel that have emerged in the last two decades to address the same questions that preoccupied J.M. Coetzee and W.G. Sebald in the late twentieth century, pushing their vision of a world past a horizon where the future became unimaginable. Coetzee's novels strive for a form of resistance that, in turning away from political authority, refuses to mimic its authoritarian strategies through direct opposition. In so refusing to acknowledge government, his narrator-protagonists inevitably stop short of imagining what the negation of such negative authority might look like. The question that Coetzee's oeuvre confronts, then, is how the novel can imagine such a political organization in positive terms without becoming authoritarian in its own right. Sebald situated the reader in a Western European landscape quite different in texture and style from the tenacious legacy of colonialism that Coetzee tries to think his way beyond. The Anglo-German writer's world is poised between the crumbling structures of European sovereignty and the massive post-war rebuilding projects that ushered in the age of neo-liberalism. This moment is defined by a relentless subsumption of differences that collapse the distinctions between friend and enemy, inside and outside, and human and natural to form a heterogeneous force field without any clear center or vertical system of power. In the leveling of sovereign states,

however, Sebald's broken and partial protagonists find it impossible to reconstitute a system of social relations based on the individual citizen-subject. The attempts to recover what once made experience cohere around the individual and determine his or her relation to society results, in *Rings,* in the collapse of meaningful distinctions between subject and object. This allows the narrator to merge with and animate any object—past or present, human or not—that he encounters in an ever-expanding schizophrenic co-constitution with a devastated landscape. Although the narrator becomes implicated within a seemingly unlimited plateau of places, times, people, and things with which he comes into contact, his mode of existence is nevertheless profoundly anti-social. He does not enter into any perceptible kind of relation to it, only a kind of overwhelming proximity that blurs the boundaries and affect between entities, rather than instantiating any kind of real emotional ties between them. Austerlitz, by contrast, maintains the phantasm of a whole self, even though a significant part of it was stolen and lost. This attachment to the missing piece that he believes can make him whole closes this protagonist off from emotional exchanges with those whom he encounters. He is instead trapped in his obsession with what has been lost. The discovery of individuals whose relation to the past was similarly cut off anticipates something like a community to come.

Teju Cole's *Open City* fully activates a neo-liberal forcefield that makes such part individuals the rule, rather than the exception. Rather than the boundless and yet

hopeful melancholy of Sebaldian protagonists, however, Cole offers one who thinks and interacts with the indifference of an algorithm to transform the experience of damaged subjects into narratives of suffering that can circulate as commodities. In this respect, Julius personifies the operations of the neo-liberal city that transforms space into real estate that is in a constant cycle of destruction, renovation, and commodification for ever greater profits. Indeed, we might say that the novel itself, in this case, ventriloquizes neo-liberalism, as it reproduces the accounts of those damaged by the continuing catastrophe of 9/11 with a similarly cyclical logic. Through Julius, the novel transforms individuals' stories from their origins in therapeutic exchange, to anecdotes, to case histories, to the subjective content of a novel. This process of circulation increases the cultural capital of such accounts with each iteration. If Julius is the hyper-typical neo-liberal individual, then Indra Sinha's Animal is the other face of the neo-liberal protagonist, the equally hyper-typical non-citizen whom the former has dispossessed. Below New York City, the hidden grave sites of former slaves, which are known to exist yet displaced without a second thought for the sake of valuable construction initiatives, indicate how dispossessed figures in the global metropolis are first absorbed within and then dismissed and buried in the name of progress. A Nigerian immigrant himself, in another life Julius could well have been one of the dead and dispossessed who laid the foundations of the modern global economy. But in the contemporary era, his cosmopolitan resources and neo-liberal savvy make him the counterpoint to Sinha's

Animal. Both economic dispossessor and dispossessed imply the existence of the other, making both equally partial protagonists and two sides of the same coin.

Animal, as the name suggests, is a questionably human, otherwise nameless protagonist, once a slum dweller in the industrial city of Khaufpur, and now the inhabitant of a toxic space that we can recognize as a fictional version of Bhopal. Abandoned by the agents of global capitalism once the region became an international embarrassment and economic liability, Khaufpur now exists for most of its residents as a toxic testament to the pervasiveness of catastrophe. Disfigured by the explosion of the chemical plant and its release of a toxic cloud into the surrounding environment, Animal cannot be considered a partial individual in the sense that Coetzee's and Sebald's protagonists can. Like Julius, he embraces his damage as a natural and even advantageous part of himself and thrives in the post-catastrophic environment to which he is perfectly adapted. In sharp contrast to the fluidity with which Julius turns other people's subjective experiences to his benefit, Animal refuses to submit himself to the therapeutic industries of global capitalism who would like to make a poster child of his rehabilitation. Instead, he plants both hands and feet on one of the infamously uninhabitable areas that neo-liberalism cannot reclaim. Animal's occupation and inhabitation of this space serves as a reminder of the failures and limits of capitalist power. In his refusal to meet the human standard that would separate him from a community damaged beyond repair, Animal becomes one of the first of a new order of

protagonists who succeeds in negating the negativity implied by his animality, elevating his state of being above the normatively human.[89] He is, in this respect, a positive model of the post-human that seizes on the material at hand to cultivate the spaces overlooked or abandoned by the neo-liberal order. Ideally suited for the damaged and degraded conditions he has inherited, Animal does not set about as Julius does to extract value from the people stuck in that space. When Animal is able to assert himself and thrive without accepting any form of aid—whether from medical personnel, political activists, or legal representatives of economic liability organizations—Sinha's novel not only reveals the cracks in a system that purports to be progressive and totalizing but exploits their generative possibilities.

The goal of late-stage capitalism, as the Mauvaise Troupe Collective points out, is "that we become synthetic in our turn, that we lose that which makes of us something of an animal: our odour" (*The Zad and NoTAV* 116). It takes a protagonist like Animal to hold on to the human and animalistic qualities that can neither be repaired nor engineered by the architects of neo-liberalism. By embracing what is foul and ruined,

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[89] Michael K is one of the earliest protagonists to have gestured in this direction of a new sociality. Where his passive resistance and connection with nature at times made him seem more a part of a community of vegetables than humans, in later contemporary fiction the normative human is left behind in favor of beings who connect over and above human limitations. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) understands clones as marvels of scientific achievement who operate for much of their lives with—and connect over—the inevitability of their required self-sacrifice. Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* (2010) imagines a future world in which criminals are endowed with extrasensory abilities and animal familiars as a means of establishing a collective that cannot be contained by the limits of human law. Mohsin Hamid envisions the plight of the migrant in *Exit West* (2017) as the occasion for forms of travel, hospitality, and community-formation so charged and instantaneous that they arise through magic means.

Animal meets such entities on territory that they have lost and stakes his claim. The explosion of genre fiction over the last decades takes the condition of a world where economic value has been systematically extracted from natural, personal, and intellectual forms of life, and extrapolates from that condition a post-apocalyptic reality that stretches the conventions of realism—especially its defamiliarized description of local places, people, and practices—beyond the limits of the genre.

Returning now to Colson Whitehead's New York City, we should be able to appreciate fully the logic by which the zombie horde asserts itself as a population of Animal's post-human "People of the Apokalis." Ultimately, the population with which the protagonist affiliates at the end of days demonstrates a capacity not only to seize the abandoned and zoned-off parts of the world, but also to deny—in what is revealed to be a strategic fashion—what remains of the human race the chance to resuscitate their former reality. The sweeper team member Gary, in an ill-timed act of bravado, offers to have his fortune read by a straggler whom the team has been ordered to put down. Spitz registers his distaste for the delight that Gary takes in toying with the hand of an unwitting straggler, who appears to be frozen in a perpetual re-enactment of her former occupation.

But what Whitehead invites his readers to realize when his characters do not is that the fortune-teller is not the kind of post-Fordist office drone compelled to repeat the same limited behaviors in death as in life that would make her into a straggler, but a skel

who has developed a kind of cunning that humans were unwilling to grant them to this point. By the time that Mark Spitz notices "the tiny smile engraved into the fortune-teller's black lips, as if she enjoyed the joke as well, or an altogether different amusement, the exact grain and texture of which only she could appreciate," it is too late (283). Having bitten off Gary's thumb and infected him, the skel is dispatched by another team member with a bullet to the head, but not before smiling once again at Gary, as if to welcome him into the population of the undead. Nor is this intelligence the fortune teller's alone. Indeed, what appears to be a haphazard trickle of skels into the city, strikes the protagonist as a man-made tsunami: "The ocean had overtaken the streets," as the novel describes the scene, "as if the news programs' global warming simulations had come to pass and the computer-generated swells mounted to drown the great metropolis. Except it was not water that flooded the grid but the dead" (302). Although the zombies are not the kind of unified force that would see one another as friends, they are all attracted to the same goal. By storming the barricades of the zoned-off city, the skels overpower their categorical containment, thus erasing all partitions and categories that would separate them in space and type. As Mark Spitz watches the creatures carry out a siege of the barriers around the city, "[t]he dead clambered up the bodies of the fallen and were rent by the artillery, contributing to the heap, and these latest were trampled by the next wave, which was cut down in turn. The corpses entwined and tangled in a mutilated pile half as high as the wall" (303). This breach of

the "safe" zones of the world's most iconic city constitutes, in effect, a spectacular military defeat of the enclosures and protection of property associated with Hobbes since day one. This fall, however, does not signal a return to the state of nature that constitutes a war of all against all—Mark Spitz knew that from his early sense of how the skels shared their kill—but the dawn of something different.

The success of the skels is made possible in large part because their cooperative hunting tendencies, previously noted by Mark Spitz, evolve throughout the novel to indicate that the undead have achieved the ability to share information via a kind of unconscious transmission that does not compromise the equality and heterogeneity of the mass. In this respect, the success of the undead cultivates a form of political intelligence resembling that shared by the independent farmers engaged in the zad and NoTAV struggles. Without the temptation to divide themselves into friends and enemies, and without demanding conformity of any kind, such groups prove capable of using even spaces designated as hubs of neo-liberal power for their own purposes. In such instances, the "revolution is to have created a people, without a nation, without boundaries, and without making itself into a society. It is an almost imaginary people" (86). When the ironically named Mark Spitz closes the novel by walking "into the sea of the dead," and declares, "Fuck it…You have to learn to swim sometime," he is renouncing property and even deprivileging private bodily autonomy, joining those who value the freedom to move and grow above the rights and protections of the citizen

subject. Spitz also recalls that in naming the protected spaces of New York City "Zone One," the Corporation indicated the long-term plan to establish such zones sequentially around the world, until the entire planet had been taken back and the foreign enemy they saw in the skels had been eradicated. The novel's end makes it clear that rather than triumphing over the forces they have designated as evil, those same individuals had actually brought on their own presumed extinction by exponentially increasing the numbers of the dispossessed. More motivated to devote financial resources to the development of real estate than to that of a vaccine or cure, the humans in Whitehead's novel seem to believe their relative metaphysical "goodness" in contrast to the skels will immunize them against the enemy they so desperate try to barricade beyond the city. There could hardly be a clearer repudiation of this logic than the "tattoo of bodies bouncing" that provides the new soundtrack to the city and suggests the way that the citizen subject has been transformed into an inert example of collateral damage yet again, this time by the dispossessed non-human population that will settle this new world (312).

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