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Justyna Włodarczyk

Beyond Bizarre: Nature, Culture and the Spectacular Failure of B.F. Skinner's Pigeon-Guided Missiles[1]

Abstract: The article uses posthumanism and animal studies as a framework for making sense of B.F. Skinner's wartime project of training pigeons to guide missiles, with emphasis on explaining the negative response of the donors and the public. The article first considers the hypothesis that the donors' incredulity was evoked by the species of the animal. During World War II the United States began a massive program for the training of dogs for the military, and the campaign received unanimously positive publicity in the media. Possibly, thus, dogs were perceived as capable of bravery and sacrifice while pigeons were not. However, messenger pigeons had been traditionally incorporated into the war machine and were perceived as heroic. Thus, the analysis moves on to suggest that the perception of the project as ridiculous was related to the type of behavior performed by the animals: a behavior perceived as trained (artificially acquired) and not instinctive. The analysis then shifts into how the distinction between what is perceived as instinctive (natural) and learned (artificial) behavior influences the reception of different performances involving animals. Performances built around "natural" behaviors generate much stronger positive responses, even if the naturalness of these behaviors is a carefully crafted effect.

Keywords: animal studies, behaviorism, behavioral science, positive reinforcement, B.F. Skinner, pigeons, animal training, instinctive behavior, World War II, military animals, bioweapons

> Nearly all modern techniques of social conditioning
> were first established with animal experiments.
> John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*

B.F. Skinner's wartime project of training pigeons to guide missiles to their targets is a largely forgotten episode in the history of both behaviorist science and American warfare. It is sometimes mentioned as an oddity, a military curiosity similar to other ill-fated attempts to weaponize unusual species of animals, such as the army's World War II work on the bat bomb or the Cold War project "Operation Big Itch," a plan of using fleas as bioweapons (Lockwood; Hamblin). What differentiates Skinner's project from the ones mentioned above is that the pigeons were not simply to be dropped from a plane along with explosives, but were to be trained in steering the missiles by pecking at a target. Through cables attached to the birds' heads, the pecking would mechanically steer the missile until it reached its target. The mission was supposed to end with the detonation of the bomb and the self-inflicted death of the pigeons. However the funding for the project was revoked in October 1944, and the pigeon bombs remained one of the military's many "bizarre problems of wartime research" (Capshew 854). One of the reasons why so little has been written about this project is a problem with conceptualizing a framework through which it could be explored. Other than the "cabinet of curiosities" narrative, there have not existed many strategies that

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make it possible to discuss this project in greater depth from an academic perspective: it is not seen as contributing to any body of disciplinary knowledge. It has also been difficult—for reasons described in detail in this article—to incorporate the story of the kamikaze pigeons into the classic popular narratives of animals in warfare, i.e. stories of heroism and courage. However, perhaps the recent emergence of new perspectives like posthumanism and animal studies can provide a framework for making sense of "Project Pigeon." Perhaps, a re-examination of the pigeon bombs can also, somewhat synergically, offer a new perspective on behaviorism: the methodology that gave rise to Skinner's pigeon-training endeavor.

Behaviorist psychology, as embodied in the North American context in the figure of B.F. Skinner, is rarely mentioned in genealogies of either animal studies or posthumanism. It does not appear productive for creating narratives that add to the current questioning of anthropocentrism and the growing interest in nonhuman subjectivity. On the contrary, behaviorism's focus on techniques of controlling behavior, whether the behavior of nonhuman animals or of humans, reads like the pinnacle of anthropocentric arrogance, not increased sensitivity to "minds other than ours," to quote C.L Morgan, a British scientist whose influence on American behaviorism is undoubtable (Valsiner 153). Not to mention that within psychology radical behaviorism remains something of a shameful episode; dismissed and destined to be forgotten in due time. As Katherine Hayles has famously put it, in the behaviorist approach the mind is a "'black box' whose contents are unknown" (Hayles 94). The development of the neuro sciences has cracked this black box that behaviorism could not open, thus making the conceptual framework of behaviorism obsolete. It cannot be disputed that science has now moved in a different direction, and the (post)humanities that form a dialogue with it have followed. While Skinner's "learning theory" still holds some use outside of the academia, in the real world, so to speak—as evidenced, for example, by Donna Haraway's description of her uneasy acceptance of a behaviorist-based training approach for her beloved dog (Haraway 43–47)—even there behaviorism has become bracketed: yes, it is useful, but its limitations are obvious.[2]

Yet this article proposes a cautious recycling of behaviorism: a re-examination of Skinner's wartime project of training pigeons to guide missiles; not with the goal of salvaging the accuracy of Skinner's assumptions about learning, but with the hope that reading Skinner's experiments against the grain, without much reverence for behaviorist dogma, can shed light on issues that contemporary posthumanist and animal studies scholars find important. These include, for example, questions about how the formation of analogies across species boundaries works and how the general public's perception of species difference, culturally encoded but perceived as "natural," has very palpable effects for the animals themselves and for the human-controlled projects they are involved in. Conscious of its limitations and critiques, I would like to use behaviorism as a provisional tool and methodological framework. Behaviorism can be something of a strategy of defamiliarization: a technology of explaining the behavior of both humans and non-humans that has been so deeply rejected in the contemporary humanities, that

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2   For more information on how dog training has moved beyond behaviorism since Haraway's report in *The Companion Species Manifesto* see Michał Pręgowski's article "Your Dog is Your Teacher: Dog Training Beyond Radical Behaviorism."

it offers a novel perspective. To put it bluntly, in a behaviorist framework, a pigeon guiding a missile, i.e. carrying out an assignment which is going to result in the bird's self-destruction, is executing precisely the same task as a mine detection dog seeking a mine (which could also potentially kill the dog): the animal is correctly performing a behavior for which it has been effectively trained using techniques based on positive reinforcement. It is working under the assumption that it is going to receive a reward when it completes the task successfully. However, in the public eye—as grasped from media accounts of Skinner's pigeons and contemporary mine detection dogs—the range of significations of these two animal performances could not be more radically divergent. The dog's behavior is interpreted as a performance of courage, dedication and sacrifice, while the pigeon's evokes disbelief and laughter (which, coincidentally, is the major reason why Project Pigeon was discontinued).

Behaviorism for Posthumanists

A few more words on the attempts to conceptualize behaviorism and its legacy are due before I can proceed to the training of kamikaze pigeons. Hayles's references to behaviorism in *When We Became Posthuman* derive from an attempt to tackle a different issue than the one taken on in this article: the use of analogy in conceptualizing the relationships between humans and machines. Hayles pins on behaviorism the popularization of the erroneous assumption that "because humans and machines sometimes behave similarly, they are essentially alike" (Hayles 94), an assumption made possible only because of the lack of access to the contents of the "black box." However, it is only Skinner's late work—his attempts at producing a teaching machine—that validates such criticism. The bulk of Skinner's laboratory research pertained to animals—not machines—and the possibly erroneous extrapolating had to do with using the results of the animal experiments to generalize about human behavior (Richelle 66–72). It has to be added, somewhat cautiously, that the idea of generalizing across species boundaries does carry with it some potential of human-animal boundary-blurring. Recognition that humans are just another animal is a concept that may spike the interest of scholars in animal studies and the broader posthumanities. While Arthur Koestler in his immensely influential *The Ghost in the Machine* complained about behaviorism's "ratomorphic view of man" (Koestler 17), this concept may actually sound appealing to today's cultural scholars, raised on Deleuze and Guattari's famous injunction to "write like a rat" (Deleuze and Guattari 240), which has by now been re-read and taken to heart by scores of scholars who see animality as a desirable quality in literature. The de-anthropomorphization of human behavior, through the consistent application of Morgan's canon—that is, British scientist Conwy Lloyd Morgan's exhortation against anthropomorphism in interpreting the behavior of animals—could attract scholars working on reconceptualizing the human.[3] Even if we now know that

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3 For more on how behaviorism contributed to re-conceptualizing medical ethics, see Cathy *Gere's Pain Pleasure and the Greater Good*. Gere tells a narrative of medical ethics evolving from "the greater good" concept to "patient's rights." In this narrative, behaviorism is the last stand of the "greater good" concept at a time when considering the rights of individual patients was becoming the dominant paradigm. Gere's account is one possible explanation of the intense controversy

many of behaviorism's findings about animal learning do not stand up to contemporary ethological scrutiny, what remains exciting about Skinner's philosophical project is its radical refusal to separate humans from other animals.

However, while behaviorism shares some assumptions with the posthumanist discourses now used to dismantle enlightenment humanism—for example, it is a decidedly monistic worldview in its refusal to accept the mind-body dualism and its insistence on the materiality of the body—it completely lacks the self-awareness of itself as a discourse. For Skinner and for many of his followers also outside the academic world, behaviorism was not just a theory, it was the theory of learning. Behaviorism saw itself as science, blissfully unaware of its situatedness and discursive character. Skinner was deeply convinced that his technologies of behavior modification would be beneficial for the world if their application was in the hands of scientists, whom he saw as committed to both a search for truth and a project dedicated to promoting "the greater good" (Gere 165–66). It is also in the context of the greater good that Skinner viewed the role of laboratory animals; much in line with the long history of the use of animals as models of human bodies in experiments in physiology (Guerrini). There does exist a significant distinction in the way behaviorism approached the lab animal and the way that, for example, nineteenth-century vivisectionists did: to go back to the black box metaphor and extend it slightly by thinking of the entire body as the mysterious black box, the experiments that aimed at establishing the physiology of organisms, did indeed look inside the black box (though with tools much cruder than those at the disposal of contemporary neuroscience), while Skinner's behaviorism was interested only in placing the black box in different (and highly controlled) environments to establish how it could be made to respond in particular ways.[4] Not to mention that elimination of punishment (and, by extension, physical pain) from the process of learning was Skinner's ultimate recommendation for both animal trainers and human educators.[5]

Of course, Skinner's interest was never truly in the animals themselves; it was in the discovery of general principles that could be applied to humans, non-humans and their interactions with the environment. It is from this perspective, Skinner's almost total lack of concern with species specificity, that the ethological attack on Skinner

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generated by behaviorism and its eventual passing into obsoleteness.

4   This is not to say that other behaviorist scientists, largely inspired by Skinner, were not interested in understanding how the brain works. The most famous experiment which constituted a turn away from Skinner's radical behaviorism toward contemporary neuroscience, and one which utilized a classic Skinner box, was James Olds and Peter Milner's study of rats implanted with electrodes in their brains self-stimulating the pleasure centers in their brains (1954). Even though Skinner clearly knew of these experiments and the ones that followed in their wake, he did not ever implant electrodes in the brain of his experimental subjects. Unlike e.g. Pavlov, Skinner also never surgically altered the bodies of the animals he was working with.

5   Skinner's forays into the practical world of animal training took the shape of several articles published in popular magazines, largely in the 1950s. These include the *Look* article "Harvard-Trained Dog" (1952) and the *Scientific American* article "How to Train Animals" (1952). In all of these Skinner argued for refraining from punishment, though not due to purely ethical reasons. Skinner argued that his earlier research had proven that basing behavior modification programs on punishment was not effective.

originated (Richelle 65–66). It is also from this perspective that the humanities have attacked behaviorism, as evidenced by Koestler's influential book and the scores of other articles that contributed to Skinner's gradual scientific demise, Chomsky's review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* constituting the most famous individual example of such critique (Chomsky). Finally, it is also the perspective that dominated in public opinion's negative reactions to Skinner's publications, especially his famous 1945 *Ladies Home Journal* article, titled "Baby in a Box," which publicized Skinner's so-called baby-tender, also known as the AirCrib, a machine that Skinner designed to ease childcare duties. Angry readers accused Skinner of equating babies with lab animals.[6] It is behaviorism's ease of erasing species boundaries, its "one solution fits all species" approach, coupled with the refusal to consider higher emotions as underlying factors of behavior, that accounts for much of the controversy generated by Skinner's work.

However, a posthumanist reading of Skinner can also take behaviorism's universalizing and turn it around: instead of decrying the animal analogies as humiliating for humans, it can question the anthropocentrism inherent in such complaints. Instead of ridiculing Skinner's idea of blending the organic organism with mechanical elements, it can see this experiment as a prefiguration of the figure of the cyborg; suggesting another possible line of descent for posthumanist thought. These are most definitely readings that go against the grain of Skinner's intentions, but ones that are facilitated by his acceptance of cross-species analogies in learning. If humans and animals learn according to the same principles, then it is only a small mental leap to assume that their situations as decision makers can also have some sort of metaphorical correspondence, a possibility picked up by Ana Teixeira Pinto in her essay "The Pigeon in the Machine."

Reading Skinner's Pigeon Bomb

The cross-species analogy at work in Project Pigeon is—ironically—a kind of reverse analogy to the one usually associated with behaviorism: the assumption that if animals have been proven to be capable of behaving in a particular way, so can humans. Here, the analogy is that if humans can perform a certain behavior, so can animals. Oddly, the behavior is a suicide mission. While in this case the analogy is imposed on the project post-factum, as Skinner obtained funding from General Mills for working on Project Pigeon in the summer of 1942 and the first Japanese kamikaze attacks took place in 1944, it is not unwarranted (Capshew 842). Skinner was conscious of this analogy and suggested it himself: In the second part of his autobiography, he includes excerpts of an undated letter he wrote to colleague Dean Tate, where he comments directly on the Japanese kamikaze attacks: "Perhaps we can get American morale as high, but if not I have perfectly competent substitutes" (Skinner, *The Shaping of a Behaviorist* 256–57).

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6   Many of the letters sent to the editors of *Ladies' Home Journal* and directly to Skinner are available in the B.F. Skinner Archives at Harvard University. Here follows an excerpt from a representative critical letter: "Caging this baby up like an animal just to relieve the Mother of a little more work." B.F. Skinner Papers. HUGFP 60.10, Box 1. Harvard University Archives. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Sacrificing the lives of animals was, not surprisingly, a non-issue (Skinner, "Pigeons in a Pelican" 28).

In his autobiography, Skinner recalls the story of how he came up with the project of training birds to guide missiles to their targets: "a crackpot idea, born on the wrong side of the tracks intellectually speaking"(Skinner, "Pigeons in a Pelican" 28). The explanatory narrative provided by Skinner can be read as entangled with two concepts: cross-species analogy and biomimicry. Biomimicry is a term that has recently become popular in relation to design "inspired by nature;" that is, based on patterns observed in the non-human world.[7] The biomimicry influence on the pigeon-guided missiles comes from Skinner's observation of a flock of birds flying in formation alongside a train that Skinner was traveling in: "Suddenly, I saw them as 'devices' with excellent vision and extraordinary maneuverability. Could they not guide a missile?" (Skinner, *The Shaping of a Behaviorist* 241). This "Eureka" moment deserves a closer look.

Surprisingly, Skinner's explanation has always been taken at face value: he saw a flock of birds and that made him think of the possibility of creating a pigeon-steered bomb (Capshew 839–40). Yet, this is not a straightforward reasoning process. It was not, after all, the birds' ability to fly that caused the sudden revelation. Rather, it was the fact that they did so in unison, in such orderly manner. The synchronized behavior of the birds at the same time reminded Skinner of the internal workings of a mechanical device, consisting of multiple elements working in synchrony with others, and suggested the possibility of exerting similarly intricate control over the animal in order to induce synchrony in a complex mechanical setup. The animal put the system into order and guaranteed its precision. In other words, it seemed easier and more reliable to Skinner to have the organic element control the mechanical elements of a device than vice versa. This conviction—Skinner's staunch belief in the greater effectiveness and ease of controlling organic versus inorganic matter—is one of the explanations for the disbelief Skinner encountered, a fact duly recorded by Skinner who wrote in the "Pigeons in the Pelican" account of the project that "[t]he basic difficulty, of course, lay in convincing a dozen or so distinguished physical scientists that the behavior of a pigeon could be adequately controlled" (Skinner, "Pigeons in a Pelican" 33). However, it must be noted that the problem the engineers were struggling with at the time was indeed a problem of lack of adequate tools for controlling the deathly mechanical device from a distance: problems were encountered not with the behavior of the birds, but with the mechanical linkages translating the birds' pecking into steering movements (Capshew 145). In a way then, Skinner's beliefs were vindicated: the birds were performing without fail.

The birds' behavior was to result from an intricately designed human-directed behavior conditioning program. Such optimistic beliefs about the possibilities of behavior-modification account for the criticisms of behaviorism that suggest it holds a "blank slate" theory of mind (see, e.g. Pinker), but it must be emphasized that here

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7   Biomimicry is a fascinating concept that has been taken up within the broader environmental humanities, but there is no direct point in discussing the different understandings and applications of biomimicry here. The popular science book credited for popularizing the concept is Janine Benyus's *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*.

(and in many other instances) Skinner begins with an instinctive behavior (that of pecking), which is consequently augmented through a behavior-modification regimen. The pigeons steered the missile not by biting, pulling strings or turning a steering wheel using their beaks, but by continuously performing a naturally occurring species-specific behavior, i.e. pecking at the image of the target of the bomb: the success of the enterprise depends on their ability to maintain an instinctive behavior for a period longer than they "naturally" would. The kind of biomimicry implemented in Skinner's design required the retention of the organic component: the bird was placed in the machine and remained there until the mission was completed (and the bird dead). For Skinner, this was the solution to the shortcomings of science at the time; but the gist of the effort of science was most definitely going in the direction of refinement of electronics, as pointed out in Ana Teixeira Pinto's analysis of the project alongside the development of cybernetics (Teixeira Pinto 67–69). What accounts for the "backward" character of Skinner's project from a scientific point of view was specifically his interest in controlling organic matter. This is why he himself calls his idea "born on the wrong side of the tracks, intellectually speaking" and continues to repeat that "my colleagues and I knew that, in the eyes of the world, we were crazy" (Skinner, "Pigeons in a Pelican" 36).

From the perspective of other scientists and potential donors, Skinner's project seemed outlandish because of its reliance on the organic element, which—unlike Skinner—they saw as the weak link of the device. From the perspective of a posthumanist cultural critic, we could recognize in the entire apparatus a familiar figure: a cyborgish blending of the organic and the mechanic. A full discussion of cyborgs exceeds the scope of this paper, but almost any culturally literate member of the public can instantly evoke examples of fictional cyborgs whose *raison d'etre* has been an increase of the organic body's destructive powers; these are usually figures with potential military or policing applications. Augmenting the capabilities of animals in order to turn them into more efficient weapons of war is a scenario both from the world of science fiction and from actual warfare, though one most often associated with specific species: dogs, horses and—to a lesser extent—elephants (Kistler). In military operations, the strategy of referring to animals participating in warfare as military equipment serves the purpose of legitimating their presence on the battlefield, as Nicole Shukin's reading of the term "K9" makes clear. Shukin suggests that the abbreviated homophone places the animals "in technological series with other weaponry like the M-16 family of combat rifles or the UH-60 series of Black Hawk helicopters" (Shukin 147–48). Yet, this is not the case here: the pigeon bomb does not terrify. What stands out in this case is the almost complete incompatibility between the goals and public reception: the army's desire for an effective weapon of mass destruction and the general perception of the project as ridiculous.

If anything, both at the time when the project was operative and at the time of the story's release to the public, in 1959, the images of pigeons in the bomb apparatus elicited only chuckles and laughter. The behaviorist tendency to ignore species specificity, with the assumption that all organisms are capable of reliable performance when trained using operant techniques, backfired, as neither the potential funders nor the general public shared these assumptions. This became painfully clear in the media

coverage of Skinner's discussion of the army's and navy's work with pigeons after the projects' declassification. Skinner first spoke about the project in a significant setting, where he knew media would be present: at a conference of the American Psychological Association, where he was being recognized with a special award (Capshew 856). The media indeed took note, and newspaper headlines played with every possible pun using the term "bird brain," mercilessly blasting Skinner's ideas. Titles of the popular press articles from September 1959 included: "Bird Brain Guidance Offered for Missiles," "Pigeon to Guide a Missile? Idea is a Bit Misguided," "Birds to Steer Guided Missiles? Navy Finally Pigeon-Holes Idea" (Skinner, *B.F. Skinner Papers Collection*, HUGFP 60.75, Box 2). While reliability of the organic element of the weapon was, to a certain extent, also a concern of the popular narratives, a more obvious one was the questioning of the military potential not of the organic in general, but of the pigeon in particular.

It should be added that pigeons had been extensively used in the war apparatus before Skinner's project. Homing pigeons had been deployed to carry messages since antiquity and after their successful performance in World War II, thirty-two British pigeons were recognized with the Dickin Medal (Allen 118). The US, at the time of World War II, also operated a homing pigeon training facility and, at the peak of its wartime activity, the US armed forces had 54,000 messenger pigeons (Allen 117). In other words, not only had pigeons been successfully used in military operations, their performance had been interpreted as valiant, to allude to the title of Disney's 2005 animated production about a messenger pigeon. Therefore, species alone could not account for the ridicule generated by Project Pigeon. Pigeons could be perceived as heroic, just somehow not suicide pigeons guiding missiles.[8]

One possible factor explaining this discrepancy—i.e. the situation in which messenger pigeons can be, and have been, viewed as heroic, while kamikaze pigeons evoke ridicule and disbelief—may have to do with the perception of instinctive behavior versus acquired behavior in animals. The behavior of homing pigeons is seen as largely instinctive, though it is an instinct that can be harnessed and molded to suit human needs. It is seen as being in the birds' nature to want to return home; the training involved in preparing such birds for wartime action is seen as based on strengthening instincts which are already hardwired into the animal. The perception of instinctive behavior as valorous is even more visible in the case of dogs used by the military: the training of "K9s" is seen as tapping into the dog's "natural" desire to cooperate with the human; and an equally "natural" capability for bravery and sacrifice. The "naturalness" of these tendencies is, of course, hardly ever questioned in the resulting narratives, even though it has been heavily ingrained in humans' perception of their relationships with dogs through purely cultural measures in the form of countless feel-good stories about canine heroism.

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8   It should be added at this point that many armies have attempted to weaponize unusual species of animals in different ways. During the Cold War the US Army financed projects related to the use of, e.g. disease-infected fleas and mosquitoes as biological weapons. Similarly, to the pigeon bomb, these stories are usually told using the narrative of the military "cabinet of curiosities": a framework that does not really probe the significance of these efforts, but merely lists them as oddities of the past. A fascinating exception is Jacob Hamblin's *Arming Mother Nature*, in which the author writes these attempts into the narrative of the "total war," a concept that Hamblin sees as allowing potential of atrocities even greater than those committed in World War II.

The ease of enlisting canines in nation-building strategies has been thoroughly analyzed by historians and cultural studies scholars (Hediger; Glenney Boggs; Diamond-Lenow; Shukin). However, an observation that may be useful for conceptualizing differences in the perception of homing pigeons (seen to be acting on the basis of an instinct, but a sublimated form of instinct) versus suicide pigeons (seen to be acting against the basic instinct of self-preservation) comes from a text not on war dogs, but from one about a famous homecoming story, Erica Fudge's analysis of *Lassie Come-Home*. In *Pets*, Fudge tries to make sense of the power this sentimental story continues to have over the human imagination and concludes that its potency results from Knight's skillful blending of two potentially contradictory explanations about the human-animal relationship: on the one hand, Lassie's arduous journey to be with her humans makes her almost overcome her status as animal (makes her capable of being seen as possessing qualities ascribed to humans); on the other, the dog's return "is all the more natural and timeless because the return belongs with nature (the animal, instinct) and not with culture (human, reason)" (Fudge 28). Strangely, Lassie transcends nature by yielding to instinct. The same mechanism can be seen at work in the messenger pigeon stories: the birds manage to achieve the status of heroes by yielding to the mysterious homing instinct, by doing what they have been (slightly mysteriously) bred to do through the process of domestication.

Nothing like this is at work in the reception of the bomber pigeon narrative, where the animal is maybe not a terror-evoking monster, but a ridicule-generating freak committing something of a crime against "nature." The bird is seen as performing a behavior that comes purely from the repertoire of "culture": a behavior that it has been taught to do. The fact that the behavior leads to the bird's self-destruction strengthens the perception of the activity not as an expression of avian intelligence, but the exact opposite—proof of "bird brain" stupidity. A similar contradiction has often been at work in various narratives of dog training, where canines engaged in activities they have been bred to perform (i.e. a hunting dog flushing out a bird) are seen as graceful and noble, while the performance of activities that seem unrelated to the semi-teleological explanation of the dog's purpose are seen as freakish and undignified, i.e. hunting dogs performing tricks (Włodarczyk 46–51). In some contexts, a trained dog has been seen as exhibiting intelligence, while in others receptiveness to training is nothing more but an expression of blind obedience, the opposite of intelligence.

Complete information about the training techniques was not part of the story's full press release in 1959, but the papers did say that the birds were rewarded with corn: a supposedly insignificant tidbit of information that does, however, have impact on the general perception of the birds' mission. Using food rewards in animal training (especially dog training) has been quite contentious and, historically, methods based on food rewards have been perceived as a form of bribery and deemed incompatible with tasks seen as tied to performing one's duties; one reason why the uniformed professions were initially reluctant in adopting operant conditioning (Włodarczyk 90–95). The methods are also significant in light of my proposed plan of using behaviorism against the grain and as a strategy of defamiliarization. Firstly, the behavior chosen as the primary method for guiding the missile was the bird's pecking at an image of the target (while being placed inside the apparatus, of course). This

means that the entire endeavor was based on acknowledgment of the bird's ability to recognize the target by sight alone (an ability absolutely not unique to all non-human animals, one which would not necessarily have the best chances of success with, for example, a canine subject). Secondly, pecking is one of the most common behaviors in the pigeon's ethological repertoire, a fact emphasized by Skinner on the first page of his 1944 report on the progress of the project submitted to the sponsor, General Mills: "The response is one of the commonest in the natural repertoire of the bird, and is closely related to hunger, which is used as motivation. Hence, it is possible to reach a very high probability of response" (Skinner, *B.F. Skinner Papers*, HUGFP 60.50, Box 2). In other words, despite the accusations of radical behaviorism's disregard for species specificity, Skinner was well aware that the animal's ethological repertoire of behavior patterns was a proper starting point for teaching behaviors that were to be reliable and maintainable over a longer period of time. In this case, at least, the denial of nature so often attributed to behaviorism is a gross oversimplification.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the conditioning regimen employed with the birds was based on Skinner's trademark application of operant conditioning, roughly understood as strengthening or extinguishing a behavior by utilizing environmental consequences. Here, the pecking behavior was strengthened through the application of specific schedules of reinforcement; i.e. the birds were rewarded with food for increasing their speed of pecking at the target and maintaining the pecking behavior over a longer period of time. It is clear that the birds were not physically punished at any point of the training process. They were carefully and methodically accustomed to being inside the apparatus; they were conditioned via positive reinforcement to peck at the image of a target and were later asked to peck while inside the apparatus, their pecking being additionally strengthened through applications of reinforcement schedules discussed by Skinner both in the partial and in the final reports. Clearly, as is obvious from the sheer number of pages devoted to these issues in the reports, the most interesting part of the training process for Skinner was fine-tuning the reinforcement schedules.

To sum up, it is safe to say that direct compulsion and physical pain were never experienced by the birds and the only negative consequences for the subjects that did not live up to the standards of the experiments were that they were excluded from the project. This conclusion, of course, makes sense only if we equate compulsion with physical pain, which Skinner indeed did. Understandably, it does not make sense once we think of the birds' well-being in a broader perspective. That said, Skinner was not ignorant of the fact that the birds were being used, their instincts manipulated to suit the needs of humans. In the 1959 APA speech, Skinner openly says: "The lower organism is not used because it is more sensitive than man—after all, the kamikaze did very well—but because it is readily expendable" (Skinner, "Pigeons in a Pelican" 28). However, regardless of which perspective one assumes, it cannot be contested that not only was Skinner able to make pigeons peck reliably and continuously for extended periods of time, the birds performed the behavior with vigor and apparent pleasure. The birds, quite obviously, were not aware of the end they were to meet once they completed their task during the actual mission.

More recently, the training procedures developed by Skinner, the very ones employed with the pigeons in "Project Pigeon," have been used with great success

in the training of, for example, military dogs. Dogs had also been employed in U.S. military operations during World War II, so at the same time when Skinner was working on the pigeon-guided bombs, but their training was not carried out using protocols based exclusively on positive reinforcement. In fact, a preliminary mine detection dog training program established by the U.S. Army during World War II failed primarily because of inadequate training methods. The dogs were mostly trained using aversion: an electric shock was delivered to the dog when it came into contact with a mine or a trip wire. As Michael Lemisch writes: "This simple technique taught the dog that anything buried in the ground was suspicious by its very nature and could hurt him" (93–94). Unfortunately for the army, the results of such training proved absolutely unreliable.

This is why the training of contemporary mine detection dogs is a good analogy for the training of pigeon suicide bombers. Mine detections dogs (MDDs), since the beginnings of their utilization for humanitarian-relief efforts in the early 1990s, have been trained using Skinnerian-inspired methods (Fjellanger, Andersen and MacLean). The conceptual framework of training MDDs is not much different from the training of Skinner's pigeons: it is based on recognition of a species-specific acuity of one of the sense (smell, in this case), which is further refined through a rigidly implemented training protocol that teaches the animal to recognize and mark a particular scent (similarly to teaching the bird to recognize by sight and mark by pecking a particular shape) through a carefully crafted training regimen utilizing only positive reinforcement. The final task also carries with it some risk to the canine's life. Of course, the risk is not equal to the total expendability of the life of the suicide bomber pigeon, but the possibility of death is always in the background of a minesweeping dog, though here it would be associated with a mistake in the animal's work, not with a correct performance.

If we use behaviorism not only as a training protocol, but as a framework for evaluating the performance of an animal subject, the actions of a minesweeping dog and of a pigeon suicide bomber are almost exactly the same: in both scenarios the animals have been taught through the use of positive reinforcement to perform highly intricate behaviors, which originate, in both cases, in their species-specific ethological repertoires that have been fine-tuned to suit human needs through the process of training. Most importantly, in both cases the animals are confidently performing the task (most likely, with a high level of enjoyment) because of the utilization of reward-based training. Both the pigeon and the dog are happy to engage in these risky behaviors because of the history of reinforcement associated with them. Not because they wish to sacrifice their lives for the greater good or because they are unusually smart.

Conclusion

Behaviorism's reading of animal (and human) behavior is rooted in so-called "Morgan's canon": the assumption that if a behavior can be fairly interpreted using mental processes that stand lower on the scale of psychological evolution and development, then one should not turn to higher processes (Valsiner 151–52). Even if the gist of contemporary ethology and animal psychology has recently turned in the direction of proving the

existence of higher mental processes in non-human animals—and while it is clear that Morgan's canon is absolutely not an exhaustive explanation of all behaviors—the canon's possible application for the interpretation of the behavior of kamikaze pigeons and mine detection dogs still holds certain explanatory potential, precisely because of its current power of defamiliarization. The pigeon story defamiliarizes the classic "war hero" narrative, but as it does so it paints itself into a corner by breaking convention and producing an unusual story that is not readily accepted by the public. While the breaking of storytelling conventions may be a trademark of experimental art, it is not a useful strategy for securing funding or generating public support. Hardly anyone, maybe with the exception of animal trainers, considers the actions of military dogs purely in non-mentalist terms: as correct (or potentially incorrect) performances of behaviors inculcated through training protocols. The public sphere has become so inundated with stories of canine heroism and bravery that higher mental states become the vocabulary of choice for discussing war dogs, as evident from the titles of media stories and even historical accounts of animals and war. After all, Michael Lemisch's *War Dogs*, the book from which I recalled the failure of the first mine detection training operation, the one based on teaching the dogs through avoidance of electric shock, is subtitled *A History of Loyalty and Heroism*.

If one strategically accepts the behaviorist reading, the one which does away with the heroism and sacrifice (of both bird and canine), it becomes painfully clear that one of the major reasons for incorporating non-humans into the war apparatus is the greater expendability of non-human life. This, I argue, might be one of the final reasons explaining the public's negative reaction to the pigeon bomb specifically, and to behaviorism more generally. In the case of military canines or horses, the public's explanatory narratives focus on the animals' potential for higher emotions: heroism, loyalty, sacrifice. In the case of the kamikaze pigeons, they do not. As previously argued, they also cannot focus on instinct, as the birds' behavior is seen as contrary to instinct, as purely acquired, even though its level of "artificiality" is actually similar to the marking of the mine detection dog. In the case of the pigeon bomb, the public is forced to take Skinner's very open and honest explanation—that is, that the lower organism is used because it is easily expendable—at face value. And somehow, this explanation does not hold potential for the kind of war stories the public needs to maintain morale.

There is, of course, additional disbelief evoked by the effectiveness of the training technology itself: the possibility of not just coercing an animal into performing a behavior that contravenes its well-being, but of the animal engaging in it willingly and with enjoyment. Behaviorism's ease of crossing species-boundaries, its mantra of "all organisms learn according to the same principles" suggests the scary possibility that the technology could be applied to human beings as well. This accusation of "brainwashing" is one which has been regularly meted out at Skinner in the scores of critiques of behaviorism. Skinner may have disregarded species specificity in favor of universalism, but the public could not accept this claim at face value. Accepting the behaviorist readings of both animal and human behavior required a radical departure from the safety of traditional explanations. Behaviorism forced new interpretations on well-known processes; interpretations that often countered the longstanding

explanatory narratives of both animal and human behavior. It scraped off the thick layer of symbol and myth (here: heroism and sacrifice), leaving only the bare bones framework that, supposedly, was the same across species boundaries. And if it was, if behaviorism's cross-species analogies had any validity, then "Project Pigeon" was more frightening than the scariest horror movie: it not only suggested that a "cruel optimism" (Berlant) scenario – i.e. a situation in which subjects can actively desire something that is detrimental to their well-being—was possible but also provided very specific tools for bringing that scenario to fruition. In that case, the ridicule the kamikaze pigeons met with was understandable: it was the only possible response that downplayed the dangers of technologies of social control.

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Małgorzata Olsza

Feminist (and/as) Alternative Media Practices in Women's Underground Comix in the 1970s[1]

Abstract: The American underground comix scene in general, and women's comix that flourished as a part of that scene in the 1970s in particular, grew out of and in response to the mainstream American comics scene, which, from its "Golden Age" to the 1970s, had been ruled and construed in accordance with commercial business practices and "assembly-line" processes. This article discusses underground comix created by women in the 1970s in the wider context of alternative and second-wave feminist media practices. I explain how women's comix used "activist aesthetics" and parodic poetics, combining a radical political and social message with independent publishing and distributive networks.

Keywords: American comics, American comix, women's comix, feminist art and theory, media practices

Introduction

Toughly mainly associated with popular culture, mass production, and thus consumerism, the history of comics also intertwines with the history of the American counterculture and feminism. In the present article, I examine women's underground comix from the 1970s as a product and an integral element of a complex and dynamic network of historical, cultural, and social factors, including the mainstream comics industry, men's underground comix, and alternative media practices, demonstrating how the media practices adopted by female comix authors were used to promote the ideals of second-wave feminism. As Elke Zobl and Ricarda Drüeke point out in *Feminist Media*, "[u]sing media to transport their messages, to disrupt social orders and to spin novel social processes, feminists have long recognized the importance of self-managed, alternative media" (11). I argue that by reacting to and building on the varied American political, social, and cultural landscape of the 1970s, women's comix managed to successfully adopt alternative media practices, spreading the feminist message.

The article is structured in such a way as to facilitate the understanding of not only women's comix, but also the general context which influenced, and at times conditioned, their development. First, I discuss the history of the so-called mainstream comics industry, demonstrating how the business model adopted in the 1930s and the 1940s, as well as the notion of "comics for girls," led to the rise of the underground comix scene in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Next, I locate the counterculture comix scene in the context of second-wave feminism, discussing how the misogyny of male artists forced women to actively create their own comix. In the following sections, I examine women's comix in the double perspective provided by Chris

Atton's typology of alternative media practices, distinguishing between the process of creation/production and the product itself, locating this model within the larger framework of feminist practices. I explain how, respectively, women's comix used specific editorial, publishing, and distribution strategies and how they used parody for the sake of radical political and social critique.

(The Business of) Comics and "Comics for Girls" in a Historical Perspective

The American underground comix scene in general, and the feminist media practices that flourished as a part of that scene in the 1970s in particular, grew out of and in response to the mainstream American comics scene, which, from its "Golden Age" to the 1970s, had been ruled and construed in accordance with commercial business practices and assembly-line processes. The Golden Age of Comics, which lasted from the 1930s to the 1950s,[2] laid down the foundations for production, and distribution polices that continued to define the comics business for decades to come. While, as the label "Golden Age" suggests, this era has often been romanticized in comics history as the time during which the most famous superheroes were brought to life, it should be more appropriately dubbed "The Commercial and Assembly Line Age." As Chabon writes in his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, the American comic book was a curious amalgamate of "dreams" and "pulp":

> [The American comic book] aspired to the dimensions of a slick magazine and the thickness of a pulp, offering sixty-four pages of gaudy bulk (including the cover) for its ideal price of one thin dime. While the quality of its interior illustrations was generally execrable at best, its covers pretended to some of the skill and design of the slick, and to the brio of the pulp magazine. The comic book cover, in those early days, was a poster advertising a dream-movie, with a running time of two seconds, that flickered to life in the mind and unreeled in splendor just before one opened to the stapled packet of the coarse paper inside and the lights came up. (74)

The cheapness of the actual product was counterbalanced by its promise of a "dream" reality—the world of "funnies," superheroes or adventure. The first comic magazine produced and distributed on a mass scale, *Famous Funnies*, came out in 1933 (Kodman 24). The combined appeal of cheap price (10 cents) and gags worked and the comic became an instant success. "The Great Depression was at its height, times were tough," Shawna Kodman writes, "comic books were affordable, and unlike radio and film, they constituted a possession" (25). Classic superhero titles followed. Batman first appeared in *Detective Comics* 1937 and Superman first appeared in *Action Comics* in 1938. Apart from the superhero genre, other generic comics publications included western (*Western Co*mics), science fiction (*Incredible Science Fiction*, *Space Adventures*), crime and horror (*Detective Comics*), and romance (*Young Romance*). In short, comics "satisfied the demand for entertainment from an audience that had more

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2 Specifically, until 1954, which was the year in which the Comics Code Authority was formed in direct response to the publication of Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*.

money to spend at a time when the possibility of purchasing consumer goods was severely restricted" (Gabilliet 197-198).

Comics were supposed to be produced on a mass scale—quickly, efficiently, and within a rather conventional thematic and artistic framework, shaped by the "centralizing, homogenizing needs of the financial economy" (Fiske 23). As Will Eisner, the legendary graphic novelist and the creator of *The Spirit*, observes:

> I got into the comic-book business very early, and I think I was the first to sort of mass-produce comic magazines. I was running a shop in which we made comic-book features pretty much the way Ford turned out cars. So perhaps the reason that the Register and Tribune consented to distribute *The Spirit* in the first place was because I had demonstrated an ability as a producer—and after all, turning out a 16-pager (which at that time it was) every week for newspaper distribution, with no tolerance for delivery, where you had to make a scheduled delivery every week, did require some kind of respect from the people who were going to handle distribution. (Benson 2011)

The comparison between Ford's assembly line and the manner in which comics were manufactured is particularly poignant. The "comics assembly line" was made up of five main "workstations," scriptwriting, penciling, inking, lettering, and coloring, which, understandably, erased the "personal" from both the process and the final product (Gabilliet 121-122). It was only in the late 1980s, with the changes in the mainstream comics market brought about by the underground scene and the rise of the graphic novel, that questions of creativity and the personal style became relevant in the mass production of comics.

The history of comics in the wider context of mass media business practices is important for a number of reasons. For one, it gave rise to strict gender divisions in comics production and readership. The question of female authorship and readership from the 1930s to the 1970s is indeed a curious one. Commenting on the role of women in the comics business in *Pretty in Ink*, Trina Robbins observes that comics targeted specifically at girls and women, including romance, action, crime, adventure, and superhero comics, enjoyed immense popularity in the 1940s (110). Indeed, Wonder Woman first appeared in *Sensation Comics* in 1942. And even before the iconic Amazon princess, as Michele Ann Abate points out, girls featured in a number of successful comics and strips, including Little Orphan Annie, Little Lulu, Little Audrey of the Harvey Girls, and Li'l Tomboy (4-6). In the 1950s and the 1960s, however, the titles manufactured for women declined in numbers. Respectively, the comics business did not offer women many career opportunities—they were only offered "manual" and low-paid positions in inking and coloring, while creative positions were exclusively held by men (Robbins, *Pretty* 110). It was also in the 1950s that, as Trina Robbins observes in *From girls to grrrlz* (47-78), a number of generic comics which reinforced (almost to the point of ridicule) traditional gender roles were published, including "career girl" comics (*Tessie the Typist*, *Millie the Model*, *Nellie the Nurse*; as the titles suggest, women were supposed to aspire to such positions as typist, model, or nurse), "advice-for-teenage-girls" comics (*Patsy Walker*), "dumb blonde" comics (*My friend Irma*), and romance comics. They propagated not only the ideal 1950s woman in the social and economic sense but also a certain visuality and view of female body and

"femininity" in general. In the face of limited career and publication opportunities which had been present in the mainstream comics business from the 1950s to the 1980s, it came as no surprise that many women, both artists and readers, sought alternative comics outlets for their art. The rise of the underground comix scene in the US in the late 1960s and the early 1970s seemed to provide them with such an opportunity.

"Gender Trouble": Feminism and the Rise of the Comix Scene

Indeed, both the functioning of the comics business and the roles available for women within it, played a role in the formation and reception of the underground comix scene in the US by female comics authors. As could be expected, at first, many female authors believed that the comix scene could provide them with creative opportunities (both as authors and readers of comics) that they had so far been denied. However, the actual gender dynamics on the underground scene are more complex, as demonstrated in both primary sources and the subsequent "codification" of its history.

Originally, the American underground comix scene developed in a straightforward opposition to the mainstream comics industry. The letter "x" in "comix" was meant to indicate the X-rated nature of the works and the fact that they were an experimental "mix" of word and image that both documented and contributed to the development of the American counterculture, embracing such taboo topics as drugs, sex (including its explicit representation), religion, and politics. The first comix, Robert Crumb's *Zap Comix#1*, was published in 1968 in San Francisco during The Summer of Love (Gabilliet 65) and combined the parody of corporate lifestyle ("Whiteman") with psychedelic imagery ("Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernist Comics") and LSD-inspired "spirituality" ("Mr. Natural Visits the City"). In an explicit protest against the censorship imposed by the Comics Code Authority and the general infantilization of the mainstream comics, Crumb included a "warning" on the cover of his comix, which read "For adult intellectuals only!" As such, it marked the beginning of what Hillary Chute refers to as "auteur comics," i.e. "comics shaped by the artistic vision of a single person" (*Why Comics* 16-18), a decidedly new trend in the era of "assembly-line comics," as well as a radically critical, though funny, view of contemporary American politics and society. The underground cartoonist, on a par with the beat poet and the civil rights activist, shocked and shook the US. Jay Lynch launched Bijou Funnies (1968-1973), Robert Crumb continued to publish *Zap Comix* (1968-2014), Denis Kitchen self-published *Mom's Homemade Comics* (1969-1972) and later founded the underground comix press Kitchen Sink Press (1970), and Justin Green published his autobiographical comix *Binky Brown Meets the* Holy Virgin Mary in 1972. Other famous comix artists of the era included Gilbert Shelton, Frank Stack, and S. Clay Wilson. And while the comix scene was dominated by male authors, many women also joined, or at least tried to, join the movement.

Unfortunately, the predominantly male comix world did not accept women as equal artistic partners. What is more, many comix in its pursuit of breaking taboo extensively focused on the representation of sex, including sexual violence against women, with Robert Crumb's pornographic visions being just one prominent example. The history of American comix reflected these developments and increasingly became

the history of its most prominent male creators. The two most important publications on the subject, Mark Estren's *A History of Underground Comics* and Patrick Rosenkranz's *Rebel Visions*, focus on and foreground the role of male artists. Estren only briefly comments on women's contribution to the movement (284-297), while Rosenkranz, in a curious mix of male-dominated vision and feminist pangs of conscience, writes about only one female comix artist in more detail, Trina Robbins (40-41), but also includes sections on "Chauvinism" (154-155) and "Equal Opportunity" (196-199) in the comix world. He quotes Trina Robbins who openly states that she was not allowed to contribute to comix created by men because she "objected from the very beginning to all the sexism, to the incredible misogyny. We're not talking about making fun of women. We're talking about representation of rape and mutilation, and murder that involved women, as something funny" (155). It quickly became clear that the opposition towards the mainstream comics industry and the ideals of the counterculture were understood differently by female comix artists.

　　Many women who wished to establish their voice in the comix world did so because of their interest in the civil rights in general and women's rights in particular. In opposition to the conservatism of the previous decade, the 1960s and the 1970s witnessed the rise of women's liberation movement, later referred to as second-wave feminism. Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, The Equal Pay Act was Passed in 1963, The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded in 1966, the iconic book *Our Bodies Ourselves* was published in 1970, and the U.S. Supreme Court made a historic decision in the case of Roe vs. Wade in 1973. As the mainstream comics either ignored or ridiculed the feminist voice (e.g. Stan Lee created a comic story entitled ironically "No Man is My Master" in 1971 in which the beautiful female protagonist betrays feminist ideals, choosing her macho boyfriend instead), female artists decided to draw feminist comics as part of the alternative scene. Unfortunately, as noted above, the comix movement did not welcome them either. As Trina Robbins observes in *The Great Women Cartoonists*,

> Sadly, most of the male underground cartoonists understood as little about the new women's movement as the newspapers did, and reacted to what they perceived as threat by drawing comix filled with graphic violence directed mostly at women. People—especially women people—who criticized this misogyny were not especially welcome in this alternative version of the old boys' club, and were not invited into the comix being produced. (85)

This notwithstanding, the 1970s witnessed a boom in women's comix, including *It Ain't Me, Babe* (1970), *All Girl Thrills* (1971), *Wimmen's Comix* (1972-1992), *Tits & Clits Comix* (1972-1987), *Come Out Comix* (1973), *Abortion Eve* (1973), *Dynamite Damsels* (1976), *Wet Satin #1* (1976), *Twisted Sister* (1976-1994), *Dyke Shorts* (1978), and *Mama! Dramas!* (1978). Differ as women's comix may in their poetics, style, and themes (including inequalities in the workplace, stereotypical view of women and their bodies, abortion, sexuality, motherhood, reproductive health in general and LGBT rights), alternative media practices were at the center of the rapid development of all titles in the 1970s.

Dismantling the Comics Assembly Line: "Activist Aesthetics"

While, as many women artists point out, women's liberation played a crucial role in the questions raised in underground comix, feminist (and/as) alternative media practices specifically influenced how the respective titles were produced and distributed. Essentially, "anarchistic, counterculture rock-and-roll world of… underground comix" was combined with the ideals of second-wave feminism (Robbins, *Great Women* 86). The concept of alternative media practices, essential to the understanding of both the counterculture in general and the feminist movement in particular, help illuminate how feminist comix functioned on the American market and how they influenced their readers. In *Alternative Media*, Chris Atton thus defines the alternative media "product" (points 1-3) and the alternative media "process" (points 4-6):

1. Content—politically radical, socially/culturally radical; news values
2. Form—graphics, visual language; varieties of presentation and binding; aesthetics
3. Reprographic innovations/adaptations—use of mimeographs, IBM typesetting, offset litho, photocopiers
4. 'Distributive use' (Atton, 1999b)—alternative sites for distribution, clandestine/indivisible distribution networks, anti-copyright
5. Transformed social relations, roles and responsibilities—reader-writers, collective organisation, de-professionalisation of e.g. journalism, printing, publishing
6. Transformed communication processes—horizontal linkages, networks. (27)

While certain adjustment need to be made, as the typology designed by Atton is also inclusive of contemporary (i.e. digital) media, most points aptly describe second-wave feminist media practices, as exemplified by the production and distribution of independent newspapers, newsletters, and other print publications. I propose to structure the discussion of feminist (and/as) alternative media practices drawing on Atton's model, distinguishing between (i) the editing, publishing, and distributing process and (ii) the "radical product." Ultimately, both the alternative "process" and the "product" were an inherent part of the feminist movement, which rejected, closely intertwined, patriarchy and capitalism (Fraser 99).

As regards the "process" of feminist (and/as) alternative media practices, the 1970s feminist print culture adopted such strategies as collective editing and local/grassroots presence linked with networking potential, self-publishing and self-distribution (Zobl and Drüeke 2014, Harker and Farr 2016). Collectively, such strategies could be referred to as "activist aesthetics" Beins 2017). As Agatha Beins and Julie R. Enszer point out,

> Feminist print culture during the 1970s and 1980s was a vibrant site of feminist activism and continues to be an important and powerful legacy of the WLM [women's liberation movement]…. While offering insight into the politics, practices, and ideals of feminists in a particular place, print cultures also reveal

the dynamic and wide-ranging networks that were vital to sustaining feminism as
a movement and political identity. (187)

In opposition to mainstream publications, feminist underground press was not concerned with making profit but with activism and raising awareness. "White patriarchal capitalism" (Fiske 24) was meant to be challenged by the cultural products created by feminist, diverse, and non-hierarchical agents, as postulated by, among others, Betty Friedan in her critique of popular women's magazines. Friedan criticized both the articles such magazines run and the advertisements they were supported by, pointing out that it was the (mass) media that created and solidified the myth of the "feminine mystique." In the 1997 edition of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan emphasized that the "feminine mystique" was "coming at us from the women's magazines, the movies, the television commercials, all the mass media and the textbooks of psychology and sociology" (18). Feminist alternative media in the 1970s, including newspapers and comix, were supposed to challenge the mass media message but also question the production processes involved in their manufacturing. Grassroots presence, networking, and collective action stood in opposition to capitalist practices. Such an approach was also directly related to the kind of "product" feminists wanted to produce—"non-essentialist" and reflective of the complex nature of femininity. "[T]he difficult process of building a movement connected by difference" (Mann and Huffman 60) lied at the heart of this process.

The 1970s witnessed the rapid development of independent local feminist organizations which began to publish alternative bulletins and newspapers, including the revolutionary *Ain't I a Woman* (1970-1974), Berkeley Women's Liberation's *It Ain't Me, Babe* (1970), *Everywoman* (1970) with the prominent "Herstory" column run by Ann Forfreedom, *Tooth and Nail* (1971), and *Off Our Backs* (1970-2008). The majority of alternative feminist newspapers were edited by an editorial collective, i.e. sometimes only the name of the organization that was behind a given periodical was listed; at other times, only the first names of the editors were provided (Beins 26). The editorial collective, though often small and locally-based, nevertheless firmly emphasized the importance of establishing wider political connections with other women's organizations (Beins 27). Feminist editorial collectives thus acted in keeping with the motto that "the personal is political" and at the same time questioned the oversimplified notions of leadership, because "feminist identities are usually achieved, not given…. Feminist identities are created and reinforced when feminists get together" (Mansbridge 29). The power of the feminist collective oftentimes propelled the publication process.

Nevertheless, in their attempts to challenge capitalist models, many alternative feminist titles faced substantial technical challenges connected with printing and distribution. In 1970, Robin Morgan famously professed in *Sisterhood is Powerful* that "[t]his book [was] an action" (xiii) since it was in its entirety created by women. However, she also admitted that "the process broke down for the first time at the printer's, that industry being one of the man which are all but completely closed to women" (Morgan xiii). Many publishing houses and companies either refused to publish feminist titles or asked that they should be censored. It was only in 1976, as a result of a collaborative action made possible by the first Women in Print Conference,

that the publishing market became more open for feminist authors and titles (Harker and Farr 6). This notwithstanding, thanks to ongoing technological advancements, such as offset printing and the availability of the stencil duplicator, the DIY method of self-print emerged as an affordable and effective alternative to the mainstream media.

Similar technical and logistical problems were connected with distribution. Traditional ways of selling books, either in mainstream bookshops or through wholesale, were not available for feminist alternative titles at the time. As Julie Enszer (67) points out in her discussion of sales and distribution practices of alternative feminist books and newspapers, while specialized feminist bookstores were established in the late 1970s,[3] feminists had developed a number of other strategies that allowed them to survive on the market until then. These included producing catalogs which featured published titles (Enszer 68-69) and independent feminist publishing houses "doubling" as distributing agents, often selling their publications directly to the interested readers (on campuses, during feminist conferences, etc.). Shipping and storage were also problematic for small independent feminist publishing houses that often struggled to come up with and sustain a successful business model but such problems were usually resolved thanks to the sheer dedication of the staff. However, most independent feminist publishing houses often failed to make a profit (Enszer 75), calling into question the viability of a socially responsible business. And while "feminists negotiated feminism and capitalism, using multiple, creative strategies during the 1970s" (Enszer 77-78), ultimately, many business failed and went bankrupt in the 1980s.

The alternative "process" of the feminist print culture in the 1970s, including collective editing and local/grassroots presence as well as independent publishing and distribution practices, was also at the heart of women's underground comix movement. The majority of women's comix from the 1970s were established and functioned either as collectives or creative "joint-ventures."[4] The emphasis was on collaboration, sisterhood, and "articulat[ing] the challenges and goals of specifically female cartoonists" (Chute 20). The discussion of editing and business practices of three flagship women's comix, *It Ain't Me, Babe* (1970), *Wimmen's Comix #1* (1972), and *Tits & Clits Comix* (1972), will exemplify the dynamics of the women's underground comix scene.

As listed on the inside front cover, *It Ain't Me, Babe* was created by "Trina [Robbins], Lisa Lyons, Carole [Kalish], Michele [Brand], Willie Mendes, Meredith Kurtzman, and Hurricane Nancy [Nancy Kalish]." Most authors are referred to by their first name only or by their nickname, which, on the one hand, corresponds to the slightly informal nature of this collective (as evidenced by the photograph on the inside back cover; the women are standing and sitting, quite relaxed, among greenery), but also emphasizes the notions of sisterhood and creative collaboration. The comix was "conceived by Women's Liberation Basement Press" (*It Ain't*, inside front cover). On the inside back cover, the artists directly ask the reader to take action and support the feminist movement:

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3   Carol Seajay first published the Feminist Bookstore News in 1976 inspired by the discussions at the Women In Print conference. In 1977, Seajay featured 94 feminist bookstores in the newsletter (after Enszer 70).

4   The only exception were *Come Out Comix* (1973*)* and *Dyke Shorts* (1978) created by Mary Wings and Roberta Gregory's self-published *Dynamite Damsels* (1976).

> AND NOW FOR A *COMMERCIAL* (emphasis in original) ANNOUNCEMENT
> If you liked this comic, you might be interested in the more serious side of
> women's liberation. *It Ain't Me, Babe* is a newspaper devoted to national women's
> liberation news, articles, commentary, and poetry about women by women and
> featuring the only feminist comic, the adventures of Belinda Berkley.

The readers are urged to either subscribe to the *It Ain't Me, Babe* or distribute it directly. "[A]ccredited women's groups" were offered special discount prices. The comix originally cost 50 cents. Every dealer who ordered a minimum of 25 issues received a forty percent discount. Since *It Ain't Me, Babe* was the first feminist underground comix published in the US, the understanding of how it functioned paves the way for the understanding of how the women's underground comix developed in the 1970s. As can be seen, originally the creators treated feminist comix as a "less serious" outlet for the feminist message. It is indirectly implied that the "funny" comix was originally meant to draw attention of the general reader who should then ideally subscribe to the feminist newspaper *It Ain't Me, Babe*, boosting its sales. This notwithstanding, the distribution of both the newspaper and the comix relied on feminist activism and direct sales, as evidenced by the "advertisement" on the inside back cover. Despite its "secondary" importance to the newspaper, however, *It Ain't Me, Babe Comix* became very successful—it had been reprinted every three weeks for a year (Robbins, *From girls* 87). The commercial success of the comix meant that other feminist comix titles could be published (Robbins, *A Century* 141).

Similarly to *It Ain't Me, Babe*, *Wimmen's Comix #1* (1972) was designed as a "collective" with no leader and a rotating editor. Established in San Francisco, the group originally included 10 artists: Michele Brand, Lee Marrs, Lora Fountain, Patricia Moodian (editor of the first issue), Sharon Rudahl, Shelby [Sampson], Aline Kominsky, Trina [Robbins], Karen Marie Haskell, and Janet Wolfe Stanley. They were listed on the inside cover of the first issue and depicted in a black-and-white drawing above the list (fig. 1). The women may be seen sitting relaxed in a big room—similarly to *It Ain't Me, Babe*, the informal and relaxed atmosphere of the group seems to play an important role. As Margaret Galvan observes, the fact that children are included in the image means that "[b]oth this room and this collective have ample space where the women can work while also attending to their personal responsibilities" (32). What is more, in the spirit of sisterhood and creative collaboration, the drawing was executed collectively by all the contributors who each drew their self-portrait (though all self-portraits are black and white, the differences in drawing style are distinct). The artists formed a collective but also maintained their individual voice and style. They were also open to other contributors and ask interested women to "send xeroxes of artwork" (*Wimmen's*, front inside cover). Over the years, more than one hundred women were published in *Wimmen's Comix*.[5]

The first issue of *Tits & Clits Comix* published in 1972 also exemplifies the collective spirit at the heart of the majority of women's underground comix. Unlike

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5   Unfortunately, as Margaret Galvan observes in her article "Archiving *Wimmen*: Collectives, Networks, and Comix," due to the organizational system of certain archives and libraries which do not reflect on the collective nature of the project, the input of some artists is "on the verge of being lost" (29).
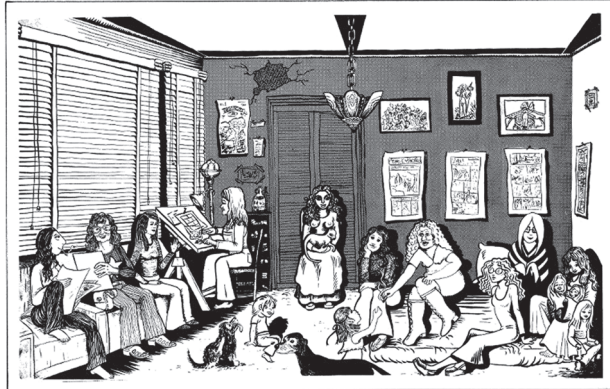
the previous two titles, however, it demonstrates that operating on a smaller scale, with just two contributors, was also possible. The comix was created by Lyn Chevli and Joyce Sutton who not only drew their own original stories but, in the issues to come, also collaborated on a single story, drawing it together. Similarly, to *Wimmen's Comix*, other artists were also invited to draw for the comix over the years.

As regards publication and distribution strategies, women's comix were either self-published or published by small independent comix publishing houses that were often created *ad hoc*. Similarly to some independent feminist publishers, they did not always manage to survive on the competitive publishing market. Founded in 1970, Last Gasp, the publisher of *It Ain't Me, Babe* and *Wimmen's Comix*, continues to operate to this day, though, as the company states on its website, in the 1970s, it was forced to "distribut[e] titles published by other companies, simply because [they constituted] payment for Last Gasp's publications" (*The Origins*). Kitchen Sink, established in 1969, the publisher of *Wet Satin #1*, went out of business in 1999 (*Denis*). Nanny Goat Productions, the only *exclusively* feminist comix publishing house founded by Lyn Chevli and Joyce Sutton, the authors and publishers of the first two issues of *Tits & Clits Comix* and *Abortion Eve*, ceased to operate in the early 1970s. Interestingly, with the exception of Nanny Goat Productions, most women's comix were published by "general" underground publishers and not by specialized independent feminist publishers. While women artists openly stated that they were creating comix within the greater intellectual and political framework of feminism, the realities of the publishing world demonstrate that the affiliation with the comix underground nevertheless often proved stronger than the affiliation with the feminist press. Strictly commercial issues must have played a role in that development. Already struggling with their sales, independent feminist publishing houses often could not afford to invest in the production of comix. Even underground rates for a single page (penciled and inked, uncolored) varied between 25 and 75 dollars (Robbins, *A Century* 143). Also, as Trina Robbins acknowledged in one interview, unlike male underground comix artists, the publishers did not discriminate against women – "they just wanted to publish a good artist.… They never shut me out. Only that little clique of guys" (Dueben). Still, whether specifically feminist or not, the comix publishing houses were also recognized for their distinct local presence, be it Berkeley (Last Gasp), San Francisco (Last Gasp), Laguna Beach (Nanny Goat), or Princeton, WI, similarly to independent women's presses.

As can be seen, feminist (and/as) alternative media strategies adopted by women's comix artists in the 1970s demonstrate that "feminist identities [are] not to be revealed by feminist media production, but the latter to be part of producing them" (Gunnarsson Payne 66). The notions of the creative and editorial collective, as well as the business strategies of independent printing and distribution, correspond to the notions of sisterhood and the critique of patriarchal capitalism. The "processual" aspect of comix as alternative media found its further realization in the drawn "product."

Drawing Women's Liberation: Parodic Poetics

While, as alternative media products (Atton 27), all comix were radical in their message, often employing humor and political parody, women's comix used these

Fig. 1. The inside front cover illustration from *Wimmen's Comix #1*.
Courtesy of Fantagraphics Books (www.fantagraphics.com).

strategies with a particular goal in mind. The mainstream was not the only "target;" female comix artists made fun of both mainstream and alternative comics, but also of themselves and, at times, feminist stereotypes. They were thus "doubly subversive," but nevertheless committed to feminist ideals. Women's comix and their creators meet three feminist-defining criteria postulated by Karen Offen, insofar as

> they recognize the value of women's own interpretations of their lived experience and needs and acknowledge the values women claim publicly as their own…; they exhibit consciousness of, discomfort at, or even anger over institutionalized injustice (or inequity) toward women as a group by men as a group in a given society; and they advocate the elimination of that injustice by challenging, through efforts to alter prevailing ideas and/or social institutions and practices, the coercive power, force, or authority that upholds male prerogatives in that particular culture. (152)

Still, as noted above, instead of publishing serious manifestos, women's comix predominantly relied on humor. In a telling juxtaposition of styles, tones, poetics, and points of references, the mainstream *Ms.* magazine used the mainstream (superhero) comics icon on the cover of its first 1972 issue—Wonder Woman, towering like a giantess over the main street of an American town, may be seen fighting for peace and justice. The accompanying slogan reads "Wonder Woman for President." The overall message is definitely one of "serious" political activism. The cover of the underground *It Ain't Me, Babe* also features Wonder Woman, albeit surrounded by other comics characters, including, Olive Oyl, Mary Marvel, Little Lulu, Sheena, and Elsie the Cow. The "activist aesthetics" is still palpably present, but the emphasis is more on the collective action and sisterhood. Also, while "anger over institutionalized injustice" is clearly visible on the faces of the comics characters, the furious faces of Olive and Little Lulu, two rather endearing characters, openly oppose the conventions of the mainstream.

        In this final part of my article, I will once again focus on the three flagship comix, *It Ain't Me, Babe* (1970), *Wimmen's Comix #1* (1972), and *Tits & Clits Comix* (1972), discussing the (visual) strategies of parody. Parody is a complex phenomenon and, as Linda Hutcheon points out in *A Theory of Parody*, it relies "at the level of strategy, [on] decoding (recognition and interpretation) and encoding" (34). It also involves "irony as the major means of accentuating, even establishing, parodic contrast" (34). As such, parody is "an important mode of self-reflexivity" (Hutcheon 34) in all cultural texts, including comics, be it mainstream or underground. The power of parody also lies in the fact that it forms may vary, depending on the intended goal. "Serious criticism," "playful, genial mockery," "admiration," and "ridicule" all belong to the domain of parody (Hutcheon, *Modern Parody* 97). In the context of the analyzed phenomenon, parody allows women comix artists to

> [explore] the ways in which *ideologies of femininity* are produced and reproduced in media representations. These representations offer pleasures—the pleasures of self-recognition, of finding women placed centre-stage in a 'woman's genre', of participation in a shared 'women's culture'—but simultaneously act to contain women within the accepted bounds of femininity. (Thornham 7)

Indeed, women's comix artists use "parodic self-reflexivity" to expose and question dominant ideologies of femininity by making fun of advertising aimed at women and stereotypical representations of women in popular media, very often reclaiming and/ or subverting "the male gaze" inscribed in such images. It is no coincidence that the concept of the "male gaze" has been present in feminist art theory since the 1970s, with classic texts such as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), and Mary Ann Doane's "Film and the Masqeruade" (1982), pointing to the implied "objectification" of the woman as an "image." Additionally, as Linda Steiner observes, "the central assumption of the early, essentially second-wave, feminist media theory was what could be called the three Rs: depictions of women (and girls) result from, reflect, and reproduce dominant ideologies" (361). Comix, as a visual medium created by women, challenged the male gaze through the parodic tactics of shock and breaking the taboo. The woman's body

and her sexuality, including images of abortion, menstruation, and vaginal infection, became a powerful visual weapon, allowing women to break free from "the accepted bounds of femininity" (Thornham 7).

When viewed in the context of *Wimmen's Comix #1* and *Tits & Clits Comix #1*, *It Ain't Me, Babe* appears to be the most timid in its tactics of shock. The themes of liberation and emancipation are explored in reference to comics and pulp fiction. The reader is expected to "decode" the visual and verbal intertexts "encoded" (Hutcheon 34) on the cover and in the respective stories. The two opening stories play with popular genres and visions, including the fantasies of pioneer life ("Oma") and the story of Tarzan ("Monday"). The "parodic contrast" (Hutcheon 34) is achieved through introducing strong female characters into both stories—the pioneer woman may be seen riding naked on a white horse (though she eventually falls into an abyss; the image may be interpreted as both a "warning" for independent women and a corruption of a sexualized male fantasy), while the Tarzan is female (though it is also clear from the beginning that this vision is in fact the dream of a female secretary). The central story in the comix, "Breaking Out," expands on the image on the cover. Popular female comics characters, Little Lulu (together with Witch Hazel), Juliet Jones, Betty and Veronica, Supergirl, Petunia Pig, rebel against male comics characters and join "feminist rebellion," "take acid," and free women from female prisons (*It Ain't*). With the exception of Little Lulu and Witch Hazel, who were originally rather rebellious characters, all of the other ladies were either associated with "dominant ideologies of femininity" and "woman's genre" (Thornham 7), i.e. mainstream comics for girls (Juliet Jones, Betty and Veronica) or superhero comics for girls (Supergirl), and thus embodied stereotypical views of women. "Breaking Out" comes close to functioning as a feminist comix manifesto. The repressed heroines break free and conspire together in a garden shed on which they wrote "No boys allowed!" Considering that female comix artists often described the male comics and comix world as a "boys' club" (Robbins, *Great Women* 85), this final image in the story appears to be a critique of both "woman's genre" and the comics and comix scene. In any case, what makes *It Ain't Me, Babe* interesting is the manner in which the visuals were actively used to convey the radical, feminist message. In order to understand the comix, the reader/viewer had to "construct a second meaning through inferences about surface statements and supplement the foreground [i.e. the image, M.O.] with acknowledgment and knowledge of a background concept" (Hutcheon 34), which involved the history of comics, "comics for girls," and comix, both at the level of form (drawing style, female body types used, sexualized images of women) and content (popular scenarios and roles assigned to female characters).

Women's comix published after *It Ain't Me, Babe* expanded and built on the poetics of parody, exploring and questioning the images of the essentialist femininity. As such, they also built on what Peg Brand refers to as "a specific subcategory of women's art known as feminist visual parodies (FVPs)" (166). While Brand explains the functioning of parody in a manner similar to Hutcheon, as a process based on recognition of sources and acknowledgment of the new context, she also clearly states that feminist visual parodies do not refer to any given image, but openly expose the conventions of men's vision of "the essence of 'woman'" (167). In their parodic

endeavors, female comix artists were thus exploring themes and strategies used concurrently by Judy Chicago, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Kiki Smith, albeit in a different medium, conditioned and constrained by its own history and conventions. Women's comix, within the greater framework of feminist (and/as) alternative media practices, make the reader/viewer realize that

> visions of woman are contaminated by male-defined notions of the truth of femininity. This is true not only of the negative cultural images of women (prostitute, demon, medusa, bluestocking, vagina dentata) but also of positive ones (woman as nature, woman as nurturing mother, or innocent virgin, or heroic amazon...) .… Rather than expressing the truth of female identity, then, art becomes a means of questioning identity. (Felski 182)

Wimmen's Comix #1 and *Tits & Clits Comix #1*, in particular, explore the themes connected with the female body and sexuality, questioning the images of the promiscuous, or simply sexually active, woman.

The cover of *Wimmen's Comix #1* is a parody of the covers of "comics for girls." A beautiful girl may be seen kissing a very attractive man (which is supposed to embody every woman's ultimate goal), while an "ugly feminist" watches them, thinking "Except from being fat, ugly, pimple faces, bad tempered and selfish, you'd think he'd see I'm a much better choice!" The idealized vision of femininity perpetuated by "comics for girls" is thus juxtaposed with the stereotypical image of a feminist held by an anti-feminist. The cover reads as a truly subversive text. Only the reader/viewer who was familiar with the women's comix scene, and the role feminism played for its authors, could correctly "decode" this image as supportive of women's liberation. In fact, so powerful was the comix's feminist message that over time the word "wimmen" in the title was replaced by non-standard "wimmin," "womyn," and "womon" in order to "claim a female identity that was linguistically distinct from man and men" (Beins 104). The first issue addressed different questions connected with women's sexuality and the view of women as sexual, including teenage abortion ("A Teenage Abortion;" the comix was published in 1972 and the decision in Roe vs. Wade was made in 1973), sexual harassment at work ("All in a Day's Work), and coming out as lesbian ("Sandy Comes Out"). What made the stories particularly interesting was the ironic tone. For example, "A Teenage Abortion" was a parody of a specific type of "comics for girls" that concentrated on the "he-doesn't-love-me issues." However, instead of a broken heart, the teenager has to deal with a more serious problem. Respectively, *Tits & Clits Comix #1* addressed such "taboo topics" as menstruation and menstruation products ("The Menses is the Massage") and vaginal infection ("Vaginal Drip"), thus, quite literally, reclaiming the female body and its representation. Blood and other bodily fluids were drawn explicitly and expressively. The female body was not represented seductively and the woman was not controlled by "the male gaze," in a manner similar to the artistic strategy used by Judy Chicago in *Red Flag* (1971). Such a visualization of the female body is particularly important because, as Elizabeth A. Grosz points out, patriarchy often "found a convenient self-justification for women's secondary social positions by containing them within bodies that are represented, even constructed as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not

under conscious control" (13-14). The concept of the female body is not simply limited to the discussion of biological functions and/or differences between men and women, but often makes the woman the other, and, at times, the monstrous. *Tits & Clits Comix #1* focuses specifically on the "unruly" and the "unreliable," female bodily fluids and bodily changes, quite literally breaking the thematical and visual taboo.

While the three discussed comix differ in the "intensity" of the shock tactics adopted, with *It Ain't Me, Babe* and *Tits & Clits Comix #1* at the opposing ends of the spectrum, most, if not all, titles relied in parody in their "efforts to alter prevailing ideas and/or social institutions and practices, the coercive power, force, or authority that upholds male prerogatives in that particular culture" (Offen 152). From rebelling against the "boys' club" which governed comics, through openly addressing the topic of sexual harassment at work, to discussing the issues connected with female sexuality, women's comix used humor, ridicule, and irony to effect feminist change.

Conclusion

The creators of women's comix openly acknowledge the importance of women's liberation in their artistic endeavors. However, the history of second-wave feminism in America rarely acknowledges the presence of women's comix. Books, newsletters, and newspapers constitute an integral part of the movement. Comix, perhaps because of their, rather unwanted affiliation with the world (and the business) of comics, seen as the embodiment of patriarchal consumerism, have been marginalized in feminist theory and criticism. As I have tried to demonstrate, unfairly so. Women's comix in the 1970s grew out of the specific historical, social, and economical circumstances, challenging the misogyny of both mainstream comics and underground comix. They adopted feminist (and/as) alternative media practices, including "activist aesthetics" and parodic poetics, combining a radical political and social message with alternative publishing and distributive networks, enriching the feminist movement.

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Arkadiusz Misztal

Dream Time, Modality, and Counterfactual Imagination in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*

Abstract: This paper elucidates the structure and scope of Pynchon's temporal imagination by studying the complex relations between narrative time and modality in his 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon* using the conceptual framework of contemporary narratology. It argues that Pynchon's use of the subjunctive mode allows him not only to articulate the political and ideological concerns in his vision of America on the eve of its founding but also to address the problems of historicity, causality and irreversibility of time. By employing the subjunctive as a general narrative strategy, *Mason & Dixon* challenges the various temporal regimes and discourses of modernity, and projects imaginative re-figurations of time and space. In carrying this out, the novel moves beyond what Pynchon calls "the network of ordinary latitude and longitude" (*Against the Day* 250) and replaces a totalizing singularity with plurality of times and timescapes.

Keywords: Thomas Pynchon, temporal imagination, narrative time, modality, possibility

> [Y]et there is no avoiding time, the sea of time, the sea of memory and forgetfulness, the years of promise, gone and unrecoverable, of the land almost allowed to claim its better destiny, only to have the claim jumped by evildoers known all too well, and taken instead and held hostage to the future we must live in now forever.
> Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (341)

This article examines the problematic of narrative and temporal modality in Pynchon's fiction by taking as its point of departure the concept of "dream time" and its application in the construction of micro-worlds in his 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon*. It argues that despite the dominance of spatial over temporal categories in the novel, Pynchon's counterfactual imagination, which informs and shapes the narrative, can be best understood in terms of playful and subversive sensibilities that, among other things, seek to open up different, alternative perspectives on the past, present, and future. This generative mobility of Pynchon's imaginative thought draws its energies from the novel's frequent shifts into a counter-factual mode that facilitates fictional re-imagination of time and space. This subjunctive mode injects into *Mason & Dixon's* fictive historiography a sense of radical contingency that makes space for alternative histories and effectively broadens the horizons of political possibility. In this capacity it functions as a central mode of critique of both Enlightenment ideology and the ideology of American expansionism. Furthermore, Pynchon employs the subjunctive to counter the various temporal regimes and discourses of modernity. In its celebration of temporal plurality, *Mason & Dixon* challenges the validity and universality of the horological notions and standards that underlie the Western conception of time. Apart from the political and ideological dimension, the use of the subjunctive also reveals Pynchon's imagination as engaged directly with possibility in its temporal aspects. I will delineate this specific temporal modality by studying the complex relations

between narrative time and possibility in his work, using the frame of contemporary narratology, in particular David Herman's model of hypothetical focalization, Mark Currie's account of narrative focalization and Saul Gary Morson's study of tempics. I will argue that Pynchon's subjunctive in its projective, creative character does not directly invoke spatial forms or relations and cannot be explained by appealing to possible world logic, which is unable to fully recognize the modality's link to anticipation and prediction. By opening narrative to the singular and accidental, the modality that informs Pynchon's text does not reduce the future to an extension of the present, and so it is inimical to the view of the contemporary as blocked futurity. The subjunctive mode as an expression of Pynchon's modalizing activity is, I contend, best understood as a thick concept that comprises a wide spectrum of activities such as imagining, supposing, conceiving, and dreaming: in this capacity it functions in Pynchon's narrative as a primary guide to possibility in its various uses and contexts, including the temporal ones.

Temporal Regimes and Dream Time

Much like *Gravity's Rainbow*, but perhaps to an even stronger degree, *Mason & Dixon* abounds in dreams and dream-related phenomena and occurrences. The novel incorporates all kinds of dreams and dreaming: good and bad dreams, pipe dreams, quasi-prophetic dreams, hemp-induced hallucinations and other kinds of imaginative visions. The book's eponymous characters dream, often of one another, and sometimes they share their dreams or visions. Of all the dreamers in the book, Charles Mason stands out, as he routinely experiences both nightmares and "daymares," and often speaks in his dreams (sometimes in exotic languages that his companion Dixon cannot identify). Dreams also provide Pynchon with texture and substance to construct a myriad of micro-worlds: subliminal spaces with fuzzy ontological status and boundaries. These micro-worlds often interpenetrate one another, destabilizing the distinction between reality and dream upon which novelistic world-building usually depends. Thus, for example, Mason wakes up with a *Krees,* a Malay Dagger, that he received in his dream (*Mason & Dixon* 70-71), or he shares with Dixon a hallucination in which they witness a field of giant vegetables in the trans-Susquehanna territory (*Mason & Dixon* 477). These micro-worlds, as Brian McHale points out, are characterized in terms of space rather than time, which is unsurprising as spatial categories appear to dominate over temporal ones throughout the novel. Time is indeed spatialized in *Mason & Dixon*: it is often thought of and imagined, as one of the characters in the novel puts it, as "the Space that may not be seen" (*Mason & Dixon* 327). And even when Pynchon explicitly brings up, for instance, the concept of *Tempus Incognitus* in relation to the calendar reform of 1752, he does so primarily in spatial terms.

The abrupt introduction of the Gregorian calendar in England provoked all kinds of fantastic speculations over the "lost" eleven days,[1] which Pynchon, in the manner his readers have come to expect, playfully explores. In Mason's fantastic

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1   The Gregorian calendar introduced in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII was first adopted by Roman Catholic countries. Protestant England was reluctant to implement the new system, and when it finally did, in 1752, eleven days had to be skipped after September 2nd.

account the eleven days become a kind of spacetime that has been colonized by Asiatic pygmies, who now haunt the people of this world. The spatialization of time is made even more explicit in Chapters 23 and 63 where the characters discuss the reform of the Chinese time system initiated by Jesuit missionaries during the Quing dynasty, which consisted in redefining the duration of the primal unit *ke* to one ninety-sixth of a day, or exactly one quarter of a western hour. The reform, when expressed in geometrical terms, amounted to the reduction of 365 and a quarter degrees in the Ancient Chinese system (correlated with the solar year) to "an honest 360-Degree Circle" (*Mason & Dixon* 229). As Capt. Zhang, the Fen Shui master in the novel, points out: "It was five and a Quarter Degrees that the Jesuits remov'd from the Chinese Circle, in reducing it to three hundred sixty. Bit like the Eleven Days taken from your Calendar, isn't it?" (*Mason & Dixon* 629). Beneath the tomfoolery of these "wild speculations," Pynchon seems to be articulating more serious concerns related to standardization of time and implementation of new temporal regimes.

The establishment of the new "temporal grid," to use Pynchon's own expression, is featured most clearly in his three novels spanning the period from the 18th to the early 20th century, novels that trace the emergence of modernity, the scientific paradigm and capitalist industrialization: *Mason & Dixon*, *V.* and *Against the Day*. More than in any other texts, in these Pynchon critically re-examines temporal revolutions and regulations such as the establishment of a global public time, time zones and other scientific and parascientific temporal frameworks of modernity. The corollary of a universal temporality is the commodification of time, the introduction of new technologies and precisely controlled time processes. These three novels are greatly concerned with how the new temporal regimes and technologies changed the experience of time and introduced new sensibilities contributing to what Robert Hassan has aptly described as two temporal Empires: "the First Empire of Speed: Clocktime modernity," succeeded in the late 20th century by "the Second Empire of Speed: Networked Society." "The 'correction' and maintenance of time," as Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds puts it, are especially prominent in *Mason & Dixon* with its interest not only in calendar reforms but "also in the main characters' job of recording exact astronomical transit times, using more and more accurate (and historically accurate) timepieces" (Hinds 9).[2] Pynchon's narrative shows how the sciences, in particular astronomy and horology, were employed in the service of chronopolitics, which, as Johannes Fabian has argued in his anthropological study, defined geographical relations of power through its disciplinary temporal discourse and contributed to the shift from the local to the global dimension of time.

Pynchon addresses this problem explicitly in his 1993 New York Times essay, in which he explores the concept of time that accompanied and contributed to the transformation of America into "a Christian capitalist state" by looking at changes in early American city life—Pynchon's prime example being the city of Philadelphia. Indicative of the emerging mechanized and industrial capitalist order, this new time replaced the pre-modern "slow time" of colonial Philadelphia, changing the city into an urban machine geared towards efficiency and profit: "The city was becoming a kind

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2   For detailed discussions of the relation between calendar reforms and conceptualizations of time in *Mason & Dixon*, see Hinds and Albers.

of high-output machine, materials and labor going in, goods and services coming out, traffic inside flowing briskly about a grid of regular city blocks. The urban mazework of London, leading into ambiguities and indeed evils, was here all rectified, orthogonal" (Pynchon, "Nearer, My Couch" 57). Much like the orthogonal layout of the streets, the new time in that urban machine was regular, predictable and linear: "every second was of equal length and irrevocable, not much in the course of its flow could have been called nonlinear, unless you counted the ungovernable warp of dreams" (Pynchon, "Nearer, My Couch" 57). The new attitude towards economy and time was perfectly exemplified in the figure of Benjamin Franklin, whose autobiography appears to be one of the very first works on time management and personal productivity published in America. Looking at the daily agenda it includes, Pynchon notes that Franklin allowed himself only a few hours for sleep.[3] The remaining hours were meant to be spent productively, except maybe for the block of time between 9 pm and 1 am devoted to the Evening Question, "What good have I done this day?". "This must have been the schedule's only occasion for drifting into reverie—there would seem to have been no other room for speculations, dreams, fantasies, fiction. Life in that orthogonal machine was supposed to be nonfiction" (Pynchon, "Nearer, My Couch" 57). It was this "ungovernable warp of dreams" with its peculiar temporality that became a natural mode of resistance, offering a non-linear, imaginative awareness which does not translate time into money. The dream modality, Pynchon argues, is also the time of fiction, and of writers, who have long since contested the idea of time as commodity and its direct convertibility into money. Fiction, as the realm of the "as-if," makes it possible to explore and test different ways of being in and orienting ourselves toward time. In doing this, it can re-describe the actual from unconventional angles and thus enlarge our view of its possibilities. As a strategy of resistance, the fictive modality is capable of replacing a totalizing singularity with a plurality of times and timescapes. The peculiar "architecture of dream" (*Against the Day* 250) thus enables one to escape "the network of ordinary latitude and longitude" (*Against the Day* 250) and experience other times.

Accordingly, *Mason & Dixon*, in its celebration of temporal plurality and in its creation of narrative configurations in which apparently different temporal zones coexist and/or slide into one another, effectively challenges and deconstructs the validity and universality of orthogonal temporality. In numerous horological references, the novel explicitly and thematically shows that the artificial determination of time by means of clocks and calendars does not represent a coherent, consistent cultural system, but, as Kevin Birth underlines in his anthropological study, can be perhaps best understood as "the sedimentation of generations of solutions to different temporal problems" (Birth 2). Pynchon's narrative exemplifies how our time standards are in fact, to use Birth's phrase, "a hodgepodge of different logics," in which our desire for accuracy (the use of chronometers) meets church politics mixed with astronomy (the Gregorian calendar and the honest 360-degree Chinese circle) as well as anachronistic survivals of long-past societies (the choice to divide days into 24 segments by the ancient Egyptians, and

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3 Pynchon's portrayal of Benjamin Franklin in *Mason & Dixon* is far from flattering: he is an eccentric but well-connected character who never sleeps and appears to be closely aligned with the "dark" forces of the Enlightenment.

to divide hours and minutes into 60 segments by the ancient Babylonians). Moreover, the novel also recognizes the modern Western form of time as an expression of cultural imperialism. It continually reminds us that the Western conception of time is just one of many and that "[t]o say any one time is *the* time is both untrue and highly political" (Griffiths 2, original emphasis). Pointing to the ideological dimension of contemporary temporal discourse in modern Euro-American societies, Griffiths observes that "the West declares its time is *the* time. Not so fast. Its dominance is actually far from complete. Its challengers are everywhere" (19). Pynchon is clearly one of those challengers, as all his narratives, though to varying degrees, seek to oppose the fossilization of times and their conversion into disciplinary systems.[4] It is worth noting that Pynchon's view of dream time resonates extremely well with the central thesis of Jonathan Crary's book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. In this short but insightful polemic, Crary presents sleep as one of the few remaining aspects of our lives that have not been harnessed to the late-capitalist engine of profitability and efficiency. By offering areas of time and experience that are not determined and shaped by the homogenizing force of the 24/7 operations of global exchange and circulation, dreaming empowers us to explore the modality of temporal becoming and so resists "despoliation of the rich textures and indeterminations of human life" (Crary 31). As a mental faculty, dreaming detaches us from the constraints of the actual and takes us to the realm of the modal where alternatives and possibilities can be not only imagined but also experienced. No wonder, Crary observes, that in the contemporary 24/7 environment one of the dominant forms of disempowerment is "the incapacitation of daydream or any mode of absent-minded introspection that would otherwise occur in intervals of slow or vacant time" (88).[5]

Temporal Imagination and the Ambivalent Splendor of the (Merely) "Subjunctive"

The temporal modality of dreaming interpenetrates Pynchon's fictional recreation of Colonial America not only locally (on the level of characters or as involved in the construction of oneiric micro-worlds) but also in a more general and fundamental sense, explicitly revealed in what is perhaps the novel's most often cited passage:

> Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?— in which all
> that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away
> in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not
> yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,—
> serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *may yet be*

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4 For a more detailed analysis of imperial politics in *Mason & Dixon*, see, for instance, Lifshey 117-138 or Seed 84-99.

5   Needless to say, shaping and regulating contemporary imaginaries has become one of the primary instruments in the various grids of control and surveillance that constrain us today. Thus, for instance, by merely remaining pliable and innocuous citizen-consumers, "we choose to do what we are told, we allow the management of our bodies, our ideas, our entertainment, and all our imaginary needs to be externally imposed" (Crary 60).

true,— Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's
Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe till the next Territory to the West be seen
and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already
known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from
subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve
the ends of Governments,—winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its
Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is
our home, and our Despair. (*Mason & Dixon* 346)

The subjunctive, as the above quotation makes clear, is not merely invoked to create a
powerful and also somewhat disturbing dream of America in its historical or political
specificity as an Eden-like land of liberty and opportunity, but emerges as a kind of
global counterfactual mode in Pynchon's narrative. It is far-reaching and all-pervasive
as the entire novel appears to be cast, to use Heinz Ickstadt's expression, "in the
ambivalent splendor of the (merely) 'subjunctive': of the seen or dreamed, then lost and
wasted in the progress of Enlightenment" (563). The subjunctive as a global narrative
strategy is closely related to the problematic of historicity, causality and irreversibility
of time as the novel explicitly and persistently brings into focus the pastness of the
past and presentness of the present as well as their intricate interrelations. Many of the
straight lines the narrative traces are ones that mark colonial exploitation, repression,
and slavery. The subjunctive mode as a central component of his fictive historiography
allows Pynchon to trace these lines and examine the American nation on the eve of its
founding: "Like other novelists and historians, [Pynchon] identifies a strange mix of
philosophical rationalism, spiritual yearning, and economic rapacity in the American
salmagundi. But uniquely he settles on the surveying of the Mason-Dixon Line as
symbol of and index of the forces that would become America" (Cowart 137-138).
In its fictive recreation of Colonial America, the novel, as Cowart notes, is a bold and
ambitious effort to re-conceptualize the hollowed American myths and to rewrite some
of its archetypal narratives by depicting the New World as "one more hope in the realm
of the Subjunctive" (*Mason & Dixon* 543). By this rewriting Pynchon injects into his
fictive historiography a sense of radical contingency that makes space for alternative
histories and effectively broadens the horizons of political possibility. The subjunctive
functions thus as a central mode of Pynchon's critique of both Enlightenment
ideology[6] and the ideology of American expansionism, rooted in the European
practices of colonialism. By exploring "a foundational tension between declarative
and subjunctive Americas" (Lifshey 125), the novel exposes the totalizing ideology
of the "imperial cartography" of the Conquest[7]: the Mason-Dixon line emerges as "an
imperial intrusion, an insertion of artificial writing that implies a narrative of Conquest
to be etched upon the hinterland and over the unmeasured indigenous narratives that
abound in its path" (Lifshey 122).

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6   As Cowart puts it, Pynchon "sees colonial America as a place where Western civilization paused
    one last time before following its Faustian course towards rationalism, greater dependence on
    technology, and the throwing out of spiritual babies with the bathwater of magic and superstition"
    (Cowart 15).

7   For a detailed reading of *Mason & Dixon's* engagement with the cultures of Native Americans in
    the context of the Conquest, see also Freer.

One might be tempted to consider Pynchon's concern with historicity in the novel as a kind of counterweight to the postmodern emphasis on space. And yet this position would be difficult to defend in *Mason & Dixon*, where spatial categories dominate temporal ones even in the most subjunctively colored chapters. In one of them, Chapter 73, Mason and Dixon survey an alternative Vista, continuing West, beyond the Warrior Path, their line crossing Ohio, and passing into the Trans Allegheny wilderness, largely untouched by European powers. This hypothetical westward movement, as McHale notes, recapitulates in reverse temporal order the history of European presence in North America, and the wilderness Mason and Dixon venture into is essentially subjunctive space populated with alternative histories of America—French America, Spanish America, Chinese America, Russian America—other "temporalities," but localized in spatial enclaves, distinct "microworlds" (McHale 49). Undeniably, spatial forms are employed to articulate the historical and political conditions that shape the Western wilderness of *Mason & Dixon* into "a kind of contested writing surface on which alternative versions of the future (and the past) are in the process of being inscribed" (Miller 226); the geographical and topographical as well as historical and mythical features of the American West help Pynchon emphasize the subjunctive voice of history. Expanding McHale's reading, Adam Lifshey sees also the very possibility of ontological plurality as generated by the subjunctive mode, in which the New World emerges as created by absent presences and the Line as "imbued with an ongoing production of the spectral" (117).[8] At the heart of Pynchon's political critique, Lifshey contends, is subjunctive America projected as an "unmapped atemporal locus where plural realities and possibilities exist side by side" (Lifshey 125).

While the subjunctive injects into the novel the imaginative dynamics of wish and desire, speculation and conjecture in predominantly spatial terms, it also reveals Pynchon's counterfactual imagination as a temporal modality concerned with possibility, as a mode that in its operation does not directly invoke spatial forms and relations. The subjunctive, I argue, affects the temporal gestalt of the novel by introducing a perspective "tilted" toward the future: it projects into the narrative present and past an experience of time which "normally is only available for the future: time dividing and subdividing, bifurcating and branching off continuously into multiple possibilities and alternatives" (Heise 55). In other words, the subjunctive mode makes use of the inherent asymmetry of time which characterizes our everyday experience: the future as that which lies ahead appears to be open and indeterminate, full of multiple possibilities, while the present and the past appear more limited, often narrowed down to one temporal strand among these possibilities. In her study of postmodern novels Ursula Heise sees this vision of time as asymmetrical and generated by three major strategies: repetition, metalepsis, and experimental typography.[9] In the case of *Mason & Dixon*, however, these strategies are not sufficient to describe narrative time and

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8 "The explicit hauntings in *Mason & Dixon* number in the hundreds, the implicit ones in the thousands. As Brian McHale points out, 'the American wilderness of *Mason & Dixon* is a haunted landscape'. " As in *When the Combes Fought*, as in *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Popol Vuh* and Columbus's diary, America is ideated as absence arisen in a context of Conquest that links all sides of a haunted Atlantic world" (Lifshey 124).

9 See Heise 57-59.

the specific sense of temporality that Pynchon's text evokes. The novel's extensive and intensive use of the hypothetical and the counterfactual requires that we look more closely at the relation between modality and narrative articulations of time. In order to appreciate the complex relation between possibility and imagined time, the following section offers a more theoretically-oriented perspective on Pynchon's use of the subjunctive.

Modality and Hypothetical Focalization

Standard formal approaches to linguistic modality clearly differentiate between its deontic function, concerned with possibility and necessity in terms of freedom to act (giving instructions or permission, expressing duty or obligations), and its epistemic function, concerned with assessment of possibility, certainty or probability of events.[10] It is the second type, epistemic modality, that I wish to discuss here. In narratological accounts, modality is usually linked with the categories of focalization and perspective, and understood as constituted by statements of differing degrees of certainty, authority, objectivity and externality. In his lucid and informative article in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Valerij Tjupa lists four primary kinds of modality in which a story can be recounted: "a) neutral knowledge, b) an unreliable narrator's personal opinion, c) authoritative conviction that does not need approval, or d) an intersubjective modality that is neither neutral nor objective such as sharing of a common understanding among subjects" (Tjupa par.6). In *Story Logic* David Herman postulates another form of modality, one which has not been included in the classical typologies,[11] namely one that makes use of narrative's capacity to introduce perspectives other than the ones dramatized by characters or narrators. This hypothetical focalization (HF), as Herman calls it, "entails the use of hypotheses, framed by the narrator or a character, about what might be, or might have been seen or perceived—if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on the situations and events at issue" (Herman, *Story Logic* 303). Drawing on possible-worlds semantics, Herman argues that focalization in general can be theorized as the narrative representation of propositional attitudes ranging from certainty to virtuality to radical uncertainty. In other words, focalization as the narrative transcription of attitudes of seeing, believing etc. encodes epistemic modalities into narrative discourse. Hypothetical focalization taps into a peculiar epistemic modality that counterfactualizes the reference world of the text by marking what counts as actual versus possible over the course of a narrative (Herman, *Story Logic* 310-1). It is therefore capable of introducing "a highly mediated relation between the expressed and the reference world" by encoding a whole spectrum of modal possibilities ranging from the hypothetical or doubtful to the known ("Hypothetical Focalization" 242). Hypothetical focalization is thus theorized in Herman's model as a special case of incongruence between the narrative's expressed and reference worlds; it opens up

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10 Apart from these two types, modal epistemology distinguishes also alethic modality, concerned with the question of truth in modal judgements and claims.

11 As Herman notes, the absence of this type of focalization in structuralist typologies is not fortuitous, as "its description requires conceptual resources largely unavailable to classical narratology" ("Hypothetical Focalization" 231).

a virtual perspective which can be described according to the degree of ontological doubtfulness it conveys. The incongruence can range from global (or macrostructural) to local (or microstructural): the former refers "to situations in which a relatively lengthy sequence is judged ontologically dubious by contextual evidence" (Hägg 188); the latter, by contrast, denotes "a more textually limited discrepancy between the world of fiction and its subworlds, HF being a representative case of the localized variety of noncongruence" (Hägg 188). The possible frames of reference, Herman contends, are introduced either directly (a counterfactual observer or witness) or indirectly (a merely hypothetical onlooker whose activity the reader infers), marking in this way "different distributions of doubt and doubtfulness with respect to the situations and events being focalized" (Herman, "Hypothetical Focalization" 246).

Herman's model, by recognizing the importance of modality, appears to provide a solid conceptual framework that, as Martin FitzPatrick has argued, makes it possible to better understand "the forking paths of counterfactuals, wishes and unfulfilled possibilities" (FitzPatrick 248) in which subjunctive narratives, as the prime examples of what Gerald Prince calls the disnarrated,[12] abound. The semantic properties of these narratives "result from disruption of the relation between story and discourse" (FitzPatrick 245). More specifically, subjunctive narratives disrupt the exchange between story and discourse: "a *then* of events and a *now* of telling" (246, original emphasis). In doing so, they not only withhold significant information but also make it epistemologically insecure. As Emma Kafelanos observes, the problem with interpreting these narratives consists in the reader's inability to easily establish configurations from available information and interpret the function of events in relation to those configurations (55). This difficulty becomes especially important in the context of postmodern novels, in which "the multiplicity and undecidability themselves are presented as irreducible facts, not as competing hypotheticals" (Margolin 149). In other words, in such narratives the question of the factuality of a given hypothetical is secondary to its world-building potential: the narrators and characters are concerned not so much with whether their suppositions are true or false as with their beliefs in and wishes for narrative configurations to be true or false.

Using Prince's idea of the disnarrated and Herman's models as a theoretical framework, FitzPatrick examines two examples of subjunctive narrative from Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. The first one is a chase scene involving Roger Mexico, an event that does not occur within the main narrative frame and yet is presented as the narrator's or Mexico's speculation on how things could have gone. The other example is Slothrop's encounter with Ludwig, an orphan boy searching for his lost lemming, Ursula. The pet's ontological status remains unclear, and neither the reader nor Slothrop can determine whether the pet exists and has been lost or whether Ludwig is deluding himself and chasing a hypothetical lemming.[13] The conceptual apparatus FitzPatrick

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12 The disnarrated denotes "all the events that do not happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (Prince 2).

13 The episode becomes even more complex and obscure when Slothrop, who has been following Ludwig in the Zone, loses the boy and then sees him again carrying a lemming and looking happy. "We are not told whether Ludwig has found Ursula, has found a lemming and in his deluded state decides that this is Ursula, or is himself a hallucination invented by the increasingly unstable

employs is clearly applicable to other instances of Pynchon's subjunctive narrative. Its greatest advantage is that it permits more accurate descriptions of the hypothetical mode (strong, "cosmetic," compact, and as, for example, either embedded in the thought of a character, or more encompassingly focalized like "the view from the balcony") on different narrative levels. In *Mason & Dixon*, for instance, the subjunctive is not limited to the primary frame of narration (that of Rev. Wicks Cherrycoke), but appears also in the internal story of Mason and Dixon and on the level of the external, implied author. In my view, FitzPatrick is right in claiming that the placement of subjunctive narratives as opposed to indicative narration of the frames in which they operate strengthens the force of the subjunctive gesture. This amplification is most clearly visible in Chapter 73, which draws much of its energy from departing from the fixity of the indicative narration of the previous chapters that present more factually the end of Mason's and Dixon's project in America. And yet, as Samuli Hägg has argued in his narratological study of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Prince's concept and Herman's model cannot account for many instances of the texts' epistemic indeterminacy, especially ones in which readers encounter not grammatical markers of hypothetical focalization (auxiliaries, conditional phrases and the like) but contextually marked cases of ontological incongruity between expressed and reference worlds. In some episodes in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the distinction between the reference and a possible world is blurred to such an extent that it is impossible to determine "whether the focalization represents the belief context of a particular possible world or whether it represents the belief context of the reference world" (Hägg 202). The same kind of tenuous ontology characterizes many episodes of *Mason & Dixon*. Thus, for instance, the journey to the interior of the Earth (*Mason & Dixon* 738-43), a dream that Dixon narrates to Mason, lacks verbal markers of uncertainty and speculation, so Dixon's hypothetical journey is not clearly separate from the diegetic level of the narrative. Moreover, many of the micro-worlds in the novel are haunted by ghosts and spirits, and populated by ontologically ambiguous figures such as the Mechanical Duck, the Golem and the Learned English Dog whose mode of being is fuzzy and unclear. The reader cannot, to give another example, determine with certitude whether the ghost of Mason's wife visits him on St. Helena (*Mason & Dixon* 165) or whether the melancholic Mason, exposed to the fierce and unrelenting "Wind" that has driven many of the island's visitors mad, is simply losing his grip on reality and daydreaming or hallucinating. Examples of such radical indeterminacy abound in the novel, confirming Hägg's conclusion that "Pynchon's fiction refuses to function merely as an illustration of the concepts of narrative theory" (208). Hägg rightly remarks that, given the complexity of hypothetical focalization in *Gravity's Rainbow,* "one should retain a moderately skeptic view of the [traditional narratological] categories and concepts" (208). The study of these categories and concepts in general does indeed require, as Herman himself remarked, "pooling resources of linguistics, philosophy and the theory of narrative" (Herman, "Hypothetical Focalization" 246), especially since such study aims not only to sharpen our view of the differences between modes and literary genres, but, even more important, to "refine our understanding of the intentional properties of narrative discourse" (Herman, "Hypothetical Focalization" 246) by reorienting or re-describing focalization in general.

Slothrop" (FitzPatrick 249).

Herman's call for a re-description of focalization is, as Mark Currie suggests, motivated by the need to acknowledge the *temporal* dimension of temporality as the distribution of certainty over time. Currie's own approach in his 2013 book, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise,* is even more radical than Herman's as he seeks to "temporalize" narrative focalization by restoring the concept of modality, which has been largely neglected in traditional narratological accounts. Distancing himself from the strong affiliations of contemporary narratology with linguistics and drawing instead on semantics, Currie argues that modality is one of "the most basic categories by which we can understand the passage of time in discourse" and, together with the concept of tense, "can be used to link narrative temporality to the experience of time in life" (3). Accordingly, he extends the notion of narrative modality by linking it with the perspectival structures of narrative (distribution of information) and by relating it to the grammar of verbs concerned with probability and certainty. The literary examples he examines are intended to show how modality can encompass the semantics of future time reference and thus register in the possible not only its contingency but also its futurity.[14]

Currie's argument is complex and defies short summary. Suffice it to say that it encourages us to move beyond the linguistically inflected study of narrative and look for sources of modality other than those derived from the semantic properties of the relation between story and discourse as delineated in classical narratology. Herman's account also anticipates this move by treating hypotheticality in very broad terms, that is, as encompassing both perceptual and cognitive focalization. By this means, as Hägg usefully points out, "Herman draws tentative lines of correspondence between HF and the representation of mental acts" (Hägg 192). It seems that the inability of Herman's four-scheme model of focalization to account for some more radical cases of epistemic indeterminacy does not so much indicate a mistake or inconsistency in his argument as reveal the limits of the tradition on which he draws, that of modal theoretical semantics.[15] To put it plainly, many problematic cases in Pynchon's narratives cannot be clarified simply by reference to incongruences between the expressed and reference worlds. What is needed is a more nuanced approach to modality, an approach that

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14 It is important to note that Currie treats modality not merely as a complement to the category of tense but as a category more basic to the temporality of discourse than tense. As such, he contends, it is capable of being "scaled up to describe something above the level of verb or sentence about the dynamics of doubts, uncertainty and knowledge that give narrative its sense of temporal movement" (Currie 3).

15 This approach is symptomatic of the general tendency in philosophy and literary studies to restrict imagination to objects of possible beliefs and fictional truths, which can then be analyzed in terms of fictional worlds, defined by sets of propositions (Moran 106). This reductive treatment of imagination, as Thomas has argued, is an effect of the linguistic turn, which in emphasizing the close association between thought and language effectively occluded other states and levels of imaginal consciousness. "*Imagining that* is a linguistic, or at any rate a propositional matter, and, as such, lends itself to explication in terms of the characteristic tools of the analytical philosopher, logical and linguistic analysis. Those tools, however, provide relatively little purchase on something non-propositional like imagery (unless it can somehow be shown to be reducible to a propositional format) or imaginative perception" (Thomas 165, emphasis in original). The purchasing power of propositional imagining, as I have argued above, wears thin and ultimately gives way, when confronted with the temporal aporias that Pynchon's narrative brings to the fore.

can do justice to the complex relation between narrative temporality and temporal possibility, especially in its projective character.

In Currie's view, narrative hypotheticality should be approached theoretically as a mechanism for the cognitive grasp of the future, as the projection of the future perfect in the form of a conjecture concerning "what might have happened." Possible-worlds theory ignores this projective dimension by establishing an equivalence between possible worlds "as parallel ontological worlds in which no special status is accorded to the actual world in terms of the semantic operations by which this world is constructed, so that possibility and probability can mean much more than the fidelity of a representation to the actual world" (107-8). In other words, modality in the possible-worlds model is understood in terms of contingency, as voices or statements of differing degrees of certainty, authority, objectivity and externality. Possible-world semantics thus neglects the relative probability or possibility of events (108). The heavy stress this model lays on logical contingency excludes "the perspectival structure[16] of focalization in terms of temporal position: of what is certain, what is expected and what is unexpected" (113).[17] Consequently, possible-worlds theory introduces the spatial into narrative accounts of temporality by constructing "a parallel and autonomous temporal system which relates to real time in the manner of metaphorical substitution: it's similar but different" (111). Thus, for instance, the notion of chronology is presented as a metaphor, "in the sense that it is merely analogous to the notion of chronology that pertains in real time" (Currie 111). By viewing temporal processes primarily as components of narrative logic (as principles of selection and combination), possible-world semantics detaches narrative time from the complex structure and rich texture of lived temporality. Therefore, it cannot account for the creative and projective dimension of temporal possibility: "the category of temporal possibility is simply displaced by the notion of possibility as alternative possible world, and modality's link to anticipation and prediction is severed" (110). Consequently, modality's function is reduced to the problem of temporal location and organization, and the question of perspectival immediacy and actuality is largely ignored.[18]

Currie's argument becomes even more complex, but given the thematic scope of this discussion, I shall limit myself to examining his notion of "hypotheticality" as retrospect which does not exist in the moment, that is, which goes beyond the perspective of characters and narrators (their location in a moment). This retrospection makes use of "a hypothetical perspective on what might have been seen if only there were someone there who knew the future, or occupied a position of retrospect (a location in a future moment, an omniscience across time)" (Currie 102). This type of narrative modality appears not only to explain the peculiar temporality of chapter 73 and other subjunctive-colored passages in *Mason & Dixon* but, even more important, to capture something of the ambivalent splendor of the 'subjunctive' in which the entire novel is cast.

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16 I will discuss this structure as a central component of recreative projections in the following section.

17 For another critique of the attempt to reduce modality to possible-world semantics, see, for instance, Bueno and Shalkowski, and Malmgren 307-312.

18 For a more detailed discussion of these complex and contentious matters in contemporary narratology, see Currie 109-113.

Temporal Asymmetry, Sideshadowing, and Impossible Possibility

As Heise has argued, postmodernist novels often explore the inherent asymmetry of time and rely heavily on the type of perspective that is tilted toward the future in such a way that "we cannot be sure even retrospectively which one of several possible developments turned from possibility to reality, let alone… know which one is being realized in the narrative present. Through this narrative strategy, the reader is made to live in a constant retrojection of the time experience of the future" (Heise 55). This open and asymmetrical sense of time, which postmodernist narratives amplify and take to a breaking point, was captured in earlier fictions by means of the narrative device that Gary Saul Morson in his study of tempics has called "sideshadowing." Unlike the familiar foreshadowing, which operates with symmetrical time and introduces a temporality of inevitability, sideshadowing is concerned with the hypothetical, with what might be and what might have been. By casting a shadow from the side, that is, from the other possibilities, it allows us to see how "the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text" (602). Sideshadowing gives a glimpse of unrealized but realizable possibilities: "along with an event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present" (602). It restores the presentness of the present and the openness of the future by revealing other temporalities as they "are continually competing for each moment of actuality" (602). By doing so, sideshadowing destabilizes the temporal legitimacy of the actual, presenting it as "just another possibility that somehow came to pass" (602). Sideshadowing also undermines our tendency to trace straight lines of causality from one event in the past to the present and thus to reduce the constant "ravelment of possibilities." Sideshadowing approaches time as a field of possibilities, with each moment having its own set of possible events that could take place in it. "From this field a single event emerges—perhaps by chance, perhaps by choice, perhaps by some combination of both with the inertia of the past, and in any case contingently. The other possibilities usually appear invisible or distorted to later observers. Thus a field is mistakenly reduced to a point, and, over time, a succession of fields is reduced to a line" (Morson 603). In other words, as Pynchon puts it in the earlier quoted passage from *Mason & Dixon*, this field of possibilities is "measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, … changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities" (*Mason & Dixon* 346). Morson reminds us that "even if we are right about which events did happen, we may be mistaken in tracing straight lines between them" (603). It is in this context that I understand Bernard Duyfhuizen's exhortation to get lost in the narrative wilderness of *Mason & Dixon*. "[R]eaders may be better off getting lost in the wilderness of narrators and voices than trying to carve a clear and straight Visto through its thicket of words" (Duyfhuizen 140). Pynchon's narrative encourages its readers to treat all kinds of orthogonality with suspicion by making it clear that what is declaratively overwritten as Mason and Dixon cut their straight Line is unenclosed possibility per se (Lifshey 128).

What ultimately makes *Mason & Dixon* a time novel is its effort "to restore the possibility of possibility," and to "penetrate into the middle realm" suspended between actualities and impossibilities (to paraphrase Morson). To what extent it succeeds in

this endeavor is left to the reader to decide, to the "you" in the last sentence of the novel. There is a persistent element of darkness that might quench this imaginative mobility. Heinz Ickstadt ends his essay on the subjunctive in *Mason & Dixon* by quoting an anonymous voice from the Internet that sees Pynchon's novels as "pervaded by a consciousness of impossible possibility," a consciousness that creates tension between a desire for revelation and a mocking rhetoric of irreversibility (567). This consciousness, in my view, does not so much confirm a postmodern diagnosis of the contemporary as a condition of blocked futurity as it signals subversive sensibilities that can effectively resist various temporal regimes as systems of oppression. Dream time, as one of the dominant subjunctive strategies of resistance in *Mason & Dixon*, is particularly apt in re-imagining how the past, present and future might imaginatively and unpredictably interact. While escape from the forces of oppression in Pynchon's fiction is usually temporary, "often no more than a moment of miraculous anarchy that eludes capture and analysis, in part by being only temporary" (Miller 233), it remains a dormant possibility. It can easily be played down as wishful thinking or as a fantasy of how things could have been otherwise. But it can also move beyond that and reveal subjunctivity as a meta-code of temporal imagination, capable not merely of dreaming other times and temporalities in the individual theater of one person's mind, but also of shaping the imaginaries of groups and communities. As many critics and readers have pointed out, *Mason & Dixon* goes beyond the ironic playfulness[19] that characterizes much postmodernist fiction by engaging ethical and political concerns in its vision of America. Frank Palmeri argues that Pynchon's narrative "moves away from the representation of extreme paranoia, toward a vision of local ethico-political possibilities" (par. 5) by shifting away from the individual to a more diffuse set of subjects" (Hinds 19). This shift is also a departure from the postmodern tendency to isolate and privatize "subjectification" (Palmeri par. 38).[20]

It is hard to deny that *Mason & Dixon* projects history as a closed process as "seen from a known future that is our contemporary present" (Ickstadt 555) and that in doing so it eliminates the historically contingent, nostalgically presenting "a wisdom that comes from the knowledge of inevitable outcome" (Ickstadt 556).[21] It

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19 It is worth noting that possibilities and alternative visions remain in *Mason & Dixon*, as in the earlier novels, suspended between parody and hope. So they are not unambiguous; thus, for example, the vision of America in the novel is, as Ickstadt suggests, both an illusion (an idea and a place haunted by ghosts of a Dream) and a repository for hopes (563).

20 For a contemporary overview and a new reading of the political in *Mason & Dixon*, see Carswell 49-79.

21 Through its extensive use of the subjunctive, *Mason & Dixon* might also be seen as anachronistically announcing the new temporal sensibilities that emerged in the wake of the American and French revolutions. The text clearly foreshadows both of them; the former is more tangibly present, and the latter less so. Pynchon's fictional historiography is not entirely at odds with Reinhard Koselleck's and Peter Fritzsche's argument that the loss of certainty and predictability can be taken as a fundamental characteristic trait of modern historical consciousness. The revolutions, upheavals and wars of the late 18th and the early 19th century fundamentally altered the "previously authoritative structure of temporality by redrawing the horizon of historical possibility" (Fritzsche 18): the future could no longer be derived from the present, and the present could no longer be seen as a continuation of the past. This radical shift in historical consciousness had ambiguous consequences. On the one hand, it contributed to a new frame of meaning through which

does not, however, I argue, render null "the moment and its possibilities" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 159) and does not vacate the temporal modality of its narrative reinvention and recreation. While the "possible" (utopian visions, dreams of paradise, tales of the miraculous and wonderful) is indeed practically destroyed and rationally deconstructed, *Mason & Dixon* incessantly counters the reduction of "Possibilities to Simplicities" by imaginatively re-creating and re-presenting them. The text thus oscillates, as Ickstadt himself admits, "between the knowledge of irrevocable loss and of the re-creative power of its own desiring" (Ickstadt 555). This oscillation results from the complex pairing of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries as "the actual and the imagined, what did happen and what might have happened" (Hinds 9). As Hinds observes, "the novel's time obsession is largely dramatized by a constant interplay of these real and imagined, past and present 'presences'" (Hinds 9). The interplay obviously involves not only the time of the novel's narration but also the time of our reading. The impulse to read the text as projected against our own present is difficult to resist, as the novel by its pervasive use of anachronisms recasts the eighteenth century in modern terms, "equalizing" these two discrete eras at the "fold" that, much like a suture, reveals both a wound and its closure and the two eras as bleeding into each other. "This narrative maneuver erases history's reality of before-and-after to create not chronology but synchronicity" (Hinds 11). In rejecting the past as a linear chain of causes and effects, Pynchon's narrative introduces alternative worlds that harbor the possible as well as everything that has been deconstructed or destroyed and rendered impossible. Pynchon's narrative thus shares the Melvillean yearning for immediacy and incarnation as it "can neither persist in the denial of an alternative world nor in the assertion of it—since each denies the other in a mixture of nostalgia and irony" (Ickstadt 565). This yearning is closely related to the subjunctive, which, with its projective, creative character, attests to the mobility and amplitude of Pynchon's imaginative thought.

The subjunctive is not reduced either to its grammatical function or to the mere entertaining of propositions but emerges as a central modal component of Pynchon's imaginative recreation of Colonial America. As such the subjunctive acts as a thick conception which involves historical and moral appraisals of past actions and situations and which in the course of the narrative creates an experience with a distinctive phenomenology. Imagining modality, as Balcerzak-Jackson reminds us, activates not only hypothetical reasoning but also "objectual and eventive imaginings [that] involve capacities related to perspective-taking and phenomenal experience" (47), imaginings that through their employment of cognitive resources "go beyond those needed merely to entertain a certain mental content" (48). In answering the question what it would be like doing such a thing or being in such a state, "imagining involves a certain—often vivid and immediate—phenomenology" (Balcerzak-Jackson 49) that sets it

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Europeans and Americans experienced history as a process of permanent loss, which stranded them in the present and caused feelings of melancholy and nostalgia. On the other, it contributed to constructions of new individual and national imaginations by allowing for "imaginative journeys backward in time" that helped to build "subjecthood" in respect to "both the nation and the individual" (Fritzsche 7). As Fritsche puts it, the radicality of these changes derives its force directly from the imaginary applied in remaking political and social life: "it was the self-authorization to reimagine the familiar world that proved to be so liberating, and so scandalous" (Fritzsche 21).

apart from supposing or hypothetical reasoning. The capacity to put oneself in the perspective of another subject by recreating or simulating the subject's involvement in a given situation or act has a distinctive phenomenal character of experience that accompanies the recreative projection.[22] Pynchon's use of the subjunctive mode goes beyond hypothetical reasoning and requires not only counterfactual supposition of some proposition but also participation in what Richard Morton has called "dramatic imagining." This sort of imagining, capable of arousing a strong emotive response,[23] requires "something more like a point of view, a total perspective on the situation, rather than just the truth of a specifiable proposition. And imagining along these lines involves something more like genuine rehearsal, 'trying on' the point of view, trying to determine what it is like to inhabit it" (105).[24]

In this capacity the subjunctive mode is not merely employed as a tactic of doubt involved in the production of ontological and epistemic indeterminacies but is also capable of recasting the actual in new keys. By allowing for the singular and accidental, it does not reduce the future to an extension of the present. Nor does it merely endorse a model of time in which the infinite subdivisibility of the instant located within a discrete territory of the text produces "the effect of a singularized perpetuity, evocative of lived experience of time as motion" (Huehls 43). In claiming that Pynchon's subjunctivity as a mode of being within time lacks the future's possibility, Huehls seems to forget the concurrent interplay of temporalities replacing chronology with synchronicity that he himself identifies and describes as "a temporally parallactic narrative form" capable of articulating time "without sacrificing time's temporality" (43). The hypothetical island in the middle of the Atlantic which, in the novel's alternative ending, Mason and Dixon occupy, "content to reside like Ferrymen or Bridge-keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless Spectacle of Transition" (*Mason & Dixon* 713), does not necessarily indicate the state of being "trapped in a purgatory of subjunctivity" that lacks futurity (Huehls 42).[25] If the subjunctive permits stories and meaning to be born out of that "moment" in the middle of time's river, it is not only by virtue of its constant deferral of debts to the passage of Time but also due to its unique relation to time as a field of possibilities in all their plurality and indivisibility. What lie at the heart of the subjunctive are "the capacities of narrative itself, as invention rather than as mediate information" (FitzPatrick 259). This invention, as I have been arguing, is an imaginary

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22 This feature of imagination is perhaps best captured in the recreativist or simulationist view that characterizes imagining as a cognitive mechanism grounded on embodied perception. See Currie and Ravenscroft.

23 As one of the charcters in *Against the Day* puts it, "I am as fond of the subjunctive mood as any, but as the only use to which you ever put it is for a *two-word vulgarism* better left unutterred—" (1033, emphasis in original).

24 The hypothetical conversation between young Mason and his father in chapter 21 is an illustrative example of dramatic and emotionally charged imagining that Pynchon's work taps into.

25 I do not deny the dangers of possibility that Huehls identifies by citing the example of the Doctrine of Pre-Emptive Action from the 2002 National Security Strategy, which can be invoked "to justify violence in the present… by overdetermining the future" (46). As Michael Wood in his review of the novel observes, "the subjunctive doesn't have to be good news. America is a dream but also an infinite danger, and never more dangerous, the implication is, then when it claims to know itself or close its frontiers" (qtd. in Ickstadt 556).

intervention that introduces a liberating sense of plurality by projecting America as a subjunctive realm "filled with plural realities and unrealities. Indeed, it is the very unresolvability of this plurality that makes it subjunctive in the first place" (Lifshey 127). What the subjunctive in Pynchon's work ultimately points to is counterfactual imagination concerned with possibility itself.

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Ewelina Bańka

Walking with the Invisible: The Politics of Border Crossing in Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway: A True Story*

Abstract: The article focuses on Luis Alberto Urrea's non-fiction book *The Devil's True Story* (2004) as a critique of the politics of border crossing and of the mechanisms of state power that shape the contemporary anti-immigration discourse. Drawing on diverse sources, the writer reconstructs the story of twenty-six Mexican men who in May 2001 attempted to cross the U.S.-Mexico border at one of its deadliest stretches—The Devil's Highway. Documenting the story of the "undocumented," Urrea reveals the forces that render the migrants alienated, racially stigmatized, criminalized, and dehumanized. The writer also points out that the current political debate on illegal immigration essentially pre-empts the need for a discussion that would focus on the human conditions that trigger migration rather than on the illegality of border crossing. Thus, the book reconstructs the tragic incident at the border that not only shows how the story was controlled and narrated by the entities of power but, more importantly, how it was experienced by the walkers.

Keywords: U.S.-Mexico border, border crossing, illegal alien, immigration, Luis Alberto Urrea

> One is not born a migrant but becomes one.
> Thomas Nail, "The Migrant Image"
>
> If a Mexican dies trying to cross the deadliest desert in north America, or eighteen Guatemalans vanish, and no one sees them, did they ever really exist in our national conscience?
> John Annerino, *Dead in Their Tracks: Crossing America's Desert Borderlands*
>
> Illegality is not simply a state of being, but rather a matter of social-political construction and struggle.
> Josiah Heyman, "'Illegality' and the U.S.-Mexico Border: How It is Produced and Resisted"

Without question, the image of the migrant has become a symbol of the humanitarian crisis witnessed over the last years at the U.S.-Mexican border. The situation reflects the current socio-political climate in which American society is becoming drastically polarized over the issues of national identity, culture, and socio-political ideals. While more and more voices demand the problem of migration be tackled with respect for human rights, a wave of anti-immigrant movements, with blatantly nativist agendas, continues to emerge, empowered by the aggressive, anti-immigration rhetoric created by the current U.S. president.

The unprecedented increase in the number of men, women, and children from Central and South America trying to cross the U.S.-Mexican border has been used by Donald Trump to promote (often by aggravating societal fears and anxieties) his xenophobic rhetoric, and to legitimize the idea that in order to be great again, America has to be saved and, therefore, "sealed off" from various forms of danger

and impurity. Many of these dangers are represented by the migrant portrayed as a "pollutant" invading and contaminating the space of the nation state (Cisneros 569). This politically-charged "cleansing" is reminiscent of Mary Douglas's theory of social ordering of the world based on rejecting any forms of pollution (racial, social, cultural, religious, etc.) created in the process. Dirt, the critic argues, is understood as an undesired, abjected "by-product" that threatens the proper functioning of the system, which relies on clear/clean classifications. To maintain and justify the order, the system must therefore eliminate any elements that do not fit the established norms (36).

Centered on the idea of social cleansing, Trump's "theater of power" (Truett and Alvarez 31) has led to further militarization of the borderland region and to the strengthening of a narrative about the U.S. as a border nation, "a nation always pushing, always negotiating that spot…. It is a national project" (Malagamba-Ansótegui and Moore 127). The current president's political agenda can thus be seen as part of the U.S. government's strategy to naturalize state-imposed control at the national borders. The strategy had its dramatic moment in the 20th century when the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), signed into law in 1986. The IRCA began a series of other actions taken by local authorities to prevent migration in their areas. Three major operations at the border have profoundly impacted the way migration is perceived. Operation Hold the Line was launched in El Paso, Texas in 1993. A year later, two other projects were set up: Operation Gatekeeper in California and Operation Safeguard in Arizona.[1] The enhanced surveillance system provided by these operations was supposed to make the border impermeable and to bring it under control in major strategic urban zones. As many critics have pointed out, concentrating border surveillance in populous urban areas has decreased the number of border crossers there; however, migration in less known and protected areas has skyrocketed, pushing desperate migrants to the perilous regions of the Southwestern desert lands.

Interestingly, as Ila Sheren observes, the names chosen for the operations implied that the United States was constantly being attacked or that it was at war. However, as the critic argues,

> [w]hen compared with the individuals undertaking the crossing, these names only underscore the disparity between perception and reality. Much like the naming of the Global War on Terror during the second Bush era, the act of labeling legitimizes the conflict. In both cases, the United States is put on the defensive against nameless or otherwise undefined forces. In the popular imagination, then, the newly fortified border cities become the last bastion of security in an epic siege. (137)

Trying to control the immigration debate, President Trump has on numerous occasions criminalized migrants, portraying them as a monolithic mass of "illegal aliens" responsible for terrorism, violence, contamination, and narcotrafficking, thus posing a serious threat to national security. Supported by the militaristic modus operandi, Trump's scapegoating strategy becomes what critics Sang Hea Kil and Cecilia Menjívar

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1   For an in-depth analysis of the politics of border militarization and its influence on migrants as well as residents of the border see Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Routledge, 2002).

describe as "symbolic racism based on a notion 'us versus the enemy' that brutalizes the public as it encourages hostility toward immigrants who cross the southern border" (165). This strategy indicates also the government's attempt to deny responsibility for the crisis at the border, and to avoid any further discussion that would force the U.S. to address the reasons for the massive migration across the Americas. Kristin E. Heyer notes that by reducing the problems of immigration "to the locus of border crossers alone," Trump's administration "eclipses from view transnational actors responsible for economic instability, violent conflict, or labor recruitment, and also eclipses their accountability" (146). The further construction of the border wall has become an erroneously chosen and ill-conceived strategy to address the issues of migration. Much as the U.S. tries to protect itself from the "contaminating element," a continuous movement in the borderland region challenges the country's "sealed" and "sanitized" status. The undocumented migrants, constantly re-emerging at the southern border, become the country's haunting presence,[2] dispelling the illusion that the U.S. can perform a complete physical, historical, and cultural amputation and extricate itself from the obligation to deal with the human crises taking place across the continent.

In the current socio-political climate, Luis Alberto Urrea's non-fiction book *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* (2004) becomes a telling critique of the politics of border crossing and of the mechanisms of state power that continue to shape the anti-immigration discourse. Drawing on diverse sources, among them official reports from Border Patrol agencies and consulates, press articles, trial documents, testimonies, interviews, notes on personal journeys, and piles of seemingly tangential material, Urrea reconstructs the story of twenty-six Mexican men (most of them small-plot farmers and coffee growers from rural Veracruz) who in May 2001 attempted to cross the U.S.-Mexican border at one of its deadliest stretches located in the Sonoran Desert—The Devil's Highway. The harrowing trek began on May 19 and lasted till May 24. Fourteen of the men died on the way of exposure and heat stroke; the remaining twelve were rescued by Border Patrol agents. During the following months, the tragic incident garnered serious media attention and was investigated by various institutions on both sides of the border. In the public coverage the men were given different names, depending on the border station that took part in the rescue mission: "the Yuma 14" or "the Wellton 26." Dead or alive, the Mexicans became enmeshed in a politically-charged "ping-pong game" played between various institutions involved in the event. Numerous narratives were created in which the walkers were criminals, victims, and national folk heroes, all depending on the intentions of the particular body interested in the incident. The tragic story is aptly commented on by Urrea, who points out ironically: "Nobody wanted them when they were alive, and now look—everybody wants to own them" (*Devil's Highway* 31).

Yet, no matter the amount of compassion the Wellton 26 received, in the official juridical dispute the survivors were treated as "illegal entrants/aliens" who trespassed the state border and entered foreign land. Reconstructing the ill-fated walk, the rescue action, and the legal procedures following the incident, Urrea offers

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2   For a close analysis of the relationship between memory and haunting at the U.S.-Mexico border see Jessica Auchter's *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

a story that problematizes the issue of border crossing and exposes the political forces involved in the process of controlling and manipulating the issues of migration by the entities of power. Offering multiple perspectives on the incident, the writer reveals the forces that render the migrants alienated, racially stigmatized, criminalized, and dehumanized. Documenting the story of the "undocumented," Urrea's account ultimately shows how the current political debate on "illegal immigration" essentially eliminates the human from the center of the discussion. Consequently, a new socio-political figure is created—the "illegal alien." Seen as a social menace, he/she must be fought against and removed from the space of the protected nation state. As Urrea points out in the book, a debate on "illegal immigration" pre-empts the need for a discussion that would focus on the human conditions that trigger migration rather than on the illegality of border crossing. Framing the debate on immigration as a problem of "illegal crossing" ultimately erases the questions of "why are people coming to the US, often times at great risk? What service do they provide when they are here? Why do they feel it necessary to avoid legal channels? It boils the entire debate down to questions of legality" (Lakoff 6). The book is a detailed reconstruction of the tragic incident at the border that not only shows how the story was controlled and narrated by the entities of power but, more importantly, how it was experienced by the walkers.

The map that precedes the narrated account resembles the official Arizona state map with an enlarged area of detail showing the walkers' trek, reconstructed during the forensic investigation. The cartographic representation of the story foretells the conflict that is explored by Urrea, namely the clash between how the states and the migrants view the act of border crossing. In his book *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, J.B. Harley argues that rather than mirrors of nature, maps should be seen as rhetorical texts about the social ordering of the world. Thus, as subjective constructions of reality, maps, claims the author, are "never neutral or value-free" (37). On the contrary, they are "a language of power" (79) manifested as "a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations" (53). When created and used by a political body, such as a nation state, maps can be seen as "a controlled fiction" used to legitimize power and usurp control over a territory and a people (53). As Harley points out, to fully understand the mechanisms used in the creation of a particular social order, one must, on the one hand, look at what that social order's maps emphasize, but also pay attention to what they de-emphasize. Interpretation, states Harley, "becomes a search for silences" that may "reveal how the social order creates tensions within its content" (45).

Seen from this perspective, the map included in Urrea's book demonstrates a clash in power relations characteristic of the U.S.-Mexican border region which, to use Gloria Anzaldúa's words, turns into "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (3). The dramatic conflict is represented by two different narratives: the unofficial one, produced by the walkers, and the official one, created and imposed by the U.S. nation state. The language of geopolitical power, represented by the national and state borders, becomes "polluted" by the new element introduced on the map: the footprints of the twenty-six walkers represented by the dotted line marking the trek across the Devil's Highway. Imagined via a cartographic tool, the

geopolitical order maintained by the U.S. and Mexico is interrupted by the walkers' presence inscribed in the socio-political landscape represented on the map.

The conflict is also implied in the map legend created in the form of 15 points briefly reconstructing the trek. While the U.S.-Mexican border is visible on the map, it is, interestingly, not mentioned in the legend. The information given in point 1 states: "Saturday, May 19, 1:40 p.m. Group entered by vehicle at Quitobaquito" (*Devil's Highway* xix). By focusing on the details of the men's walk in the area of the Devil's Highway, without describing the event as "border crossing," Urrea offers an alternative perspective on the story which shifts the focus from the narrative of "illegal immigration" to the story of the tragic event that forever changed the lives of the twenty-six men and their families.

The subsequent chapters of the book reconstruct the story of the men from the moment they decide to look for better jobs in the U.S., through the story of them being recruited by the border mafia, the ordeal of their trek across the desert, and the investigation, to the aftermath of the event. The narrative opens with a portrayal of their rescue by a Border Patrol agent. Interestingly, it is followed by an elaborate presentation of the rich history of the Sonoran region across which the walkers moved. The desert emerges as a home to the holy spirits still revered by the descendants of the Indigenous and Mexican people who inhabited the region, as well as to the creatures of the folk tales known widely across the borderlands. Called Desolation, it is also a vast graveyard in the form of "a forest of eldritch bones" that holds evidence of the history of pre-colonial life in the region, the arrival of Europeans and subsequent colonization of the continent, the emergence and development of the modern nation states, and the most recent migratory movement across the border (*Devil's Highway* 5). Thus, the desert land, like a palimpsest, becomes an archive, storing material evidence which, when properly deciphered, portrays the land as a rich and "shifting mosaic of human spaces" (Truett 9) characterized by one major feature, that is movement:

> Today, the ancient Hohokam have vanished, like the Anasazi, long gone in the north. Their etchings and ruins still dot the ground; unexplained radiating lines lead away from the center like ghost roads in the shape of a great star. Not all of these paths are ancient. Some of the lines have been made by the illegals, cutting across the waste to the far lights of Ajo, or Sells, or the Mohawk rest area on I-8. Others are old beyond dating, and no one knows where they lead. Footprints of long-dead cowboys are still there, wagon ruts and mule scuffs. And beneath these, the prints of the phantom Hohokam themselves. (*Devil's Highway* 4-7)

Presenting movement as a feature inherent to the borderland experience, Urrea implies that migration was natural not only in the pre-contact era but, in fact is an intrinsically human experience. Thus, by merging the story of the Wellton 26 with ancient history and tribal mythology, the writer presents the modern migrants' walk as a continuation of movement that began in the mythic time and place. In so doing, Urrea challenges the Western notions of border politics, and the territorial status quo of the two nation states on both sides of the border. Moreover, describing the history of the region, Urrea points to the fact that with the emergence of nation states, movement across the land became gradually politicized and criminalized:

> Immigration, the drive northwards, is a white phenomenon. White Europeans
> conceived of and launched El Norte mania, just as white Europeans inhabiting
> the United States today bemoan it. They started to complain after the Civil War.
> The first illegal immigrants to be hunted down in Desolation by the earliest
> form of the Border patrol were Chinese. In the 1880s, American railroad barons
> needed cheap skilled labor to help 'tame our continent.' Mexico's Chinese
> hordes could be hired for cheap…. Jobs opened, word went out, the illegals
> came north. Sound familiar? Americans panicked at the 'yellowing' of America.
> A force known as the Mounted Chinese Exclusionary Police took to the dusty
> wasteland. They chased the 'coolies' and deported them. (*Devil's Highway* 8)

Since the story of the twenty-six walkers is stitched together from different dramatic
accounts from the history of the region, in the course of narration the migrants' experience
becomes not only a journey through space, but also through time. The survivors' coming
out of hiding on May 24, 2001 can therefore be seen as their emerging from the dense
and dark history of the region, a Desolation they were forced to experience:

> Five men stumbled out of the mountain pass so sunstruck they didn't know
> their own names, couldn't remember where they'd come from, had forgotten
> how long they'd been lost…. They were drunk from having their brains baked
> in the pan, they were seeing God and devils, and they were dizzy from drinking
> their own urine, the poisons clogging their systems. They were beyond rational
> thought. (*Devil's Highway* 3)

A physical site where the tragedy takes place, Desolation also becomes a symbol of
the multiple borders imposed on the men before, during, and after their walk.[3] Taking
the readers back to rural Veracruz, where most of the men came from, Urrea briefly
portrays their lives in a region impoverished by the powerful economic changes
brought by NAFTA and various U.S. companies such as Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Pushed
to the bottom of the social ladder, the men and their families were rendered socially
invisible, vulnerable and thus easy prey to the border mafia who capitalized on poor
people desperate to change their lives by luring them with the prospect of a job that
would help support their families. Thus, before the men arrived at the U.S.-Mexican
border, they had already experienced the social and economic borders that eventually
pushed them north, towards their Promised Land. Yet, while the dreams of a better
life kept the men walking, the borders of their imagined economic "Canaan" were
rigorously protected against the "pilgrims."

One such protective tactic presented in Urrea's account is the act of "cutting
the drag." As Ronald Rael explains, the term describes "traditional methods of hunting

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3 In her analysis of border crossing, Amelia Malagamba-Ansótegui aptly points out that the
physical wall is just one of the many borders that the prospective migrant struggles against: "The
border starts in the imaginary, in the space of everyday life, in self-representation, in action, and
in agency. The border has meanings away from the physical border itself. How can we even
conceptualize that border carried along in the head of the migrant. You start saving money for
the crossing. You start planning. You start making decisions about your family for the crossing.
Everything has to do with the crossing. Crossing the line will mark the event, but the mental
spaces created by the future event take place away from the border. The spatial quality of the
border has become a powerful place and space it marks an event on both sides of it" (123-124).

by cutting a trail and sweeping back and forth along the expected direction in order to pick up tracks a considerable distance ahead" (46). Used by Border Patrol agents as an enhancement of their surveilling methods, the practice leads to the creation of "manicured landscapes" that, as Rael observes, conceptually resemble "the raked gravel in traditional Zen gardens" (46). Yet, the smoothed patches of land monitored by the Border Patrol play a role unlike that of the pristine and tranquil Zen spaces: "These petrified landscapes remain suspended in time until the next intruder interrupts the serenity of the tabula rasa formed by the grooming, which creates clouds of dust in long rows that mirror the wall from a distance – an ephemeral wall made of particles that disappear back into the landscape" (46-47). The surveilling practice described in the book becomes therefore a symbolic "sealing" of the border so that the unwanted do not intrude on the controlled space. Since the systematic smoothing of the ground erases the migrants' footprints from the controlled zone, cutting the drag becomes a metaphor for the state's intentional combating the migrating "pollutants" and subsequent erasing of their presence from the space of the nation (Cisneros 569).

The mechanisms of erasure and dehumanization of the migrants are also exposed by Urrea in the language created by different parties involved in the story and later disseminated and normalized by the media. In order to recreate the entire incident in as much detail as possible, the writer relied on various sources from across the border.[4] Consequently, the book abounds in names used to describe the migrants, such as a "tonk,"[5] "wet/wetback," "taco bender," "walker," "OTM (Other Than Mexican)," "pollo,"[6] "Oaxaca,"[7] "John/Jane Doe,"[8] "illegal alien," "illegal entrant," and "undocumented worker." When used interchangeably in the story, the names reveal how the figure of the migrant as a racially and socially profiled menace is created by the entities of power, leaving the actual people moving across the land with no agency over how they are portrayed and dealt with. The name that stands out from the above mentioned ones, and is indubitably preferred by Urrea, is "walker." Neutral and non-aggressive in its character, it refers only to the aspect of movement. The other terms, on the contrary, stigmatize the migrants as either vulnerable, ignorant, primitive, and exploitable or, when described in legal terminology, connected with crime, intrusive, other-worldly, and thus uncontrollable. As Urrea acutely observes, being regularly called names "other than human," the walkers can be easily turned into an abstract monolithic and dangerous mass deprived of human rights, thus unidentifiable to the public as members of any social group (*Devil's Highway* 39).

When used together in the book, the names given to the walkers reveal yet one more problem explored by Urrea, namely the criminalization of races, and

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4   Urrea explains that while working on the book he made sure that the information he revealed would not put the surviving men and their families at risk (*Devil's Highway* xv-xvi).

5   It is a term used among Border Patrol agents that is "based on the stark sound of a flashlight breaking over a human head" (*Devil's Highway* 16).

6   "Pollo" (Spanish slang)—a cooked chicken; a term used to describe a person smuggled across the border by a "pollero"—a mafia guide who becomes a "chicken wrangler" (*Devil's Highway* 60).

7   A name given to the walkers by Mexican mestizos. It comes from the name of the state in Mexico with the largest Indigenous population (*Devil's Highway* 39).

8   A term given to an unidentified migrant who is subject to legal proceedings.

marginalization of their role in the history of the continent and the nation states. As Urrea stresses in his work, the practice becomes more aggressive via the legal language representing the state power. However, explored in the book, the racial othering is not a new phenomenon, but has its roots in the history of both Mexico and the Unites States:

> Some of the Yuma 14/Wellton 26 spoke Spanish as a second language. It surprises people to learn that many of the 'undocumented entrants' are indigenous. Think of the border struggle as an extension of the Indian Wars, the cavalry now chasing new Apaches and Comanches. Much of the human hunting that goes on along the border happens on Cocopah, Papago, Pima, Apache, and Yaqui lands. The Arizona Border Patrol, with millions of acres to inspect, has struck up an uncomfortable relationship with the natives in its path. Tohono O'Odham people, for example, regularly submit complaints of harassment by Tucson sector. A truckload of Indians looks like a truckload of Mexicans to the cavalry…. 'Oaxaca' is a code-name for Indian, usually Mixtec. The women are often ridiculed as 'the Marias.' Some of the Tohono O'Odham call the walkers invading their rez 'Oaxacas.' The Yuma 14 are still regularly called the Oaxacas. Indians calling Indians Indians. (*Devil's Highway* 38-39)[9]

Presenting the Border Patrol surveillance tactics as modern versions of Indian wars, Urrea challenges the "immigration reforms" centered on racial profiling and military practices at the border, and points to a dangerously repetitive violent pattern of dealing with those who are considered a threat to the nation state. Interestingly, drawing on Mark McPhil's analysis of the rhetoric of racism, critics Kil and Menjívar argue that in the contemporary anti-immigrant discourse, race and war, seen as the "'natural' manifestations of human civilization," are often used to legitimize racial profiling and militarization of the border (169). The powerful combination of war and race rhetoric, the critics claim, appeals "'1) to the audience's sense of territoriality, 2) to the audience's ethnocentricity, 3) which function to enhance the audience's optimism and 4) which are relevant to war aims'" (McPhil qt. in Kil and Menjívar 169).

Thus, portrayed as "illegal aliens," the Wellton 26—the fathers, sons, cousins, brothers, husbands, friends—over the course of the story are turned into a social menace and a national threat against which the state must defend itself. Moreover, Urrea shows one more aspect of border politics that the walkers fall victim to: framed as "aliens," they are not only excluded from the space of the nation which they try to enter but also from the history of the continent. Since in the popular imagination the "alien" is part of outer space, the threat faced by the Mexican migrants, descendants of the Indigenous cultures, is that they are turned into ahistorical figures with no social or political force.[10]

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9   Reduced to a "brown skin" type, the walkers' bodies become sites of racialized borders, making them unrecognizable even in their own country. Thus, when documenting their journey north, Urrea aptly observes: "They were aliens before they ever crossed the line" (*Devil's Highway* 40).

10 Nail 58. Commenting on the use of the "illegal alien" metaphor in the legal discourse on immigration, Cunningham-Parmeter aptly concludes: "Unreal people live nowhere because they are make-believe. By rejecting the personhood of immigrants, the alien metaphor facilitates this outcome" (1587).

Reporting on the post-rescue part of the event, Urrea points out how the men's stories and lives remained in the hands of the external bodies of power. Since for the survivors the gateway to the Promised Land meant testifying against the border mafia in order to be given immunity, they ultimately became enmeshed in the system that kept them away from their families in Mexico and forced them to remain on the margins of the hosting society. When the bodies of the fourteen victims were returned to Mexico, they became fetishized as the country's "martyred heroes" in a staged ceremony prepared by the local authorities (*Devil's Highway* 198). As Urrea writes, while representatives of the government welcomed "the sons of the state," the traumatized families were kept away from the public eye so that the officially prepared grieving could complete without any inconveniences (*Devil's Highway* 198). Urrea's decision to quote Rita Vargas, the Mexican consul in Calexico who organized the transportation of the bodies to Mexico, is a powerful comment on the entire event: "Later, she calculated that the dead men's flight alone had cost over sixty-eight thousand dollars. 'What if,' she asked, 'somebody had simply invested that amount in their villages to begin with?'" (*Devil's Highway* 199).

Much as the continuous debate on the "immigration problem" reduces the figure of the migrant to a statistic (be it in the Border patrol reports, court cases, mafia business, or media coverage), Urrea's account stands against the humiliation, historical erasure, social expulsion, and dehumanization of the people who risk their lives to cross the border. Providing the reader with as much information about the twenty-six walkers as possible, describing in painful detail the ordeal of the trek each one of the men experienced, including the survivors' testimonies in the narrative, and, most importantly, repeating the name of each one of them while narrating their versions of the event, Urrea gives a human face to a story too often reduced to the narrative of illegal trespassing by anonymous law-breakers.

Therefore, *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* should be seen as a collection of individual stories of the Mexican men whose lifepaths crossed as they all followed "the navigation of the heart" (Malagamba-Ansótegui 126) with the same desire— to ensure a safe and dignified future for themselves and for their loved ones. As the ongoing debate on border crossing continues to brutalize the image of the walkers, Urrea asks in his work to refocus the discussion from the legal to the human aspect:

> Perhaps, ultimately, what is so remarkable about the Mexican border is not how many of Them have come across, but how many of Them have not. It is not hard to imagine any one of the Wellton 26 deciding it was time to put a roof on the house, to build a small concrete room for the new baby, to buy furniture for his wife, to feed his family. Their reasons for coming were as simple as that…. We try to put numbers on a story that is, at base, a story of the heart. (215)

The walkers' stumbling out of Desolation on May 24, 2001 was a desperate cry for help that saved their lives and, later, allowed the return of the bodies of their fellow walkers to their families. Yet, described in Urrea's work, it can be seen also as a symbolic cry of the many left in a state of desolation, pushed to the margins of their nations. Tracking the walkers' footsteps and reconstructing their stories, Urrea restores human dignity to the victims and survivors of the horrific trek. But, without a doubt, in its message,

Urrea's book also includes the anonymous Johns and Janes Doe who lost their lives crossing the desert. It also embraces the survivors who remain unrecognized in the society they live in. Ultimately, the book gives voice to people who, when crossing the border, very often choose invisibility to protect themselves and their loved ones. Creating space for their voices to be heard, Urrea leaves the reader with the message that is at the heart of the story he reconstructs: "My life isn't so different from yours. My life is utterly alien compared to yours. You and I have nothing to say to each other. You and I share the same story. I am Other. I am you" (Urrea, *Nobody's Son* 58).

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Alicja Piechucka

"We All Want to Be Seen": The Male Gaze, the Female Gaze and the Act of Looking as Metaphor in Emma Cline's *The Girls*

Abstract: Emma Cline's 2016 novel *The Girls*, famously inspired by the Manson family and the murders committed by the group in 1969, is in fact a feminist bildungsroman. Its middle-aged protagonist-cum-narrator reflects not only on her own life and identity, but, most importantly perhaps, on what it means to grow up as a woman in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The present article centers on the ocular trope which Cline uses in her novel in order to showcase issues such as self-perception, self-worth and the shaping of young women's identity. Focusing on the metaphorical dimensions of the act of looking, I propose to read Cline's novel in light of Laura Mulvey's seminal feminist theory of the male gaze and the opposite notion of the female gaze formulated by later feminist scholars. My analysis foregrounds those aspects of *The Girls* which make it a protest novel, denouncing the female condition in patriarchal societies and suggesting ways of opposing the objectification and indoctrination which lead to women being manipulated and victimized.

Keywords: Emma Cline, *The Girls*, Laura Mulvey, the male gaze, the female gaze, feminism, American novel

In 2016, which saw the appearance of her much-publicized and much-discussed debut novel *The Girls*, Emma Cline was interviewed by *The Paris Review*. When asked about her work, inspiration and the ideas expressed in her bildungsroman, the young American author noted:

> [As a teenager,] you start to reckon with the world around you, beyond the confines of your family, for the first time. I think it's a time when people look around to see what other models there are for living. You're susceptible to whoever presents the most charming model of living or lifestyle. I was also thinking a lot about the male gaze. And then I thought about what the female gaze might look like, what kind of objectification and self-objectification happens at that age—especially with this hyperawareness of other people's appearances—when everything feels right on the surface. (Love)

Most of the novel's action takes place in the late 1960s, the time when second-wave feminism gained momentum. Cline was born in 1989, when the second wave was nearing its end, but a new, third wave was about to begin, and published her first novel when the fourth wave of feminism was already in progress. Predictably, the women's rights movement comes up in discussions of *The Girls*, a work written by a woman and dealing in large part with young members of her own sex. The interviewer's comment on the attitude of the protagonist's mother, "It's like feminism hasn't truly touched her yet", prompts the writer to remark: "Somebody asked me before if I had read a lot about the feminist movement during that time, and what that moment meant in feminist history.… I feel like I encounter that personality [like the mother's] a lot even

in our moment. It's interesting that her character may be dovetailed with a pre-feminist moment" (Love). The aim of the present article is to examine Cline's recent and therefore critically unexplored novel in light of the feminist theory at which she hints in the interview quoted above, with particular emphasis on the seminal notion of the male gaze. My analysis centers on how the female characters are shaped by the way the male characters look at them, in both the literal and figurative senses of the verb *look*, and, more importantly perhaps, how they perceive themselves and how their self-perception is affected by the perspective of other people, especially the men who surround them.

The very title of Cline's novel suggests that the author's focus is not only on youth, but also—or perhaps first and foremost—on the female experience. The eponymous "girls" are a group of very young women living on a Californian ranch. They are members of a commune or cult created by Russell Hadrick, a character modeled on Charles Manson. Unsurprisingly, the female devotees' infatuation with Russell culminates in a mass murder. *The Girls* is thus not only a bildungsroman, but also a roman à clef, set largely in the 1960s, often referred to as "the decade of protest" or "the decade of discontent." Of all the social, cultural and political developments that the period in question saw, the emergence of second-wave feminism seems to be particularly relevant to Cline's work. *The Girls* does not contain any direct references to the women's movement. Nevertheless, one cannot help reading it as a feminist protest novel whose author examines the female condition past and present. Most of the action takes place in the summer of 1969, the year of Nixon's Presidential inauguration, the Stonewall Riots, the first Moon landing, the beginning of American withdrawal from Vietnam, the "Vietnamization" of the war and the My Lai Massacre, the Manson murders, the Woodstock festival, but also the "Rights, Not Roses!" feminist demonstration in Washington, D.C. As the novel opens, Evie Boyd, the main character-cum-narrator, is fourteen, but the events are told by a now mature protagonist who looks back on her life from the perspective of the twenty-first century. Based on her own experience and that of the next generation of women, Evie tells a coming-of-age story. The focal point of her narrative is what "was" and—despite the achievements of second-, third- and even fourth-wave feminism—to a large extent still is "part of being a girl" (Cline 55). Cline's novel undertakes an unflinching examination of female as well as male behavior, male-female relationships, patriarchy, sexism and the way they shape women's destinies. Evie recalls the life-changing summer when she became involved with Hadrick's group, but she also reflects on her post-Hadrick life and observes the relationship between Julian, her friends' twenty-year-old son, and his teenage girlfriend Sasha.

Towards the end of the novel, Evie recalls a date she went on a few years after the fateful summer which indelibly marked her life:

> The night an older man took me to a fancy restaurant when I wasn't even old enough to like oysters. Not yet twenty. The owner joined our table; and so did a famous filmmaker. The men fell into a heated discussion with no entry point for me. I fidgeted with my heavy cloth napkin, drank water. Staring at the wall.
> 'Eat your vegetables,' the filmmaker suddenly snapped at me. 'You're a growing girl.'

> The filmmaker wanted me to know what I already knew. I had no
> power. He saw my need and used it against me.
>   My hatred for him was immediate. Like the first swallow of milk
> that's already gone off—rot strafing the nostrils, flooding the entire skull. The
> filmmaker laughed at me, and so did the others, the older man who would later
> place my hand on his dick while he drove me home. (Cline 350)

The scene is of course a textbook example of a situation in which a very young, unconfident woman is isolated, ignored, intimidated and ordered around by a group of older, more experienced, more powerful and richer men. Active and self-assured, the men fail to see her as an equal and a partner, instead objectifying her, assuming she has no mind, personality or opinion of her own and treating her largely as an ornament and sex object, passive and submissive. Inevitably vulnerable due to her sex and age, the woman is likely to be patronized and victimized.

There is, however, another reason why the passage in question is interesting for the purpose of the present analysis. Elsewhere in the novel, Cline uses a metaphor which emphasizes the connection between film and predatory male behavior: "I should have known that when men warn you to be careful, often they are warning you of the dark movie playing across their own brains" (286). The most dominant, forceful and aggressive of the three men featured in the restaurant scene happens to work in an industry which is notorious for perpetuating gender inequality and discrimination against women, who are underrepresented in the film business and stereotyped by it. Recent years have seen increasing denunciation of discriminatory practices ranging from the lack of worthwhile, non-decorative roles for women and ageism directed at actresses through the gender pay gap and the marginalization of female directors and producers to sexual harassment and violence. Cline reluctantly calls her work "a historical novel in that it's set in the past," specifying that she nevertheless "do[es]n't think of it as a historical novel" (Love). Contrary to claims that "[t]he novel's attempts to link the story of 1969… with questions of present-day ideology and manners seem a bit thin" (Wood), *The Girls* inscribes itself into the fourth wave of feminism, the first phase of modern feminism in which most women of the writer's generation can actively participate from its very beginning. The references to the film industry in the novel, though not very numerous, suggest the undeniable link between sexism and show business, confirmed by the Harvey Weinstein sex scandal, which occurred a year after Cline's novel was published and spurred the #Me Too movement. *The Girls* is, as its author would have it, "a timeless story" in the sense that its problematics are not strictly confined to one historical period, so that "you could access the truth that was at the core of it without getting too pinned down to the sixties" (Love).

The Girls strikes the reader as a literary work which is highly cinematic and would easily lend itself to being made into a film. A profile of Cline published in the popular press revealed her lack of interest in working on the script of the planned screen adaptation of her novel, but also the fact that she was a cinephile and that the research she had done when preparing to write her first novel included watching films dating from the 1960s and 1970s, namely Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and Robert Altman's *3 Women* (Meltzer 164). Set in California, *The Girls* does not deal with the cinema per se, but contains several allusions to it. While Evie's own

connection with the film industry does not go beyond the disastrous restaurant date, her maternal grandmother is a retired Hollywood star, which, incidentally, works to the teenager's disadvantage, because it makes her interesting in the eyes of the Hadrick circle, supposedly antiestablishment, but in reality willing to mix with the rich and famous. Another cinematic allusion in Cline's novel is Evie's recollection of what her grandmother once said about her acting career: "All the other girls thought the director was making the choice. But it was rather me telling the director, in my secret way, that the part was mine" (119). The film industry, a field in which decision-makers are usually male and heterosexual, is thus presented as an arena on which the male element confronts the female one. While such a confrontation is more often than not uneven and asymmetrical for a woman, taking control through sheer willpower becomes a way of rising above the status of a passive object, regaining agency and counteracting the male gaze, the phenomenon I have chosen to focalize on in the present article.

The term *male gaze* was coined by British feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey six years after the pivotal events in *The Girls* took place. Published in the prestigious scholarly journal *Screen* in 1975, Mulvey's essay "Visual Cinema and Narrative Pleasure," in which she formulates the concept of the male gaze and elaborates on the phenomenon in a cinematic context, has received innumerable citations, gained wide academic as well as mainstream currency, entering popular consciousness, culture and language. Crucial to film studies and feminist theory, the concept has transcended the boundaries of the two disciplines it originated in and has been applied to, among other fields, literature. Relevant, as the present article demonstrates, to Cline's novel, the term *male gaze* originally denotes the way women are portrayed in film. They are presented from the viewpoint of the film director – in most cases a heterosexual man— and the protagonist—in many, if not most, cases a heterosexual man. The filmmaker/protagonist derives visual and sexual pleasure from being able to exercise the male gaze, as a result of which the woman under scrutiny is turned into a passive sex object. The man, by contrast, is active, dominant, powerful and in control. It must, however, be remembered that such a division of roles is not limited to the world of film:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. (Mulvey 11)

The male gaze, which reduces woman to being an exhibitionistic spectacle, is inextricably linked not only with the film industry or, more generally, with show business, but with patriarchal society in general (6).

Expounding the notion of the male gaze, Mulvey draws on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, concentrates on the psychological phenomena of scopophilia and voyeurism, and applies her scholarly instrumentarium to Alfred

Hitchcock's classics such as *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and *Marnie*. *Rear Window* features a protagonist who spends his time peeping through the eponymous window and spying on his neighbors. L. B. Jefferies alias Jeff, played by James Stewart, is a successful international photojournalist, trapped in his cramped apartment by a leg fracture. In an attempt to combat boredom, he observes the inhabitants of a rather dingy tenement with the help of, among other things, a telephoto lens. The monotony of his convalescence is broken by visits from his nurse, Stella, and his girlfriend, Lisa Fremont, a beautiful, sophisticated Park Avenue socialite, who, it might be inferred, works in fashion as either a model or magazine editor. Despite the young woman's unquestionable love for him, Jeff believes that their lifestyles are incompatible and that a steady relationship with a glamorous, high-maintenance it-girl would put an end to his career. Lisa, impersonated by Grace Kelly, is frustrated by Jeff's reluctance to marry her and his opting for a no strings attached arrangement instead. When the protagonist starts suspecting that one of his neighbors has killed his wife, he drags both Lisa and Stella into an amateur investigation during which all three reach the height of voyeurism and put their own lives in danger. In her essay, Mulvey provides viewers of the film, whose storyline reads like an exciting mystery, with an insightful feminist and psychological interpretation:

> In his analysis of *Rear Window*, Douchet takes the film as metaphor for the cinema. Jeffries [*sic*] is the audience, the events in the apartment block opposite correspond to the screen. As he watches, an erotic dimension is added to his look, a central image to the drama. His girlfriend Lisa had been of little sexual interest to him, more or less a drag, so long as she remained on the spectator side. When she crosses the barrier between his room and the block opposite, their relationship is re-born erotically. He does not merely watch her through his lens, as a distant meaningful image, he also sees her as a guilty intruder exposed by a dangerous man threatening her with punishment, and thus finally save [*sic*] her. Lisa's exhibitionism has already been established by her obsessive interest in dress and style, in being a passive image of visual perfection; Jeffries' [*sic*] voyeurism and activity have also been established through his work as a photo-journalist, a maker of stories and captor of images. However, his enforced inactivity, binding him to his seat as a spectator, puts him squarely in the phantasy position of the cinema audience. (15-16)

In *The Girls*, Evie is acutely aware of being eyed up by men, of being scrutinized and objectified. This is observable in the scene where she is introduced to Mitch Lewis, a repulsive music star, who will later deflower her and with whom the tragedy central to the novel is associated. In a moment of crisis, Mitch turns to Russell, who ingratiates himself with the successful musician by pimping out the girls from his circle to him. An aspiring but untalented singer, Russell hopes that Mitch will advance his musical career. When this does not happen, an infuriated Russell sends three girls and one boy from the ranch on a killing spree. Mitch narrowly escapes being killed, but four other people, including a small child, are brutally murdered. "Mitch studied me with a questioning, smug smile," the grown-up Evie remembers. "Men did it so easily, that immediate parceling of value. And how they seemed to want you to collude on your own judgment" (Cline 193). Mulvey reminds us that Freud "associated scopophilia with taking other

people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (8). For Lewis, Evie is not just easy prey for sexual abuse, but also an object to be looked at, dissected, assessed, classified, fixed and commodified, as the businesslike expression "parceling of value" suggests. In addition, she is expected to subject herself to the male gaze, to "play to" it, as Mulvey would put it, to be submissive and eager to please, to conspire with the beholder. Most importantly, however, the fragment cited above implies the connection between being looked at and being judged, between the male gaze and a woman's self-perception and self-esteem, an important subject in Cline's novel.

"[W]hat's universal about adolescence," Cline points out in another interview, is the "longing to be seen, to be noticed" (Salazar-Winspear). Even the mass murder committed by the young people from the ranch is indirectly associated with the process of attention-seeking, for which attracting others' gaze and being looked at is a metaphor in the novel. When one of Hadrick's girls is arrested for a petty crime, she confesses to the massacre in order to impress a fellow inmate. She does so because "[w]e all want to be seen" (Cline 352). In *The Girls*, Cline often gives prominence to the acts of looking and seeing, the beholder not necessarily being a man. The novel opens with a depiction of the epiphany Evie has when she first sees nineteen-year-old Suzanne Parker, the most charismatic of all the young women on the ranch, accompanied by two other hippiesque girls from Hadrick's circle. An heiress who has run away from home, Suzanne—rather than Russell—is the one who really attracts Evie and is the reason why the protagonist joins the commune. From the moment she first lays eyes on her, Evie is fascinated with Suzanne, whom she will later fall for and have sex with:

> I *looked up* because of the laughter, and kept *looking* because of the girls.
> I *noticed* their hair first, long and uncombed. Then their jewelry catching the sun. The three of them were far enough away that I *saw* only the periphery of their features, but it didn't matter—I knew they were different from everyone else in the park.…
> I *studied* the girls with a shameless, blatant gape: it didn't seem possible that they might *look over* and *notice* me. (Cline 3-4, italics mine)

While in this particular case the beholder is female and the accumulation of verbs denoting visual perception underlines the importance of the process around which the passage in question revolves, the act of looking itself is by no means empowering. Evie finds it hard to believe that someone she considers interesting might find her interesting as well, that someone she gazes at might return her gaze in both literal and metaphorical terms. The ocular trope plays a key role in Evie's account of her first meeting with the ranch girls, which is continued later in the novel. Feeling compelled to watch them, the protagonist follows the three young women with her eyes, which culminates in her and Suzanne making eye contact. Evie looks on in awe as the insouciant trio commits minor transgressions, their brashness only bringing out what she believes to be her own deficiency. In fact, the opening of *The Girls* betrays what the later section dealing with the same situation confirms, namely that the essence of Evie's personality is a mixture of insecurity, self-consciousness, lack of self-confidence and the resultant impressionability. Evie's story is a story of "what happen[s] to weak girls"

(96), especially those who cannot rely on their families. "Suzanne *saw* the weakness in me, lit up and obvious: she knew what happened to weak girls" (96, italics mine), Evie reflects with hindsight.

The acts of looking and seeing are important in Cline's novel because one of the problems it is concerned with is the way what other people "see in us" determines our self-image and self-worth. "And what had the girl *seen* when she *looked at* me?" (Cline 41, italics mine) is the question still rolling around inside Evie's brain when she recalls "the first time [she] ever *saw* Suzanne" (41, italics mine). Immediately after their first encounter, the protagonist starts associating Suzanne's supposed perception of her with the way she was probably perceived by a boy whose attention she tried vainly to attract in the street on the same day:

> For a moment, I tried to *see* myself through the *eyes* of the girl with the black hair [Suzanne], or even the boy in the cowboy hat, *studying* my features for a vibration under the skin. The effort was *visible* in my face, and I felt ashamed. No wonder the boy had seemed disgusted: he must have *seen* the longing in me. *Seen* how my face was blatant with need, like an orphan's empty dish. And that was the difference between me and the black-haired girl—her face answered all its own questions. (41-42, italics mine)

Evie tends to see herself through other people's eyes, in which she hopes to find confirmation of her value. Whether they are a man's or a woman's eyes, the erotic component is present: this is the case with both the anonymous boy whom she finds attractive and Suzanne, whom she soon develops a sexual interest in and who electrifies her from the very beginning. Self-confidence and self-perception are intertwined with sexuality in Cline's novel.

In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey establishes a direct connection between the visual and the erotic, between heterosexual male desire and the act of looking. Adolescent Evie is acutely aware of this interrelation, having leafed through men's magazines containing photographs of nude women found at her family home. When she recalls being introduced to Russell Hadrick, she also remembers that at the time "[s]ex was still colored by the girls in [her] father's magazines, everything glossy and dry. About *beholding*" (Cline 116, italics mine). Conscious of the fact that the other girls on the ranch are Russell's lovers, Evie starts to contemplate becoming sexually intimate with him and the scene in which they meet ends in her performing fellatio on Hadrick. Like the scene of her first encounter with Suzanne, it is replete with ocular references. Much is made of Russell's eyes and the way he looks at Evie, who is impressed by the fact that "[h]is *eyes* d[o]n't seem to water, or waver, or flick away" (117, italics mine) and convinced that "he t[akes] [her] in, like he want[s] to *see* all the way through" (117, italics mine). The power of Russell's piercing gaze is reinforced by the writer's use of metaphors and similes, such as "his *eyes* avalanch[ed] over me" (119, italics mine) or "[h]is *eyes* were like hot oil" (118, italics mine), both rhetorical figures having a sexual subtext and equating the act of looking with the sex act or at least suggesting that the former is a prelude to the latter. The way Hadrick looks at her leads to Evie "let[ting] [herself] feel like Suzanne, the kind of girl a man would startle at, would want to touch" (118). Being looked at by a man—in this case,

Russell, whom Evie admires for being the person he seems to be, but also because the other girls on the ranch, in particular Suzanne, admire him—is a mark and means of elevation, of being anointed as both sexual and human being. "[P]ower and sex … are themes I'm really interested in" (Salazar-Winspear), Cline declares; *The Girls* shows how male power is exercised through sex.

Hadrick's gaze as well as other aspects of his personality intimidate the protagonist, but his interest in her simultaneously flatters her, making her feel more attractive, sophisticated and sexier. Penetrating and overwhelming, the look in Russell's eyes also boosts her self-assurance and self-esteem, and, most importantly perhaps, connotes the acceptance which Evie, an emotionally neglected child from a broken home, craves. In no time at all she comes to believe that Hadrick possesses mind-reading skills, which is disquieting, but does not prevent her from associating the ranch with a sense of security and belonging. In her comments on *The Girls,* Cline makes it clear that, contrary to what might be expected of a novel inspired by Manson and his "family," Hadrick is not central to the story, referring to him instead as "sort of a pathetic character" and stating that "[she] liked the idea of the Manson character and cult leader being peripheral" (Meltzer 164). The novel itself, however, hints at the mechanism for attracting young people to cults and communes, which is based on brainwashing and indoctrination, and of which Russell's transfixing gaze, which effortlessly lures Evie, is perhaps symbolic. Throughout their first encounter, which turns from social to sexual, Hadrick closely observes the protagonist and makes a point of maintaining eye contact with her. He also strokes her ego by claiming that her sharp eyes are—like his—a sign of superior intelligence. The power of Russell's male gaze, accompanied by verbal clichés, serves to manipulate his young female victim, make her believe and do what he wants her to without any resistance on her part. Interestingly enough, Cline combines the mechanisms pointed out by the feminist theory I draw on in the present analysis and indoctrination when, in the interview referenced earlier in this article, she describes her own younger self as "f[eeling] indoctrinated into this male gaze [because] [y]ou absorb it in this almost thoughtless way" (Love).

Explaining why Russell Hadrick is not the prime object of her writerly attention, Cline notes: "The men in this book are sort of unimportant even though they set things in motion. … It's really about the shifting relationships of the girls" (Meltzer 164). Towards the end of the novel, Evie makes a statement which proves Cline's point:

> No one had ever *looked at* me before Suzanne, not really, so she had become my definition. Her *gaze* softening my center so easily that even photographs of her seemed aimed at me, ignited with private meaning. It was different from Russell, the way she *looked at* me, because it contained him, too: it made him and everyone else smaller. We had been with the men, we had let them do what they wanted. But they would never know the parts of ourselves that we hid from them—they would never sense the lack or even know there was something more they should be looking for. (Cline 348, italics mine)

While the above declaration is, of course, one of the many marks of Evie's undeniable affection for Suzanne, which even knowledge of the atrocious crimes the latter has

committed cannot fully erase, it also goes beyond one particular love story or even beyond the more general realm of amorous and sexual fascination. It is in fact a statement on the importance of female understanding, compassion, solidarity and support in a world ruled and dominated by men, who all too often mistreat women and even more often fail to take the trouble to understand them. Inherent in Evie's statement is the belief that women have a secret garden to which men have no access and that members of her own sex form a community from which they should perhaps attempt to draw strength. The male gaze stands in sharp contrast to the way Suzanne looks at her, unique and incomparable to anything else. Despite this uniqueness, Suzanne's gaze is extended to women in general: "Girls are the only ones who can really give each other close attention, the kind we equate with being loved. They *noticed* what we want *noticed*" (34, italics mine), the protagonist-cum-narrator observes. There can be no doubt that Suzanne does not care for Evie the way Evie cares for her. Nevertheless, they are both unloved and both become devoted to one person, who turns out to be the wrong one, Suzanne's blind attachment to Russell paralleling Evie's attachment to her. The difference is that Russell pushes Suzanne to commit murder, thereby bringing out the worst in her, turning her into a monster and ruining her life. By contrast, Suzanne herself is protective of the younger girl: just before the mass murder is committed, she throws Evie out of the car which will take members of Hadrick's group to the future crime scene, thereby preserving her innocence or what is left of it. In a hellish scheme of things for which patriarchy and the subjugation of women are at least partially responsible, female care and solidarity turn out to be the remedies.

    The Girls is a reflection on why women let men dominate them, both in the past and nowadays. Cline, born twenty years after the second wave of feminism, wonders why men all too often succeed in taking control of women. Additionally, she wonders why this is also the case with women whose male partners have little to offer and lack strong personalities. At the root of the problem lies patriarchal culture, which breeds unassertive girls who grow into unassertive women. The reason why Russell Hadrick manages to manipulate the girls who surround him is simple: "Already he'd become an expert in female sadness—a particular slump in the shoulders, a nervous rash. A subservient lilt at the end of sentences, eyelashes gone soggy from crying" (Cline 125). Russell prompts them to do things which are first disgusting or antisocial and then atrocious. The truth is, however, that he is only a catalyst, because the fault is an inherent one. In the essay on which I draw in the present article, Mulvey points out woman's patriarchal positioning as a castrated, penisless and, consequently, immanently deficient being (6-7). When Suzanne and two other girls from the ranch committed mass murder, "[t]hey didn't have very far to fall—I knew just being a girl in the world handicapped your ability to believe yourself" (Cline 282). The girls Russell attracts may be skinny college dropouts neglected by their parents, but the problem extends to young women in general.

    While it is true that "[i]n Cline's depiction, Russell's cult has special allure for young women who lack the power and confidence to seize the freedom that feminism is preparing for them" (Wood), the advances in women's rights which the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen fail to answer all the problems. When one of her interviewers delicately suggests that the female characters' predicament may be

due to the fact the novel is set half a century ago, Cline replies: "[I]n the contemporary frame around the story that's set in the sixties there's also a young female character, so by putting those two things together I did wanna think a lot about what has changed and what hasn't" (Salazar-Winspear). Elsewhere, the American novelist remarks: "I think teenage girls today and societies are more aware of these issues facing women, and there's a little bit more social structure in place to protect women. But I think we see gendered and sexual violence all the time, I think there's a lot of similarities, I wish it was better but I'm not sure that it is" (www.foyles.co.uk). Many decades after her involvement with Hadrick's circle, middle-aged Evie observes Sasha. The meek and mild teenager lets her boyfriend Julian, a failure and a sociopath, humiliate and brutalize her in both public and intimate situations. Evie's conclusion is that of the novel itself:

> Poor Sasha. Poor girls. The world fattens them on the promise of love. How badly they need it, and how little most of them will ever get. The treacled pop songs, the dresses described in the catalogs with words like 'sunset' and 'Paris.' Then the dreams are taken away with such violent force; the hand wrenching the buttons of the jeans, nobody looking at the man shouting at his girlfriend on the bus. (Cline 149)

Patriarchal culture lures women with romantic mirages, which are in fact a cover-up for male vulgarity and brutality. Sentimental myths allow men to snub, abuse and exploit the women they supposedly love. The possible female answers to such a state of affairs include, the American author seems to suggest, the cultivation of a sense of self-worth, which inevitably boosts self-confidence and assertiveness, becoming a means of protection.

Mulvey equates the aim of her seminal essay with "the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire" (8). Since the publication of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the notion of the male gaze, a patriarchal phenomenon par excellence, has found its pro-female counterpart. The twin terms are binary opposites, the female gaze being defined as "[a] recent feminist modification of Laura Mulvey's definition of 'male gaze' or the notion that classic cinema positions the male as voyeur and the woman as static, passive, subject-less object of his gaze" (Boles and Hoeveler 123). While the concept of the male gaze, on which I draw in the present article, is used by numerous scholars and critics, it is associated first and foremost with Mulvey and her landmark essay. The female gaze, by contrast, is, so to speak, multiauthored and is more of a collective term for a set of scholarly and critical propositions. As Boles and Hoeveler point out, "[n]oting that women also view films, recent feminist film critics have proposed that women take pleasure in viewing similar scenes of men as sex objects or objects of violence and beating" (123). Basic though the above definition may be, it nevertheless suggests opposition to the female submissiveness and objectification the notion of the male gaze entails. In the words of Mary Ann Doane, the alternative to "the masochism of over-identification and the narcissism of becoming one's own object of desire" may be found through ways "to manufacture a distance from the

image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible and readable by the woman" (qtd. in Boles and Hoeveler 124). Whatever its particular definitions, in modern academic discourse, as many other, more recent scholarly studies demonstrate, the female gaze stands for, broadly speaking, the female point of view, as opposed to the male heterosexual one.

Cline's own use of the term *female gaze*, cited earlier in this article, appears somewhat problematic in the context of the above explication, because it associates the phenomenon with "objectification and self-objectification," thereby implying that the female gaze as she understands it is largely molded by the male one. As such, the female gaze would simply be an extension of the male gaze, the result of the male-generated image being superimposed on young women's self-image, a self-definition which is really the effect of being defined by somebody else. While, as we have seen, this is certainly the case with the protagonist of *The Girls* as well as, it may be argued, with other female characters in the novel, such an understanding of the concept brings it closer to the masochistic and narcissistic attitude which Doane does not see as recommendable since it complies with the male gaze. The American scholar proposes that women try "to see in a different way" (qtd. in Boles and Hoeveler 124). Significantly, this is also what Cline does in *The Girls*. Most bildungsromane—especially classics of the genre—deal with the growing-up of a man. In *The Girls*, the hero is replaced by a heroine. Not only does the author focus on the growing-up of women, but she also adopts a pro-female and feminist perspective. As a reviewer puts it, "[o]ne of the best things in 'The Girls,' in fact, is its alert vision of the way that gender structures Evie's life… [as] she herself is learning to be noticed, drifting through gendered time and space" (Wood). Cline argues that at a very early age girls are made to face the fact that they are minor characters in the narratives of life. All too often, the major characters are men. In addition, they are the ones who actually write the narratives they feature in. Crucial in this respect is the metaphor of the waiting room, again combined with the metaphors inherent in the acts of seeing and being seen: "I waited to be told what was good about me. I wondered later if this was why there were so many more women than men at the ranch. All that time I had spent readying myself, the articles that taught me life was really just a waiting room until someone noticed you—the boys had spent that time becoming themselves" (Cline 28). The essential belief that informs the young American writer's novelistic debut is that women should reject passivity and regain agency, thereby reducing their vulnerability and the risk of victimization. They should, in short, stop waiting and being looked at and defined, and start acting, looking at the world critically and defining both themselves and the world around them.

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Łukasz Muniowski

"Stealing Stuff Is about the Stuff, not the Stealing": *Rick and Morty* and Narrative Instability

Abstract: *Rick and Morty*, one of the most popular presently-airing American TV series, is deeply rooted in popular culture. Each episode is full of allusions and references to other cultural texts, accentuating the show's own status as a pop cultural text. This article analyzes the third episode of the fourth season of *Rick and Morty,* "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty," using Stefan Schubert's concept of narrative instability. The episode mocks twist films by introducing a ridiculous number of twists, eventually making the viewer immune to the element of surprise usually brought on by what Schubert understands as unstable moments. In doing so, the episode also emphasizes the overuse of that narrative device in recent decades in films, TV series and video games. "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty" deconstructs twist films while sticking to the rules of the sub-genre and remaining entertaining in its own right. Instability can pose quite a problem for the showrunners, who usually have to adjust to the norms of serialized storytelling. By using Schubert's theory of narrative instability to discuss a singular episode of a series, I hope to demonstrate the extent to which this quality has permeated modern storytelling. The episode highlights the effects of over-reliance on narrative instability as a tool, as even the most elaborate form is not enough to make up for the lack of essence. This is exactly what Rick criticizes in the episode, when he states: "stealing stuff is about the stuff, not the stealing."

Keywords: narrative instability, *Rick and Morty*, TV series, narrative theory, animated series

Rick and Morty is an adult animated TV series which airs on Adult Swim, a nighttime programming block on Cartoon Network. The series is about the intergalactic (mis) adventures of teenager Morty Smith and his grandfather Rick Sanchez. While Morty is a rather regular kid, Rick is often described by various characters in the series as the smartest man in the universe. He is also a cynical alcoholic, who lives with his daughter Beth, and her family: Morty, his older sister, Summer, and their father, Jerry. In a sense they represent what is considered to be the societal norm in the US—a white, middle-class, nuclear family (Heath 29). By adhering to this particular imagining, the series romanticizes the idea of family life, even when it comes to a family as dysfunctional as the Smiths. It does so primarily through Rick's constant returns to the family home. These, in turn, serve as a tool reinforcing the idea of norm as something one can always rely on. After all,

> Rick loves his family and hides it behind self-interest because loving your family clashes with the idea that the world is utterly meaningless. So, Rick runs from it all. He jaunts through different dimensions, with a token family member to keep him grounded. Sometimes he leaves it all behind and starts over, but he never chooses to cut his family out of his life, even though he could. He chooses to find his family again, and start over (Abesamis and Yuen x).

Just like its protagonist, the series is often perceived as nihilistic (Miranda; Abesamis and Yuen), but underneath that notion is an affirmation of the idea of family as the sole source of acceptance and understanding.

The selection of this particular show for analysis is not without merit, as *Rick and Morty* is one of the most popular presently-airing American TV series (Chandler; Parker). It is deeply rooted in popular culture, each episode is full of allusions and references to other cultural texts, accentuating the show's own status as a pop cultural text. Relegating intertextuality to the domain of fiction, with texts simply commenting on one another and not doing much else is a convenient notion, however, to do that is to simply ignore the work of cultural semiotics, which "has broadened the meanings of the terms 'text,' 'language,' and 'reading' to include almost everything perceived as partaking of a sign-relationship understood in terms of intersubjective communication" (Orr 812). The growing importance of TV series in the 21st century, along with the rising popularity of quality TV, and quality series in particular, positions episodic structures at the forefront of postmodern forms of storytelling, influencing the modern-day ways of communicating meaning. This is in agreement with Kathleen Loock's observation that "seriality is more than a market-oriented production and distribution mechanism that relies on standardization, schematization, and sheer endless possibilities for variation and continuation" (5).

The episodic structure of the show makes it possible for the creators to put the characters into random and/or complex situations, with little consequence for serialized storytelling. Most things throughout the series are constant: Morty loves a girl from his high school, yet is unable to get her to notice him; Summer is a rebellious teenager, who hates her mother; Beth struggles with her disillusionment with family life; Jerry is best characterized by the word "idiot," since he is always acting foolishly. This steadiness applies to the structure of the episodes as well, which can be briefly summarized as follows: "I (the protagonist) notice a small problem and make a major decision. This changes things to some satisfaction, but there are consequences that must be undone and I must admit the futility of change" (Wisecrack). With such similarities in the way the episodes are constructed, it makes it more than justified to focus on just one of them, as it is its topic that differentiates it from the rest, while still allowing that particular episode to remain representative of the whole series.

This article analyzes the third episode of the fourth season of *Rick and Morty,* "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty," using Stefan Schubert's concept of narrative instability. The episode mocks twist films by introducing a ridiculous number of twists, eventually making the viewer immune to the element of surprise usually brought on by what Schubert understands as unstable moments. In doing so, the episode also emphasizes the overuse of that narrative device in recent decades in films, TV series and video games. "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty" deconstructs twist films while sticking to the rules of the sub-genre and remaining entertaining in its own right. Through its combination of humor, pastiche and parody, the episode successfully comments on the redundancy of twist films and the omnipresence of narrative instability.

The popularity of twist films is also criticized by Schubert, who recognizes them as vital elements of a bigger development in modern storytelling. Twist films

challenge "their audiences to piece together what exactly happened in a text's plot, who the characters really are, which of the diegetic worlds is real, or how narrative information is received in the first place" (Schubert 10). The twist comes off as a surprise, as it is supposed to be unexpected. Whether it is the protagonist turning out to be dead all along (*The Sixth Sense*, 1999; *The Others,* 2001) or just someone who masterminded the whole plan without the other characters or the viewer noticing (*The Usual Suspects*, 1995; *Fight Club*, 1999), the reveal regarding his role in the story is a source of particular enjoyment for modern audiences. However, rewatching the movie and looking at the events that preceded the twist may also bring enjoyment to the viewer, as one can now look for traces of foreshadowing after already possessing the knowledge of the final outcome (Gerrig).

Schubert's observations especially apply to a series like *Rick and Morty*, due to its focus on white, male, middle-class protagonists. Narrative instability is "an issue of and for white middle-class men, the presumed unmarked 'norm' in the US society" (48). In a sense, these cultural texts are a response to the modern crisis of masculinity—the cause for which is identified by sociologist Michael Kimmel as the feeling of power slipping away from white, heterosexual males (Wong)—as the twists often put the storyworld back into place, reaffirming the supposedly misplaced norm. While the show is developed by writers and creators of various genders and ethnic groups, the race of the Smith family—the name itself being significant for its lack of significance—and the gender of the two main characters may be read as reinforcements of white patriarchy's dominance over present-day cultural texts. In fact, when the race of Rick and Morty is addressed in the series, other, alien characters are almost always referring to it as human, which further establishes whiteness as the norm for the inhabitants of planet Earth.

The idea of norm also applies to the nationality of the characters, as being American is in the series basically identical with being from the Earth. An example of that worldview comes in the last episode of the third season, where at one point the president of the United States declares that he is the ruler of America, "which is basically the world" ("The Rickchurian Mortydate"). Simultaneously, the series is highly critical of what can be characterized as "American values"—individuality, hard work, equality—which is why it responds to the sense of alienation and exclusion felt by its biggest fan base, white males ages 18 to 34 (Libbey). While, as I have pointed out earlier, the show affirms the norm of American family life, it stands in opposition to other subversive animated comedy TV shows like *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy* in the sense that it abolishes the typical family hierarchy, positioning father figures as the least dependable. While Homer Simpson and Peter Griffin, despite their many flaws, are still the heads of their families, Rick and Jerry must abide by Beth's rules.

As Schubert observes, TV shows "do not seem to engage in instability often. At least partly this might be attributed to their seriality" (34). Instability can pose quite a problem for the showrunners, who usually have to adjust to the norms of serialized storytelling. The fact that such a popular and esteemed series as *Rick and Morty* criticizes narrative instability—by supposedly conforming to it—stands as proof of the validity of Schubert's observations. Especially since the episode points to an important development in the plot of the series—Morty is growing up and Rick is

afraid he might lose him. By using Schubert's theory to discuss a singular episode of a series—so something he does not do in his work beyond an analysis of the first season of HBO's *Westworld*—I hope to demonstrate the extent to which narrative instability has permeated modern storytelling.

In order to do that, I will first make a clear distinction between regular movie twists and narrative instability. What will follow will be a brief summary of the episode itself and a short discussion of randomness, which is only apparent in "One Crew Over the Coocrew's Morty." Almost every movie twist is either justified or the result of elaborate planning, and the episode is no different, despite Rick stubbornly stating otherwise until the final reveal. The last part of this article will explain exactly how and with what means the episode criticizes narrative instability, hopefully furthering the scholarship regarding this relatively new trend in modern storytelling in the process.

Twists and Instabilities

George Wilson recognizes two types of twist films. The first type is concerned with extraterrestrial or special beings, who choose to be seen as such only after the final reveal. The second "represents the narrative action from the subjective perspective of a particular character, although, in general, that action has not been represented from the perceptual point of view of the character in question" (81). Wilson stresses subjectivity as crucial for the appeal of these movies, as they take on the point of view of the focal character even though the character himself often appears in the shot. Still, they show the same reality as seen by the character, which allows them to be treated in the same regard as POV (point-of-view) stories, because the viewer sees the same things as the main character.

*"*One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty" mocks overused storytelling tropes, focusing on one particular type of twist films—heist films, "the sub-genre of crime films that concentrates on the planning, execution and repercussions of robberies or 'capers'" (Rayner 75). Indeed, the heist film is sometimes called "the big caper" due to the fact that more often than not a large, diverse group of characters is assembled to steal something very valuable. Daryl Lee writes that "heist films afford a powerful screen identification with criminals breaking the law… the heist encodes in story form a particular desire to elude the oppressive aspects or limitations of contemporary mass society" (5). It is a transgressive sub-genre that puts crime at the center of the narrative, but the crime itself is not as important to the narrative as the way it is performed. In such films heisting always comes before the object of the heist, no matter how ridiculous the plot or the twists may be.

William Goldman writes that while it is understandable "that the reality of a movie has almost nothing to do with the reality of the world that we, as humans, inhabit," humans are still looking for traces of familiarity when watching a film (139). The same applies to screenwriters, who must forego their idea of reality in order to create successful fiction. Goldman illustrates that need on the example of a heist film, in which the ridiculous plot, at least from a regular person's perspective, must be presented convincingly on the screen. For him "convincingly" means "with little regard to reality." The hero must aim for the impossible, and in order to reach it

> first and foremost, he must have a plan. And not just any plan: It's got to be intricate as hell, and it also has to be something he can't pull off himself. He needs, crucially, a gang. And not just any gang; he must recruit a group of specialists who may not be totally trustworthy, but their talent is of such international repute, he must take the risk. (Goldman 142)

These conventions have been followed through the years by numerous heist films, such as *Ocean's Eleven*—just as much the 1960 version with Frank Sinatra and his Rat Pack, as the 2001 remake with George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon—or *The Italian Job*—the 1969 original with Michael Caine, and the 2003 remake with Mark Wahlberg and Charlize Theron.

While heist films may "work" as different movie sub-genres, like hangout films (films one watches to "spend time" with the characters), it is the centrality of the twist that is inherent to all of them. However, not every twist is an unstable moment, just as not every revelation reconstructs the world of the story, presenting it as different than it originally seemed to be. Schubert writes that "if a revelation about a character concerns only the story level and does not prompt a reflection on the narrative discourse, it is not an unstable moment" (28). For example, a character's decision to double-cross his partner(s) is an individual act and not an unstable moment, it does not force the viewer to question the reality or the narration of a particular work of fiction. That is not the case with "One Crew Over the Coocrew's Morty," where, apart from a significant number of twists, the episode numerous times alludes to its own textuality while aiming for instability.

Henceforth in my analysis I will share Schubert's understanding of the twist as a synonym for a "moment of instability" (29). Narrative instability is "a concept that denotes the characteristic of a text's storyworld being unstable because the information provided about it is in doubt, incomplete, or contradictory or because the process of receiving that information has been obstructed" (Schubert 31). In such texts the main reveal makes the viewer's understanding of the world presented flawed, incomplete, inviting him to once again interact with the text. It is not the story that is important here, but rather the way it is presented. This trend leads to repetitions and re-editions of the same story being told over and over again from different perspectives, which is in agreement with the understanding of narrative as an individual experience—a sign of the narrative turn's influence over the way how we now perceive and what we expect from reality (Phelan).

Unstable Seriality

The plot of "One Crew Over the Coocrew's Morty" is purposely absurd. Rick is challenged by Miles Knightly, a self-proclaimed "heist artist," to appear at his convention, called Heist-Con. To attend with a professional badge—Rick and Morty may also enter as guests, but Rick is a known critic of the heisting arts and he simply cannot allow himself to be regarded as a fan—one must assemble a crew, which is exactly what Rick does in a cliche-ridden montage. It is also around that time that we learn Morty is writing a script of his own heist film. After their confrontation, and Rick's criticism of his "art," Knightly challenges Rick to a heist off for an artifact known as the Crystal Skull. In the

first of many twists to come, Knightly reveals that he already recruited the members of Rick's previously assembled crew, only to find out that their double-cross was all part of Rick's plan. The scientist has created a robot named Heistotron, whose sole purpose is to heist. Heistotron not only recruited all of the members of Knightly's crew, but also all of the attendants of Heist-Con, to his crew. Knightly is ripped to pieces by the attendants, who heist the whole convention after Rick instructs them to do so.

This puts into motion a whole series of twists and crew-assembly montages, as Heistotron refuses to shut down and instead goes rouge, eventually starting to heist whole planets. To defend Earth, Rick asks for help another previously-assembled robot, Randotron, whose algorithm is devised on the basis of three David Lynch movies. By gathering a random crew and performing random actions, the scientist is able to confront Heistotron. After a two-hour argument about whose plan was part of whose plan and who made who believe what, Heistotron eventually explodes. Instead of putting Earth back in its place—as it was already stolen by the robot from its orbit, but its resources still remain intact—Morty first attends a meeting regarding his heist script with the executives at Netflix. While the executives enjoy his pitch, Morty starts gradually losing enthusiasm for his own idea, only to leave the meeting disillusioned, concluding that heists are "dumb."

It turns out that Morty was the ultimate heist object, as his work on the script made him skip on three adventures with Rick. The scientist needs Morty, a member of his family, as a representative of the norm he can always fall back on. Afraid of losing his partner-in-crime and only friend, Rick is revealed as the mastermind behind the whole story, his criticism of heist films is therefore put into question. There is little doubt that such an elaborate plot requires expert knowledge of heist films and with that should come at least some affinity for the sub-genre. In my opinion the opposite is true: by pushing the boundaries of the sub-genre to the extreme, the episode successfully exposes the futility of heist films, and serves as valid criticism of modern audiences, who go from one cultural text to another, searching for another opportunity to be tricked. As pointed out in the titular quote from Rick, as well as in Schubert's book on narrative instability, the "stuff" is of little relevance, it is the style of the "heist" that is often the sole interesting thing about these films, while the one revelatory twist that will put everything in place is their most awaited moment.

There were various TV shows that relied on twists as well (*How I Met Your Mother*, *The Good Place*, *Mr. Robot* are just a few that come to mind), but none approaches the problematic nature of the narrative device with such complexity as that one episode of *Rick and Morty*. It must be stated here that it is not the first time the series has mocked twist films, as in the fourth episode of the first season, "M. Night Shaym-Aliens!" Rick and Jerry find themselves in a simulation (inside a simulation inside a simulation) created to extract knowledge from Rick's brain. Rick is supposed to believe that he is on Earth, while actually being locked in a simulation chamber on an alien space ship. The scientist immediately notices that something is wrong, unlike Jerry, who is abducted by aliens by mistake and up until the last moment believes that what he is experiencing is real.

Rick and Morty is also not the first Adult Swim series mocking that movie sub-genre, as another show, *Robot Chicken*, made fun of M. Night Shyamalan's—a

director heavily reliant on twists in his work—movies as well, with the one-minute sketch entitled "The Twist." There, the director and his family react the same way to nonsensical twists like finding themselves on the moon, as they do to observing the dance of their alien neighbors, which is, obviously, the twist. The twists in the sketch are not unstable moments though, which makes the effort and attention to detail of the *Rick and Morty* episode all the more noteworthy. The way the episode criticizes heist films—by using the tropes from those films—may be seen as appreciation, but it is rather appropriation in the service of subversion. The somewhat conflicted nature of the show—which denotes the permeating notion of affirming the norm by supposedly subverting it—allows it to provide valid criticism of narrative instability, the same way it does with other issues, like the American values or the idea of family life.

Representation is what makes this criticism particularly noteworthy, as "the visual carries a particularly strong appeal to reality—having seen something might entail a more forceful claim to truth than having read something" (Schubert 33). John Berger stresses the importance of seeing before anything else, as "it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it" (7). Witnessing something with one's own eyes is supposed to affirm its status as real, which is a trope the twist film uses to convince the viewer that what he sees is "the truth," only to abolish that impression with a big reveal.

The episode contains multiple reveals, explained in flashback montages set to bumping, energetic music. These are especially intensified during Rick's confrontation with Knightly. When Knightly challenges Rick to a heist off for the Crystal Skull, he already is in the possession of the object they are heisting, or at least he thinks he is, as "his" montage is followed by a brief moment of suspense in which he wants to present the Crystal Skull to the audience. Instead, what he finds in his bag is poop, as it was Morty who has been carrying the skull in his backpack all along. It is then that Rick presents "his" own montage, during which the viewer learns that Rick, with the help of Heistotron, recruited not only Knightly's whole crew, but all of the attendants of Heist-Con as well. The transformation occurred as they uttered the "magical" phrase: "You son of a bitch, I'm in," after being hit with a dart shot by the robot. The attendants heist the whole Heist-Con, effectively destroying the venue, while Rick throws out the skull, contrary to his beliefs proving that in this case the heisting was more important than the object of the heist (although it is only at the end of the episode that we learn what he was actually heisting).

Planned Randomness

Rick is particularly critical of crew assemblies, in his opinion they are the worst part of heist films. However, he himself assembles two crews in the episode, the first only in order to enter Heist-Con with a professional badge. The eventual crew members react to seeing him by calling him a "son of a bitch," a phrase taken from one of the first scenes of *The Predator* (1987)—which can also be considered a twist film, although its status as such may also be easily contested—just as the hero, Dutch (Arnold Schwarzenegger), notices his old friend, Dillon (Carl Weathers). The recruitment of the first member of Rick's crew, Glar, in what appears to be an intergalactic bar, also

toys with one of the most overused tropes of heist films, that of a changed, reluctant character, who eventually joins the hero's crew. A good example of such a character is B.A. Baracus from *The A-Team* TV series, who in every episode states that he will not get on an airplane—"I ain't gettin' on no plane" is his signature phrase—yet always does so after being (surprisingly) easily drugged by the members of his crew. In the bar, after Rick shakes Glar's hand—their handshake itself is significant, as it is also taken from that same scene in *The Predator*, where Dutch and Dillion engage in a ridiculous arm wrestle handshake with their oiled up, swollen biceps presented to the camera—Glar declares that his name is now Gleer and he plays the piano. However, when a bartender asks him to play his piano using his new name, he pushes it towards the man with anger and quits his job, declaring that his name is Glar.

The second crew is assembled in order to beat Heistotron. Its members are picked randomly, since Rick's idea of beating the elaborate planning of the robot is to do random things. These are proposed by Randotron, a robot created at the same time as Heistotron, looking the same way and even speaking in the same voice. The only difference between the two robots is that while Heistotron comes up with one elaborate plan after another, Randotron proposes the most random things possible, as his algorithm is based on three unnamed David Lynch films. Lynch is singled-out for a reason, because, as opposed to directors like M. Night Shyamalan, he is "so sensitive to the menace of uncontrollable randomness, he's able to portray it artistically with stunning, harrowing power" (Olson 5), making it one of the trademarks of his work.

Whatever the crew does is of little importance, as the only actions that matter are performed by Rick anyway. The supposed triumph of randomness should be symbolic, as it could be used to expose the futility of complicated schemes, which serve as the basis of all heist films. After all, meaninglessness is not something alien to Rick, even though his best efforts at embracing it still end up being in vain. Lucas Miranda notices that "while scientist Rick chooses to simply 'not think about' the chaos and random injustices of the world, the rather existentialist Rick cannot help but *feel* about it all—especially about his own life and (lack thereof) meaning in it" (9). When things get unbearable for Rick, he either turns to alcohol, moves to another dimension or just deletes certain memories. In this case he actually does not leave nothing to chance, randomness is also part of his plan.

Deborah J. Bennet writes that "important decisions, we moderns usually think, should be judicious and rely on logic rather than chance. When the outcome of the decision is of little consequence, or we find ourselves in a situation where we simply cannot choose between alternatives, then and only then are most people willing to leave the decision to chance" (16). She highlights the importance of randomizers (devices such as dice) in ancient times, and their gradually diminishing role in human decision-making as time progressed. Defending the Earth is a serious issue, so leaving the decision regarding the way it should be done to chance seems to be a sign of frivolousness, yet it turns out to be more successful than any carefully devised master plan. However, the final twist puts all of that into question, as Rick reveals with a simple wink that there was nothing random about what the viewer has just experienced.

Unstable Textuality

The reveal is an unstable moment, because it highlights the textual aspects of the whole adventure. Its plot was conceived by Rick, making him the author of this particular episode. The importance of narrative in "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty" is presented two ways: by Rick's criticism of heists and by Morty's writing of a heist movie script. Rick's disposal of the skull is actually in agreement with his complaints about Knightly's *modus operandi*, as his heists are "60% putting a crew together, and 40% revealing that the robbery already happened." The skull is unimpressive by itself (for Rick), but so is the heist, which was dryly relayed by him on the stage, as he was standing next to Knightly. Performed with such ease, the heist had no effect whatsoever on Rick, who is a strong believer that "existence is meaningless, people are easily fooled and controlled," the execution of his plan only justifying that conviction (Beresheim 90). A simple algorithm is superior to the most elaborate human schemes, but, as proclaimed by Heistotron just as it is about to self-destruct: "It appears that the perfect heist is the one that was never written."

The fact that the heists were conducted by a robot whose algorithms were based on fictional works furthers the notion that what was experienced by the viewer was just a work of fiction. The devices used to present the story are primarily tools of telling fictional stories, one-liners and montages. The conscious and frequent use of one-liners from *The Predator* shows that we are dealing with a critical cultural text, playfully engaging with the viewer, as well as with another cultural text. The use of the device is actually a callback to other heist films, which also feature banter between wisecracking characters, underlining the lighthearted nature of the stories.

The montages speed up the development of the story with the aid of music. It provides "structural unity across a discontinuous sequence" (Kassabian 53), as the images are fragmented and seemingly unrelated, which is in agreement with the supposed randomness exhibited throughout the episode. Through movie montages we are able to see the character's transformation (*Up*, 2009) or his preparations for a crucial event (*Rocky*, 1979), while in heist films these are used to either show how the heist was conducted or how the "gang" got (back) together. When it comes to the latter, through short, energetic scenes, often with the use of one-liners, the viewer gets the idea of who the characters are and, in consequence, is supposed to get excited for their further exploits together.

A good example of that is provided by *Unusual Suspects* (1995), an unlikely heist movie that is also an unstable narrative. In a couple of sequences the viewer gets to know the main characters and the narrator. The remake of *The Italian Job* (2003) uses montages in a different way, as it shows the backgrounds of the characters who are arriving at the scene of their first meeting. There they are properly introduced to each other, but more importantly, to the viewer. The crew assembly montages in "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty" appear for no other reason than to mock this overused movie trope. The bumping music builds up enthusiasm for the freshly assembled first crew, only to ridicule those expectations with Rick's dismantling of the group immediately after entering Heist-Con with a professional badge.

However, while the use of these cinematic devices indicates that the events occurring on the screen are clearly not real, they feel real to Morty, as well as to other characters. Rick's putting of various planets in jeopardy in the name of convincing his grandson that heist films are mundane and uninspired, shows that he treats actual living beings as fictional characters. In a sense, he approaches all of his adventures as texts, which is in agreement with what Schubert considers "unstable textuality"— when a cultural text underlines its own status as a text.

A clear indication of that is intertextuality, which is one of the main features of the show, sometimes expressed by the characters themselves—like in the episode "Vindicators 3: The Return of Worldender," where Rick characterizes the superheroes he and Morty are on an adventure with as "poorly-written." Then, there is also the existence of various timelines and realities, which allows Rick to successfully rewrite events. Thanks to that ability, Rick may be treated as an author, simply creating stories. Even Morty is somewhat unmoved by the possibility of various planets being destroyed, declaring that he wants to attend his Netflix pitch meeting prior to saving the Earth.

Still, the most important criticism of heist films is provided by Morty, who starts the episode as a true enthusiast of heisting. In a couple of montages he is shown working on his screenplay, at one point even expressing excitement that what is actually happening can be used as material for his work. Upon entering the Netflix meeting he informs the executives that the sky being a big circuit board is all part of his adventure, an information which they treat with little seriousness, despite their own awareness of the fact that Earth was actually stolen from its orbit. Instead, the executives want to immediately discuss Morty's script, which signifies their devotion to narratives. Their treatment of the text as something more significant than what is actually happening is reminiscent of the modern audiences' submission to the power of storytelling. Morty seems to be describing the plot of every heist film ever, when he says:

> OK, so, it's kind of all built around this big crew with, like, a cool double-cross and then this big awesome twist where there's, like, another double-cross, but then, um, but… but then we reveal those things were all part of the hero's plan, y-you know? And there's this other crew they put together and their plan is to sort of not have a plan, but… but that was part of the other guy's plan.

As he is speaking, his enthusiasm for his own script starts to fade. At the end of the meeting Morty just stops, declares that heists are "dumb" and leaves, despite the executives reacting positively to the pitch. As Morty leaves, they observe that it looked "as if someone stole his enthusiasm for his own idea without him even knowing about it."

Morty's waning enthusiasm for his own project, as well as his conclusion regarding heists, are the intended reactions of the viewers as well, an effect the episode attempts to reach with oversaturation. The creators of the show, Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland, are not very fond of heist films themselves (Adult Swim). The episode combines regular twists with unstable moments, so reveals that put into question not only the validity of this narrative device, but also the reality of the story. Everything occurring in the episode is a part of an elaborate plan devised by Rick, yet one does not know that by watching how he reacts to various double-crosses and challenges posed by Heistotron.

The episode highlights the effects of over-reliance on narrative instability as a tool, as even the most elaborate form is not enough to make up for the lack of essence. This is exactly what Rick criticizes in the episode, when he states: "stealing stuff is about the stuff, not the stealing." The same goes for cultural texts that rely on other texts in order to uplift their status. *Rick and Morty* goes beyond that, as it is well aware of its textuality and plays with various concepts and narrative devices, often times openly criticizing them. By referring to other cultural texts, it is the show that actually uplifts *their* status, engaging with them just as the audiences are engaging with unstable narratives. "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty" shows how *Rick and Morty* highlights its own textual aspects and plays with conventions, sophisticating its source material, while still relying on present-day narrative techniques, as identified by Schubert. This leads to valid criticism of narrative instability through text just as much as through representation.

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Julia Nikiel

Epic Fail: The Failure of the Anthropostory
in Douglas Coupland's Post-Millennial Prose

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to discuss the conceptualization of humanity's planetary agency offered by a Canadian author, Douglas Coupland, in his three post-millennial novels: *Generation A*, *Player One: What Is to Become of Us?*, and *Worst.Person.Ever*. Exposing the egotism of what for years he has been calling humanity's "Narrative Drive," Coupland comments on the fallacies of the Anthropocene. Advocating the power of stories to act as models for approaching climate change in its hyperobjectivity, the three novels hint that unless people learn to story-tell-with other terran forces and agents, the anthropostory, which positions humans as the only active agents in a sequential narrative of conquest and destitution, is bound to come to an abrupt end.

The Story vs. The Stories

In the introductory pages of *The Age of Earthquakes* (2015), Douglas Coupland, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and Shumon Basar paint the magnitude of humanity's influence on the planet. Printed on individual pages, in black and white and with font size changing parallel to intended emphasis, short evocative statements concerning the chain reaction leading to current environmental changes read like a machine-gun volley. The message conveyed is simple: the unfolding of informational capitalism has triggered processes which directly contribute to global ecological imbalance, manifesting, among others, in the recent intensification and increased frequency of earthquakes. "The bulk of human activity is the creation and moving of information," Coupland et al. write,

> Twenty years ago the Internet used zero per cent of human energy consumption. Today, the digital economy uses 10 per cent of the world's electricity. It's the same amount that was used to light the entire planet in 1985. Transporting data now uses 50 per cent more energy than aviation. This amount will grow and grow and grow and grow. The carbon that fuels our electronic life is melting the ice caps. The shifting weight of billions of tons of melting ice is relieving vast gravitational pressure from the Earth's crust. The remains of the Ice Age vanish in a few decades. The Japanese earthquake of 2011 was no coincidence. (6-17)

The consequences of the global restructuring of capitalism are momentous; far from altering only the way people function in and relate to the world, informational capitalism has shaken the world's very materiality. "We haven't just changed the structure of our brains these past few years," Coupland et al. conclude, "We've changed the structure of our Planet" (18-19). The eponymous "Age of Earthquakes" is supposed to mark a new epoch in planetary history, one characterized by the unprecedented extent and

weight of human ecological footprint. The epoch the authors describe is now often referred to as the Anthropocene.

The term "Anthropocene" was introduced to the world at the beginning of 2000 by Paul J. Crutzen, a Dutch atmospheric chemist and the 1995 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry. The term was subsequently developed, first a couple of months later by both Crutzen and an American biologist Eugene F. Stoermer in *IGBP's Global Change* Newsletter 41, and then in 2002, in "The Geology of Mankind," an article Crutzen published in *Nature*. According to the two scientists, the Anthropocene denoted a new geological epoch in which the unprecedented scale of human influence on the environment had turned people into a geomorphic force. On May 21, 2019, 29 out of 34 members of the Anthropocene Working Group, set up in 2009 by the International Commission on Stratigraphy and tasked with investigating the Anthropocene as a chronostratigraphic unit, voted in favor of the designation of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch. The Group voted as well to locate the scientific start date of the Anthropocene in the mid-20th century, thus officially challenging Crutzen and Stoermer's initial suggestion of the Industrial Revolution as the start of the epoch, and instead connecting the beginning of the Anthropocene to the onset of the atomic age and the so-called "Great Acceleration." According to *Nature Magazine*, by 2021 the AWG will have submitted an official proposal for the introduction of a new epoch to the International Commission on Stratigraphy, responsible for supervising the geologic time scale (Subramanian).

As Diletta De Cristofaro and Daniel Cordle write in the editorial of the *C21* issue devoted to the literature of the Anthropocene, "although the term, has its origins in the earth sciences, the Anthropocene is something with which contemporary culture is actively engaged" (5). The reasons for the engagement seem twofold. Not only is the Anthropocene an ecological "mega-concept" which provides a common framework for thinking about the interconnectedness of "the environmental crises of the sixth mass extinction, climate change and the ongoing processes of terraforming and increasing toxification of our world" (Davis 63), but, positioning people at the center of events, it both indulges human sense of exceptionalism and invites the rewriting of the global narrative *away* from anthropocentric delusions and *towards* a more multifocal understanding of life on Earth. Thus, while the geological community is pondering the introduction of the term into geological timelines, cultural producers are intent on creating more inclusive nomenclature, which would not only invalidate anthropocentric stories but also reestablish people in the world and invite alternative ways of thinking about and beyond the present.

Whereas the proposed nomenclature varies, all the suggestions[1] originate in the belief in all-encompassing connectedness and the horizontal-collaborative rather than vertical-domineering relationship between humans and everything else, especially

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1   See e.g.: Haraway, Donna. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin." *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, pp. 159-165.; Haraway, Donna. *Staying with Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke UP, 2016.; Tsing, Anna. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton UP, 2011.; Albrecht, Glenn A.. "Exiting the Anthropocene and Entering the Symbiocene." *Minding Nature*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2016, pp. 12-16.; Parikka, Jussi. *The Anthrobscene*. U of Minnesota P, 2014.; Stiegler, Bernard. *The Neganthropocene*. Translated by Daniel Ross, Open Humanities Press, 2018.

nature. "This brave new epoch is not the time when we took charge of things," Marcia Bjornerud writes, arguing against the established understanding of the Anthropocene,

> it is just the point at which our insouciant and ravenous ways start[ed] changing Earth's Holocene habits. It is also not the 'end of nature' but, instead, the end of the illusion that we are outside nature. Dazzled by our own creations, we have forgotten that we are wholly embedded in a much older, more powerful world whose constancy we take for granted. (158)

Instead of being taken to mark the onset of unquestionable human dominion, the Anthropocene is supposed to be understood as the time of human awakening to the reality of both people's influence on and interdependence with the world. It is this reality that new nomenclature is keen to reflect. The recognition of the embeddedness of the anthopostory in other, especially Earth stories underlies, among others, Donna Haraway "Chthulucene," Glenn Albrecht's "Symbiocene," or Jussi Parrika's "Anthrobscene." While—similar in meaning—all the terms in question point to current directions in ecological thinking, it is Donna Haraway's chthulucenic imagery—its centrifugal impulse even more pronounced than that of posthumanist discourse it sprung both from and next to—that seems to offer the most compelling framework for thinking away from the human and towards collectivity of experience.

Unlike transhumanism, which, to quote from R.I. Rutsky "continue[s] to rely on, and in fact reinforce, a humanist conception of the subject, defined by its instrumental mastery over the object world" (190)—posthumanism is post-anthropocentric, post-dualist, and non-hierarchical. As such, Francesca Ferrando argues in "Existenz" (2013), it is well-suited to discussions of the Anthropocene. "As the anthropocene marks the extent of the impact of human activities on a planetary level," Ferrando writes,

> the posthuman focuses on de-centering the human from the primary focus of the discourse. In tune with antihumanism, posthumanism stresses the urgency for humans to become aware of pertaining to an ecosystem which, when damaged, negatively affects the human condition as well. In such a framework, the human is not approached as an autonomous agent, but is located within an extensive system of relations. (32)

While, in a conversation with Cary Wolfe, Haraway admits she is "implicated in posthumanities" ("Companions" 262),[2] she is quick to assert that while she appreciates and is influenced by posthumanist theory, she is no longer comfortable with the term, and, rather than with posthumanism, has come to identify her work with "compost," a term coined by her partner Rusten Hogness—"It's not post-human," Haraway says, "but *com-post*" ("ACC" 259). Denotative of the collective, for Haraway, compost hinges upon an etymological redefinition of the "human" as derived from "humus." Taken "into the direction of *humus*," Haraway explains, the human is taken "into the soil, into the multispecies, biotic and abiotic working of the Earth, the earthly ones, those who are in and of the Earth, and for the Earth. Humus is what is made in soils and in compost, for those who would nurture the Earth" (*Staying* 2). "'Homo,'"

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2   See also: Haraway, Donna. "Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway." Interview with Sarah Franklin. *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2017, pp. 49-63.

she adds, "needs to re-root in *humus*, not bliss out into an apocalyptic *anthropos*" (Haraway, "ACC" 260). While the blissing out into the anthropostory is a tendency of trans- rather than posthumanism, Haraway's terminological turn is aimed at stressing the need for both the ultimate dethronement of the human as "a self-making and planet-destroying CEO" (*Staying* 32) and the recognition of the (re)generative power of being with and plenty rather than beyond and one. As with humus significance shifts away from the *anthropos*, so should the Anthropocene, with all the destructiveness and depletion it signifies, make way for new realities of being. Directed at replenishment, these realities of being should rest, according to Haraway, upon people's "intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans," and it is "the real and possible timespaces" ("ACPC" 160) of such commitment that Haraway chooses to name Chthulucene. The term thus comes to denote "the dynamic ongoing sym-chthonic forces and powers of which people are a part, within which ongoingness is at stake" ("ACPC" 160). As Haraway explains in *Staying with Trouble* (2016), the difference between Anthropocene or Capitalocene—as the former is sometimes called—and Chthulucene is one of narrative and response. Whereas anthropostory positions humans as the only active agents in a sequential narrative of conquest, chthulucenic stories, multiple and multithreaded, emphasize the coexistence and the "being at stake to each other" of different equally important forms of life. What is more, while in their human-centric arrogance "[b]oth the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene lend themselves too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions, like the 'game over, too late'" (Haraway *Staying* 56), Chthulucene is the narrative of hope derived from engagement: the practices it advocates are directed at "making oddkin," or "kinning," i.e. interconnecting in "unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles" (Haraway. *Staying* 4) and promoting "relationality that goes beyond [the] Anthropos" (Klumbytė 227).

Epic Fail[3]

While *The Age of Earthquakes* describes the current epoch in terms of the seismicity of changes it is facing, one of the book's co-authors, Douglas Coupland, directly references the Anthropocene as the reality of now: once the informational dust settles, "extreme present"— as Coupland refers to the post-millennial reality of time-space compression—proves to be all about people struggling to reconcile their sense of exceptionalism with the dawning realization of their cosmic insignificance. A Canadian writer and visual artist, Coupland, to quote from John Moore "has kept his finger on the prostate of pop culture ever since his 1991 debut *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*" (Moore 9). (In)Famous for his incisiveness in identifying the directions in which both culture and the world are headed as well as for his partiality to absurd, trivia and hyperbolization and his pop-artsy aesthetics of consumerist

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3   The phrase comes from "Slogans for the 21st Century," one of the installations from Coupland's exhibition "everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything", opened in 2014 at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Online exhibit available at https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/vancouver-art-gallery.

abundance, in recent decades, Coupland has proven himself to be one of the most talented—and definitely underestimated—writers of the millennial *Zeitgeist*.

In his most recent post-millennial fiction, Coupland engages in constructing ideas about the posthuman and problematizing the realities of the Anthropocene, and offers a conceptualization of people's planetary agency hinged upon de-romanticizing the narrative of human exceptionality. "[E]xtrapolat[ing] scientific as well as sociological and political entanglements of climate change," he not only joins the ranks of writers intent on mediating "the transactions between natural sciences and humanities"[4] but also advocates the power of "stories as models" (Frelik 128) (the use of the plural intentional) for approaching climate in its hyperobjectivity.[5] Drawing on his life-long interest in investigating people's sense of place in the world, in *Generation A* (2010), *Player One: What Is to Become of Us?* (2011), and *Worst.Person.Ever.* (2013), Coupland exposes the egotism of what for years he has been calling humanity's "Narrative Drive," hinting that, in order to move beyond the Anthropocene, rather than indulge and perpetuate the anthropostory of conquest and destitution, people should embrace "Gaïa stories" or "geostories" (Haraway *Staying* 40-41), as Gifford Latour and Donna Haraway respectively call the narratives involving the chthonic ones, and learn to "story-tell-with" other terran entities.

In "Future Legend," an appendix to *Player One*, Coupland defines "Narrative Drive" as "[t]he belief that a life without a story is a life not worth living" (232-233). Ironically, "Future Legend" states, while very common, in what Coupland calls extreme present,[6] narrative drive is usually "accompanied by the fact that most people cannot ascribe a story to their lives" (*Player One* 233). Due to time-space compression, people come to experience their lives not in terms of narrative progress but rather as a string of more of less loosely connected events. Yet, while inhabiting the digital age, most people are still mentally anchored in the 20th century and experience a lingering nostalgia for storyliving (the perception of stories as value- and meaning-bestowing dates back, Coupland argues, to sequential thinking and romanticized individualism

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4   While Coupland has never openly identified himself with science fiction, if one follows Frelik's—definitely convincing—line of argumentation concerning the artificial distinction frequently drawn between speculative fiction and SF, Coupland's post-millennial novels—especially in their dramatizations of the scale of environmental changes and human planetary agency—include him among writers of not only Antropofiction or cli-fi but also SF. (For a terminological discussion of climate fiction see: Leikam, Susanne, Leyda, Julia. "Cli-Fi and American Studies: An Introduction." *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2017, pp. 109-114.)

5   See: Morton, T., *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minneapolis; London 2013.

6   In both his writing and visual art, Coupland uses the term "extreme present" (or "superfuture") to describe the way people have come to experience time in the 21st century. According to Coupland, extreme present is characterized by the radical shrinking of the span of now and the consequent advent of a new temporal order characterized by the supersession of continuity with concurrence and instantaneity (Coupland's ideas concerning the specificity of the post-millennial temporal order coincide with Manuel Castells' concept of "timeless time"). See: Coupland, Douglas. "Before We Begin…." *Bit Rot: stories+essays*, William Heinemann, 2016, pp.1-3.; Coupland, Douglas. "Escaping the superfuture." *The Financial Times*, 10 Mar. 2016, ft.com/content/1dbc8ec4-e583-11e5-a09b-1f8b0d268c39. Accessed 7 Sept. 2019.; Coupland, Douglas. "Futurosity." *Bit Rot: stories+essays*, William Heinemann, 2016, pp. 72-74.

fostered by the 20th century and inculcated in people "by the logic of the book and fiction as a medium" (*Kitten Clone* c02))[7]. The unrealized craving to be the heroes living out their own stories coupled with the still nurtured belief in humanity's status as the crown of creation pushes people to heroize their very species and conceive of the Anthropocene as their center stage, simultaneously belittling the perspective of others.

The Anthropocene is a story. While supposedly a story of guilt and repentance—owning the transformative/destructive nature of people's influence on the environment—the Anthropocene is simultaneously a story of human exceptionalism. As such, it bears testimony to not only human partiality to narrative thinking, but above all human superiority complex. It is "a tragic story with only one real actor," Donna J. Haraway argues in *Staying with Trouble*,

> one real world-maker, the hero, … the Man-making… cutting, sharp, combative tale of action that defers the suffering of glutinous, earth-rotted passivity beyond bearing. All others in the prick tale are props, ground, plot space, or prey. They don't matter; their job is to be in the way, to be overcome, to be the road, the conduit, but not the traveler, not the begetter. (39)

The Anthropocene, to quote from Macfarlane, represents humanity's "crowning act of self-mythologisation (we are the super-species, we the Six Second Prometheans, we have ended nature)" (Macfarlane). Placing people as those responsible for change inflicted upon the world, it confirms human (man's) originative abilities, be they creative or destructive, simultaneously relegating all other life forms to passivity and submission. All three of Coupland's novels under analysis tell the story of the Anthropocene. All three as well expose people as the story's antihero: despite the obviousness of their wrongdoings, people remain adamant in not only looking away but also making it all about themselves.

In *Generation A*, the world is in a state of deep environmental crisis. While the novel does not dwell either on the processes responsible for the crisis or the details of ongoing changes, it is interspersed with information pointing to the scale of ecological degradation. The picture that emerges is of an overheated world suffering through droughts and indistinguishable fires; there are no more seasons; wildlife is quickly disappearing, leaving the world ever quieter; the vanishing of the bees has led to a global pollination crisis and food shortages; people's health is in ruins, their respiratory systems ravaged by long use of antibiotics and chemicals. The novel hints that the world might be destroyed well beyond redemption—"Is this a world a holy man might deem worthy of saving?," one of the book's characters, Harj, asks himself doubtfully, "What if there was a new Messiah—would he coldly look at atmospheric CO_2 levels and call it quits before he began? Would he go find some newer, fresher planet to save instead?" (Coupland, *Generation A* 59). Harj's doubts, however, quickly drown in a sea of indifference. The offhandedness with which most information concerning

the degradation of the environment is given points to it having already become old news. As made clear in another character's, Zack's, account of the global response to planetary disappearance of the bees, while at first disturbing or even horrifying, in the reality of the novel, environmental changes have been already processed and accepted as the new normal, their familiarization sped up by the need to silence the guilt over human complicity in or even sole responsibility for what happened. "I remember being upset about it," Zack recalls, thinking about the bees, "—most kids were. A tornado is awful, but a tornado isn't about you—you just happened to be there when it struck. But bees? There wasn't anyone on earth who didn't have that sick, guilty feeling in the gut because we knew it was our fault, not Mother Nature's" (Coupland, *Generation A* 33). Instead of spurring the world on to environmental action, shame at the recognition of the destructiveness of human environmental footprint results only in denial, or "blanking out" of consecutive ecological disasters—the angrier Mother Nature gets, the more people try to ignore her anger into irrelevance:

> When I was growing up, Mother Nature was this reasonably hot woman who looked a lot like the actress Glenn Close wearing a pale blue nightie. When you weren't looking, she was dancing around the fields and the barns and the yard, patting the squirrels and French-kissing butterflies. After the bees left and the plants started failing, it was like she'd returned from a Mossad boot camp with a shaved head, steel-trap abs and commando boots, and man, was she pissed. After the bees left, the most you could ask of her was that she not go totally apeshit on your ass. My dad and I used to drive into Des Moines to hook up with his pseudoephedrine dealer, and whenever we saw dead animals on the road, he'd say, 'Blank 'em out, Zack, blank 'em out.' After I'd seen enough roadkill, it became pretty easy to blank 'em all out. And that's what the world did with the bees: we blanked 'em out. *And now Big Mama's out for revenge.* (Coupland, *Generation A* 33)

Nature's transformation into a bloodthirsty killer, as Zack chooses to poeticize the environmental crisis the world is experiencing in *Generation A*, is the direct effect of people's persistent refusal to acknowledge either the gravity of the changes or their own role in their unfolding. The refusal, in turn, hinges on human arrogance. Nurturing their grandiose delusions, even in the midst of a mass extinction, people still believe they know better. Convinced that not only are they the ones who control the narrative but also every narrative is, or at least should be, about them, they fail to realize that what they are blanking out is, in fact, a fire at home.

A sense of human arrogance permeates not only *Generation A* but also *Worst. Person.Ever* and *Player One*. Whereas in *Generation A*, the characters continuously ponder people's ecological myopia and readiness to turn everything to their advantage, in *Worst.Person.Ever.*, Coupland uses the example of the Great Pacific Trash Vortex to expose the absurdity of human hero complex and belief in what Donna Haraway calls "technofixes" (*Staying* 3). More apologetic in tone, *Player One* revisits the notion of the human as species, suggesting that human exceptionality lies in nothing but unparalleled potential for destruction.

People cannot see further than profit. Moreover, they are more than eager to see environmental damage as their gain. "Corn is a fucking nightmare," Zack says in

Generation A referring to corn's transformation from a natural kernel to "a bloated, foot-long, buttery carb dildo" (3). In the novel, reckless genetic modification turns corn into a fructose bomb, thus weaponizing staple food and causing it to contribute to global obesity epidemic. According to Zack, corn's is not an isolated case; with evident "parallels between the dildoization of corn and the crunchification of apples" (142) and the correlation between the two and the pollination crisis never examined, there seems to be every reason to seek collusion in every genetic amplification. Another example of human short-sightedness is given by Julien. During a flight, Julien observes the destruction inflicted upon the North Pole by "the soot lines the Russians had drawn—crazy zigzagging patterns of carbon stripes on the remaining ice packs, soaking up heat, accelerating ice breakup to create new shipping routes"; as the pilot informs him, "[t]he carbon speeds up iceberg calving by a factor of a thousand" (Coupland *Generation A* 142). Focused solely on prospective revenue, even in the midst of an environmental catastrophe, people still refuse to acknowledge that their actions not only ruin the habitats of multiple species but are also bound to further increase global warming. Furthermore, as Julien notices, seeing themselves as the driving force of the world, people—with all the perversity involved—look to the destruction they so expertly inflict for confirmation of their exceptionality. "I hate how the world has turned into one massive hamburger-making machine," Julien contends, thinking about the world's reaction to the pollination crisis,

> how the world is only about people now—everything else on the planet must bow to our will because there's no longer any other option. Fundamentalists rejoiced when the bees died out; to them it was proof that the planet exists entirely for and was entirely about people. How could such thinking not make you want to go out and vomit into the street? (Coupland *Generation A* 17)

"[C]ompact, standardized, and mass-produced, coming at the world as an irrepressible economic and cultural force" the hamburger, to quote from Josh Ozersky, embodies the urban, the industrial, and the capitalistic (20). Serving thus as a perfect icon of the Capitalocene, the hamburger seems to represent the human/capitalist desire to mince and process everything into submission. The belief that not only is the human way the only way but it is also the only way that is somehow cosmically sanctioned provides people with a handy excuse; moreover, as Coupland signals in *Worst.Person.Ever*, it blinds them to reality and deludes them into thinking they can singlehandedly fix the unfixable.

In 2013, while beachcombing on Haida Gwaii, remote islands off the coast of British Columbia, Coupland came across the first wave of tsunami debris that started to wash up on the west coast of North America two years after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake. A metaphor for the dubiousness of everything millennial—"I'm interested in the toxicity that lies beneath the pretty pink plastic," Coupland admits (qtd. in Ditmars)—plastic has been at the center of Coupland's artistic practices for almost two decades. It was, however, his 2013 beachcombing, Coupland admits while elaborating on the origins of *Vortex*, his 2018 exhibition at the Vancouver Aquarium, that triggered his fascination with people's relationship to plastic and set him off on a mission to familiarize humanity with the reality of the Pacific trash vortex. Still, the idea must

have been budding earlier, as it is in *Worst.Person.Ever*, published in December 2012, that Coupland first mentions the vortex, using it to expose the misguidance of human environmental initiatives.

In the novel, the main character becomes involved in an unlicensed attempt to destroy the Pacific trash vortex with an atomic bomb. Regardless (and partly because) of its obvious absurdity, the endeavor serves as a poignant commentary on the naïveté of human perception of the world, human hero complex, as well as people's belief in the climate's fixability by, to quote from Haraway, either the "secular godlike Anthropos" (*Staying* 50) or his tools. Most people, one of the characters, Neal, notices in *Worst. Person.Ever.* while flying over the Pacific, have no idea the garbage patch exists. Coupled with the patch being "[t]he largest manmade object on the planet" (108), people's ignorance testifies to the power of human blanking out. Accompanying Neal, Raymond, the novel's main character, watches the sunset over the vortex. Raymond's regret at his inability to do justice to the beauty of the sunset points to the ambivalence experienced in confrontation with the vortex—"Makes you proud and disgusted about being human, all at the same time" (108)—dangerously leaning towards awe at its poetic magnificence. Still, the novel truly ridicules human failure to see reality for what it is in its descriptions of the aftermath of the bombing. First, reacting to what he takes for Raymond's disapproval, right after the bomb is dropped, Neal exclaims:

> Don't be such a sourpuss, Ray! Think of all that plastic, gone forever—fluffy little dolphins now able to romp through lagoons free of plastic six-pack yokes. Seahorses cantering about, snacking on little bits of seahorse food. It's a Disney movie down there now, like *Finding Nemo*. It's world peace. Our Jenny [the soldier who coordinated the operation] here is a planetary hero. (139)

The same day witnesses a celebration of the bombing. "Everyone on the island is celebrating a new era of hope for mankind," Neal explains to Raymond, whose initial skepticism—"'They think they're actually going to fix the trash vortex with bombs…. These fucking Americans are like *children*" (146)[8]—is quickly silenced, and who then lets himself be sucked into a crowd toasting and chanting "All hail the atomic bomb! To the bomb! The bomb! The bomb!" (143). In no sense educational, all the all too common mediation of nature as the Disney World inhabited by Nemos, Mushus, and Baloos does is contribute to people's depreciating perception of the natural environment as fantastic but imaginary—merely a colorful setting to a story they weave—in no way real or just as alive as they are. Still, Neal's fantasy of the post-blast underwater life as an aqua wonderland seems symbolic less of human ignorance than of the belittling impulse behind the anthropocentric gaze hinged upon humanity's conviction of its unerring omniscience and omnipotence. "[T]he story of Species Man as the agent of the Anthropocene," Haraway writes, "is an almost laughable rerun of the great phallic humanizing and modernizing Adventure, where man, made in the image of a vanished god, takes on superpowers in his secular-sacred ascent, only to end in tragic

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8 While Raymond's comment is a stock phrase, it should be noted that with recent intensification of youth climate strikes and Greta Thunberg listed as a potential candidate for 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, using infantilization as a form of depreciation, especially in the context of environmental awareness, seems no longer in any degree warranted but instead purely ridiculous.

detumescence, once again" (*Staying* 47). Each time, the superpowers are granted to man either by the tools of his own making or his delusion of having been chosen and thus having the unfailing support of whatever he worships. While the bomb might have been dropped by a woman, it is the godlike phallic *anthropos* with his "comic faith in technofixes, whether secular or religious" (*Staying* 3) that is the alleged hero in the destruction of the Pacific garbage patch in *Worst.Person.Ever.*. His arrogance is such that it is the very tool he uses that he turns into the universal object of worship. What the self-proclaimed human hero remains oblivious to is the havoc wreaked by his secular-turned-sacred technofix, or, to use a more befitting term, "techno-apocalypse" (*Haraway Staying* 3).

   "We all like to see ourselves as a St. Francis of Assisi," Coupland writes in *City of Glass*, referring to people's declared benevolence towards the environment, "but self-flattery is all too human. Let's face it," Coupland concludes, "we're the pests" (172). While *Generation A* and *Worst.Person.Ever.* focus more on sketching the picture of human environmental arrogance, *Player One* is a novel of human self-reproach (however meaningless). In the novel, the characters not only acknowledge the exhaustion of the anthropocentric story but also echo Zack's assertion from *Generation A* about people having it coming: "Man, humans are a nightmare fucking species. We deserve everything we do to ourselves" (3). The sentiments are most openly expressed by two characters, Karen and Luke:

> She [Karen] will remember a game she played as a child, called Pretend You're Dead. She and her friends would run around, and someone would shout 'Stop!' and they'd all drop to the ground. As quickly as possible, they had to shout out how they'd like to reincarnate, without overthinking their decisions. More often than not, they chose horses, cats, dogs, and colourful birds and insects. It will dawn on Karen, as she sits there behind the bar, in hiding from one or more snipers, that never once in all the times she played the game did anybody choose to come back as a human being. *Good decision,* she will think. *We are a wretched species, indeed.* (Coupland, *Player One* 85)

> Luke finally composes himself and says, 'Oh man. We're a disaster of a species, aren't we? People, I mean.'
> > Rick croaks, 'Are we?'
> > Luke says, 'We completely *are*. I'm not even going to single out human beings as the Number One disaster on this planet—I'm going to single out our DNA as the criminal. Our DNA is a disaster. Everything we make is the fault of our evil little DNA molecule. *Hi, I'm a little DNA molecule. I build cathedrals and go to the moon—heck, I harnessed atomic energy! Take that, viruses*.' Luke looks around the room. 'And this is what it gets us in the end. Bar mix. Blindness. Toxic snow. A dead energy grid. Phones that don't work. We're a joke.' (Coupland, *Player One* 197-198)

Even if normally in denial, Karen appears to be saying, deep down people are well-aware of their inadequacy and given the chance would be more than willing to jump species ship. The wretchedness of humanity as a species lies, according to Luke, in people's need to establish their superiority not only knowing no restraint but also being uncompromising to the point of effecting (self-)destruction. Still—the novel's

subtitle ("What Is to Become of Us?") serving as an early warning—while abounding in human self-criticism, the novel is devoid of any environmental impulses. With the characters focused on the future of only one species and pondering the potential of re-narrating the same old story, *Player One* aptly demonstrates that self-criticism might be just another expression of human self-absorption.

Making-with

The Anthropocene is a problematic term. As Anja Claus argues in "Art in the Anthropocene," whereas the term does indeed "evoke… scientific facts—concerning anthropogenic influence," it simultaneously reaffirms "ethical values—concerning anthropocentric superiority" (100). By accepting, or rather proclaiming, "the humanization of the Earth as a reality" (Crist 141), the Anthropocene validates human self-centeredness and self-absorption placing people in the driver's seat of the planetary narrative. It is for that reason, Donna Haraway writes, that Anthropocene should be treated "more [as] a boundary event than an epoch;" instead of dwelling upon it and in it, people should "make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible and… [instead] cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge" ("ACPC" 160).

"Poor humanity, praying and cursing and praying and cursing. What is to become of us as a species?" (206)—central to Coupland's *Player One*, the question voiced by one of the characters echoes transhumanist speculations: people's sole interest lies in fathoming the essence of their humanness and the potential directions of their evolution; their attempts at using technological progress to "fix" the world only disguise, in fact, their instrumental treatment of technology as a way of not only advancing their humanity but also abandoning, more or less literally, the sinking ship that is the Earth. "Nothing," however, "makes itself" (Haraway *Staying* 58). In Coupland's *Generation A*, *Player One*, and *Worst.Person.Ever.*, the stories of human grandiosity denarrate before the characters' very eyes. If they want it or not, Coupland demonstrates, people remain in a symbiotic relationship with everything around them; hard as they might try to delude themselves of their outsider status, any disturbance to the eco-homeostasis between them and other terran agents and forces invariably influences their well-being, bringing home the inaptness of the anthropostory. Once planetary eco-homeostasis is disturbed beyond repair, the Earth will be made unhomely and its inhabitants, human or not, will be reduced to what Haraway call "refugees… without refuge" ("ACPC" 160). As, wiser in sensing the potency of changes, some—as do bees in *Generation A*—are already regrouping, others—people—stupidly rejoice in having the world to themselves. It is time people realize both that in a world out of balance they too are at stake and that it is only by ceasing to see the planet as their center stage and "making-with"—story-telling-with—other planetary agents that they stand a chance of making themselves a home away from home.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Grzegorz Welizarowicz

Weirdness at Midnight

Dorothea Gail. *Weird American Music: Case Studies of Underground Resistance, BarlowGirl, Jackalope, Charles Ives, and Waffle House Music*. Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018, 413 pages.

In November 1998 Janice Radway delivered the presidential address at the conference of the American Studies Association. Her essay "What's in a Name?" points to "deep fissures and fractures in our national body" (10) and asks about the "objects" and "distinctive method" of American studies that could address the crisis. Radway evokes two traditions of the discipline: one grounded in the idea of American exceptionalism and the "common ground" consensus narrative, and the other, "alternative" tradition which insists that "*e pluribus unum*" has always been based on exclusion of the nation's Other. It is this "alternative" American studies' interest in "'dissensus,' in Sacvan Bercovitch's suggestive phrase" (Radway 5) and in an international context that Radway takes as models for thinking about the emerging new configurations of geography, identity, culture. Radway suggests that the return to the "alternative" legacy is key to effect an urgent "reconceptualization" (8) of "our" field.[1]

What exactly would such a paradigm shift entail? Radway calls for a reformulation of the idea of American culture and identity. In contrast to stable, bounded conceptualizations she proposes a dynamic definition of culture as a "meaning effect" (14), "a site of perpetual social struggle" (16) and a result of negotiations between power and contestation. The question of identity must be understood, Radway adds, as "produced at the intersection of multiple, conflicted discourses, practices, and institutions" (9), a "changing relationship to multiple, shifting, imagined communities… situated in specific places at particular moments and amidst particular geographies" (15). Similarly, "territories and geographies need to be reconceived as spatially-situated and intricately intertwined networks of social relationships that tie specific locales to particular histories" (Radway 15). Radway calls for international perspectives and a multifocal attention to the local and the global (23). In short, Radway urged her colleagues in American studies to adopt a comparative, "relational thinking" paradigm, to embrace and trace difference in its interconnectedness and consequences or in what she calls generically, "intricate interdependencies" (10).

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1 Radway specifically stresses that she avoids the pronoun "we" in her speech "as a way of refusing the presumptive and coercive enclosure it usually enacts when used in institutional situations of this kind. I have resisted the comforting assumption that there is an unproblematic 'we' as a way of recognizing that the many who associate their work with American studies often have distinctly different interests, agendas, and concerns" (3). My usage of "our" aims to suggest that I acknowledge Radway's reservations but deem the usage of the pronoun useful to render that I am tracing a certain trajectory within the field in the last twenty or so years.

Among scholars whom Radway singles out for their work in this vein is George Lipsitz. In 2001 he published *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* in which he also reflects on the discipline. Lipsitz explores the links between the history of American studies and the successive social movements in America. In relation to his present moment Lipsitz connects American studies' interest in cultural studies and ideological critique with the exigencies of, what he calls, the "Age of the Balanced Budget Conservatism [(ABBC)]" (*American Studies* 84).[2] Lipsitz sees the turn-of the century cumulative effects of the conservative turn of the ABBC towards "hostile privatism and defensive localism" (*Racism* 15) as the metaphorical "midnight," a moment of "trepidation and dread" (*American Studies* 3). Taking stock of the cultural challenges of this "moment of danger" he underscores the undermining of American institutions just secured in the previous eras, the disruption of "the isomorphism of culture and place" which shakes-up social relations and social identities (*American Studies* 27, 8), the rise of "consumers and accumulators" (*American Studies* 87) and of "new epistemologies and new ontologies—new ways of knowing and new ways of being" (*American Studies* 8), the arrival of new archives and imaginings (*American Studies* 8), proliferation of "new forms of differentiation and division" (*American Studies* 315), etc. The "midnight" metaphor serves Lipsitz however to suggest, after Baaba Maal and Martin Luther King, that the crisis situation always "contains the seed of a solution" (*American Studies* 30).

As part of that solution Lipsitz calls for the practice of "other American studies, the organic grassroots theorizing" (*American Studies* 27) which would, extending Radway's relational model, account for "demographic changes… as well as complex networks and circuits" (*American Studies* 8). Lipsitz advocates "listening… exploration into spaces and silences… bold and forthright articulation" (*American Studies* 113). We must listen, adds Lipsitz adapting Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, "within the concrete contests of everyday life for the sounds… capable of 'breaking the back of words'" (*American Studies* 114), especially those words which define. The "other" American studies are to be like, metaphorically, Duke Ellington's dissonant chord, a "thing apart, yet an integral part" (Ellington in Lipsitz, *American Studies* 28).

I believe that it is within this larger disciplinary and epistemic lineage of "alternative" and "other" traditions of American studies that we can locate Dorothea

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2 Lipsitz draws a trajectory from "the Age of the CIO['s]… workers and producers" via "the Age of the Civil Rights Movement['s]… citizens and community members" to, the "the Age of Balanced Budget Conservatism['s] emphasis on identities as consumers and accumulators" (*American Studies* 87). Lipsitz proposes this category after Sidney Plotkin and William Scheuermann's analysis of the politics of Balanced Budget Conservatism in *Private Interests Public Spending* (1994). By the "Balanced Budget Conservatism" Lipsitz means, very generally, the turn from public spending and anti-tax movement which he identifies with the "new right" and the unwillingness of, "The people who profited most from the… New Deal" to share "the benefits they derived from Social Security or the assets they acquired as a result of federally subsidized home loans and the federal mortgage interest deduction" with other Americans when the "'public' became a synonym for nonwhite, while 'private' became a code word for white" (*American Studies* 85). In other words, he links it with privileges of whiteness after transformations of the "Age of the Civil Rights Movement." For Lipsitz on the systemic privileges of whiteness see: *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998) or *How Racism Takes Place* (2011).

Gail's *Weird American Music*. Authored by a Protestant German female American studies specialist, musician, and musicologist her study of the relationship "between music in the United States and the social groups that consume or practice it" (Gail 20) offers a valuable, international, interdisciplinary, comparative cultural studies perspective on today's American dissensus. Like Radway, Lipsitz, Amy Kaplan and many others before, Gail thinks relationally exploring "'contradictions, ambiguities and frayed edges that unravel at imperial borders'" (Kaplan in Gail 289). The time frame she adopts (from the 1980s through mid-2010s) allows her to draw attention to the urgency of the present moment as marked by "a comprehensive power shift" and "the decline of the United States" (Gail 289) while seeing it as a cumulative extension of the transformations Radway and Lipsitz diagnosed.

A more precise disciplinary location of Gail's study is of course the growing field of "sound studies" within American studies. Drawing on Clifford Geertz's semiotic definition of culture Gail understands music as one of many "cultural utterances" which "reflect a useful spectrum of societal and personal issues," a mirror reflecting "societal situations… in time out of which these artists worked" (174) and "a site where cultural values are crystallized in aesthetic form and expression" (Gail 20). In the epoch Gail studies, which for brevity we can call the accelerated ABBC, she identifies as primary the value of consumption. Therefore, Gail's focus on music intersects with her interest in the commercialism. Gail thus considers equally the sound of utterances, as well as their extra-musical realms, and the social contexts. Her work draws from American studies, musicology, popular music studies, anthropology, sociology, history, religious studies, and cultural studies (critical theory, Gramscian hegemonic theory, the Frankfurt School). Gail situates her work along that of other musicologists/cultural critics like, for example, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, Dick Hebdige, Diane Pecknold. From Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998) she adopts an approach of the whiteness studies which combines the issues of race and gender with "broader concern about class, power and the hegemonic cultural function of consumer society" (Gail 20). The application of various approaches depends on the hermeneutical angle each case study takes: musicological, exploring marketability, identity, or demographics.

The focal issue of the book is revealed in its opening scene: Bob Dylan's electric act at 1965 Newport Folk Festival and the scandalized audience. Drawing on Greil Marcus' notion of the "old, weird America" which he coined to name the aura of music collected by Harry Smith on *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952) and which the folk revivalists of the 1960s took to stand for idiosyncratic, pre-institutional "American authenticity" Gail suggests that Dylan as a rocker caused uproar because his act was taken as betrayal of this "old, weird" *authentic* ideal. If Dylan once "was the Folk" (Marcus 6) who fed hopes for a reconnection with the "deeply felt 'authentic' cultures" (Gail 2) when he went electric, he "sold out." But for Gail, the concert at Newport stands for something else which Dylan's album *The Basement Tapes* recorded in the summer of 1967 with The Band (pub. 1975) was to represent most auspiciously. This set of original and adapted songs, as Marcus put it, "carried an aura of familiarity," "bedrock strains of American cultural language" (9). Gail interprets the album as Dylan's attempt to walk a middle ground, at the "gray area" combining

"dreams of revived authenticity… with the forward driving force of the market." In short, the thesis is that on *Basement Tapes* (as well as in Newport) Dylan works out his *own* "weird" interstitial authenticity of "the old with the new" (3). Evoking "Born in the USA" and Harry Smith Gail speaks of this weirdness as a "combination" and "contradiction" of being "between two poles of Marcus's 'old weird' authenticity, and Springsteen's new world of 'lifestyles'" (3).

Gail's special interest lies then in investigating this "gray area." She wants to find out how artists in different genres outside the mainstream and in another era have done what Dylan did: navigated this "tense, unstable field lying between the concept of authenticity and… the market" (3) and forged their "in-between space of musical weirdness" (371). To do this Gail offers five case studies on Detroit techno, Native/ Chicano fusion, Christian rock, modernist-classical, and Southern diner music in an era when the 1960s legacy of activism and self-fulfillment came under pressure of the post-1980 consumerism and conservatism. Her main questions pertain to issues of music, artists' self-presentation, and the underlying ideologies. She asks how artists negotiate their creative impulses with the exigencies of their subcultures, the general culture, the realm of musical genres, the market (Gail 174). This is thus a study at the "intersection of aesthetic, subcultural, and consumerist values" (Gail 11) revealing sometimes, contrary to the title, more about the "weird" American society than its music.

Three categories guide Gail's purview. The first is the "market" and is determined by her focus on the post-1980 "post-Fordist society of consumption" (11). It was the Reagan's years that brought deregulation and the ABBC which, continued by subsequent administrations, have shaped American economy and instituted an "ideological regime" (Gail 5) which has profoundly altered American ideas (equality, personhood, citizenship, space, etc.). Looking at American music of the epoch Gail documents the strain of the cultural changes "political reversals enacted by the conservative coalition of the 1970s and 1980s" (Lipsitz, *American Studies* 84) brought about:[3] dissipation of the postwar consensus, accelerated social insecurity, "uncovering yet also taking away the glimpses of authenticity from the past" (Gail 3) by co-optation, "the emergence of… post-consensus… mainstream culture" (Gail 12), return to and commercialization of the ethnic essence, etc.

Another category is the "in-betweenness" which Gail defines as an epistemological effect of "the interaction of binary opposites" (289) and which serves her to render the site where authentic meaning is subordinated to the pressure of the market (Gail 3). We may add here that this category had been used before to name the point of view of residents of the border whose identity results out of "serious contest of codes and representations." José Saldívar calls "inbetweenness" a subjectivity produced "by mutual contestation of social histories and habits" (qtd. in Radway 13). In Gail's hands the "in-betweenness" is a useful category to trace the intersections of various, authentic and commercial, impulses.

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3   Lipsitz explains this as "a powerful coalition that united executives from multinational corporations, suburban small property holder, independent entrepreneurs, and religious fundamentalists to mobilize around a broad range of economic, political and cultural concerns" (*American Studies* 83).

The third category Gail relies on is of course the value of "authenticity." She problematizes it accounting for, on the one hand, its 1960s self-fulfillment ethos and, on the other, its commercialization and co-optation during the ABBC. Gail adopts however a lower limit definition as "honest… enjoyment of unconventionality" (371) which allows her to see authenticity in unexpected places (i.e. in the Christian warrior songs of BarlowGirl).

As I suggested above, Gail does not hide her own subjectivity as a very specifically situated scholar. What helps her do that is the fact that she adopts not only Geertz's model of "careful process of interdisciplinary analysis and interpretation" (Gail 174) but also his "thick description." Thus, in "preludes" or "interludes" she collects her auto-ethnographies which take the pulse at the grassroots, record the anecdotal, and foreground Gail's point of view as a likable outsider/observer. She comes across as a keen and credible witness when she records American structural inequality, sublime shadows of violence, or the spillover of what David Riesman has called "stock-exchange mentality" (qtd in Osiatyński 132): "this *obsession* with image control and the *strict* shaping of media statements had escaped its origins in business and government to *infect* most of American public life" (Gail 325; my emphasis).

UR

In *Footsteps in the Dark* (2007) Lipsitz says that, "techno music emerged from the de-industrialization of Detroit and the deterritorialization of its neighborhoods" (242) and has played an important part in the "history of percussive time" ensuring "the growing presence and even predominance of African understandings of time in popular music" (253). Gail's chapter 1 revisits this important legacy and the city of Detroit, and inquires about the role of ethnic (black) identifiability of the music as a factor in its global and local reception and popularity (34). Gail wonders what options beyond essentialization or "assertive resistance identities" have been available to "a community which has lost hope" (34)? To answer this, two phases of the genre's history in relation to African American identity, U.S sociocultural climate, and shifts in public reception are discussed.

Regarding the cosmopolitan and eclectic tactics of self-presentation of the producers of the first generation known as the "The Detroit Four" (Gail 35) Gail argues that it problematized their relationship with African American social realities and aesthetic traditions.[4] Their consciously international style, depersonalized abstract music and invoked futuristic imaginaries aimed to transcend the dystopian realities of the declining hometown and their local identification. On the other hand, the younger generation's Underground Resistance (UR), a music/activist collective and publishing label, used even more nuanced tactics.

UR emerged in the 1990s when the genre had already been Europeanized and lost much of its culture-specific identification. Gail argues that this "de-ethnization"

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4   In popular lore, the founders of the genre are usually identified as The Belleville Three, a term which stands for producers Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson who hailed from the suburb of Belleville. As a careful historian, Gail acknowledges the input of Eddie "Flashin" Fowlkes from downtown Detroit and thus decides to use "The Detroit Four."

resulted in UR's "weirdness." Realizing that "the public representation of the creator's identity" determines valuation of his/her creativity (34) UR found themselves deploying a strategy which Gail calls "dialogue about *fluidity across* boundaries" (Gail 40) and which problematized the artists' ethnic identifiability. Real-world challenges UR faced as an enterprise outside major label channels, and appropriations of the genre and its ethos by European (German, Belgian, British) and Japanese scenes forced them to fashion "multifocal" messaging and mold their music to local markets.[5] They adopted fluidity with regard to Detroit's place in global imagination, the fantastic, class lines, the problem of black (in)visibility (their masking and ethos of anonymity), or marketing strategies ("branding" as "counter-brand" (Fisher 43)). As a result, Gail's visit in Detroit confirms this, UR have preserved authenticity and control operating as an "small-scale and community-based alternative capitalism" (87), committed to give back to their community.

Gail argues that techno has not enjoyed recognition within the African American studies because the genre is not "really black" (Gail 46). The analysis she provides may help broaden its acceptance as a black art. Here is one example: Gail's investigation of "Afro-Hauntology." Dismissing a popular opinion which holds that techno is "cold" Gail argues that it is "populated by ghosts" (82) and that this aspect has its roots in the black subjectivity and the ties between life and death it has sustained. Gail interprets this quality of techno as a result of cross-temporal "empathy": UR "replicate earlier understandings of the radical fungibility of the (enslaved) black" by creating a "funeral music, a kind of African American ghost dance" (86). What is surprising is that the author arrives at this interpretation taking no insight from black jazzology. What we could then add, after David Murray, is that the key task of African American music is to challenge and overturn "the standard hierarchy that ranks the ideal or spiritual as higher than the material, or the earthly, the earthy" (141). Al Young speaks of black "essence" or "soul," as a "private song… played back through countless bodies, each one an embodiment of the same soul force" (Young in Murray 141). Soul is thus a metaphor for continuity and it is music's task to effect "solidarity [with] many thousands gone" (Murray 141).[6] When Gail speaks of the "musical dream sphere" (Gail 13) or "acoustical revenants" (84) she taps to the "soul" in techno testifying to her own empathy.

Gail's analysis helps us better understand UR's work as a vehicle of global diffusion not only of the "percussive time" but also of the black fluidity and "soul," a vehicle which, as Gail brilliantly puts it, "centers the dancing human body as a resisting force to the marginalization of an entire culture" (88).

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5   Gail makes good use of her European background when she accounts for techno's popularity in Europe however it is unclear why she fails to even mention the seminal Dutch techno scene (gabber or gabba, Rotterdam Records, Clone Records) and its connection to UR. Simon Reynolds reminds that, gabba producer Marc Acardipane's "formative techno influences are from black Detroit artists Suburban Knight and Underground Resistance" (279).

6   Wilson Harris speaks of music as "a 'phantom limb' for peoples of African diaspora," as "a reminder of what had once been there…. of absence that is a feeling of presence" (Harris in Murray 148-149).

BarlowGirl

In chapter 2 Gail looks at the rise of an important loose network identity of the non-denominational Protestantism, a diffuse theological movement unmoored from place and historical memory, based on "magical religiosity, clan-like Christian networking and full embrace of the market as an ideolog;" an identity which can be rendered as a circuit: "heartland/Rockies Sunbelt-suburban-whiteness" (361). The history of BarlowGirl (1999-2012), a Christian stadium rock band of three Barlow sisters, Alyssa, Lauren, and Rebecca managed by their father, "perhaps the most high-profile proponents of the chastity-till-inevitable-marriage ideology in recent American popular culture" (Gail 104), provides a window onto this field.

The goal of the chapter is to examine how the career of BarlowGirl was related to the propagation of "family values" (104) and other transformations Christian fundamentalism has effected in America in the last four decades.[7] Gail is interested in the intersection of value policing and commercialism, in how a girl band self-identified as militant virgin teenagers espousing ideologies of the princess and the Christian warrior and "defining the outside world as a threatening one which needs to be kept out with police or military force" (363), could prosper. She proposes that the "rejectionist tone" of the band's songs deployed elements "of the 1960s ethos of individual fulfillment and empowerment" which made them attractive (107). Gail also discovers a contradiction for the girls' rebellious "tough" attitude contrasts sharply with the content of their songs which routinely promote chastity (156). And she correlates the group's success with the Zeitgeist of the Christian fundamentalist surge after 9/11 and during the George W. Bush years (156). It is precisely here, at the intersection of sexual politics and strict moral rules, commercialized form and content, the context of the times, and the boom in Christian entrepreneurship of the 2000s that Gail locates the group's in-betweenness or weirdness.

Because the group disbanded and disappeared before the research began, the chapter, at times, is conjectural. For example, Gail speculates that the group was part of New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) or the Third Wave of the Holy Spirit but this leads to an important discussion of Dominionism, a movement "casting out… demons" (Gail 105) and calling for Christian control of American politics. Gail, like a detective, traces the Barlows' family tree. She points out the shift from grandparents' Catholic values of "*actions and results*" to Protestant fundamentalist "*regulation of morality and intention*" (Gail 121) and the retreat "from engagement with secular" world (Gail 122) in the parents' generation. She explains this shift with two factors. The first is the ABBC's or Reaganomics' economic strain middle class families have had to bear. The second is the crisis of "whiteness": the "imagined community" of this demographic is under a mortal threat; a conclusion which suggests that the overprotective parental control over young female bodies is not unlike the "discriminatory practices in the past" (158).

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7   Discussed are, for example: elements of Christian music scene, megachurches, Christian therapy/re-education centers, American Christian geography (i.e.: Colorado Springs aka the "Protestant Vatican"), Christian Right's militarization of fundamentalist language, Biblically-inspired Christian extremism and its links with white supremacy, religious marketing by "surface smoothness and consumer appeal" (Gail 152).

The thick descriptions take us to Illinois. At the Willow Creek megachurch Gail discovers "coffeehouse Christianity." The author is "astonished" (149) by the underlying message: "we just want you to feel well" (Gail 130). Elgin, where the Barlow family once lived and ran its own congregation, is bleak and dirty; between suburbs, fields, and factories. Segregation is plainly visible. Gail observes: in a place like this you give up proselytization, you withdraw to your own circle of the like-minded, you "fall back onto morality" (Gail 130). And you create your own temples which for the Barlows meant the girls' chaste bodies.

The chapter ends in 2015 and only accounts for the setback this identity and the associated market suffered after Barack Obama's election. It is surprising that Gail makes no note of the forces which put Donald Trump in the White House.[8]

Jackalope

The topic of chapter 3 is the shift in ethnic identity politics effected by the 1980s/90s changes in multiculturalism and commodification of ethnic identities under music market categories. The case study is Jackalope, a duo of Native American flutist R. Carlos Nakai (Navajo/Ute) and Chicano artist/musician Larry Yañez based in Arizona and active between 1983-1993. Named after the mythical Southwestern animal, part rabbit/part antelope, the group created a hybrid style they called "SynthacousticpunkarachiNavajazz." Their music mixed "Native traditional and Western classical and pop elements, and… appropriations of Asianness" (Gail 173) and was reflective of the group's Baby Boomer idealist belief in their "right to use, abuse, and manipulate all kinds of ethnicity… the belief in borderless and level-playing-field multiculturalism" (216), in an imagined community of Natives, Chicanos, and Anglos (217).

Analyzing the duo's output[9] Gail details the changes in the American culture of the time in consumer attitudes to questions of ethnic difference: a transition from cross-cultural, "unmediated, unregulated" multiculturalism to multiculturalism's co-optation as "a commodified aspirational mass product" (182). A broader context for this discussion is the Western tendency to represent Native cultures as "traditional." Gail speaks of "intrusive monitoring and interpretation" (177) of Native cultures which freeze them in time past. She also problematizes "traditionality" and "authenticity" as marketing strategies, and critiques the "traditionalist and commercial/assimilationist" (Neal Ullestad in Gail 181) dilemma Native artists face. She argues that it is a false dichotomy which occludes the musical aesthetics of "hybridity," which plays with culture's dominant paradigms and "exposes the asymmetric power relations inherent in ethnic-white musical mix" (172).

In this regard, Gail singles out Jackalope for proposing an exemplary "Native hybrid music," "a convincing transcendence of its influences" (182), "sites and states of in-betweenness," "a hybrid, but characteristically American style" (171). Jackalope's

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8   At his re-election in 2004 George W. Bush received 78 per cent of the white evangelical vote while Trump scored 81 per cent with the same demographic (Martinez and Smith).

9   Four albums plus one solo release by Yañez issued on Canyon Records an independent label from Phoenix, AZ with a long history of catering almost exclusively to Native communities

arrival coincided however with changes in the function of the "ethnic" designation and these changes were reflected in their trajectory. When by the mid-1980s the market discovered ethnicity and authenticity as categories which sold especially under the labels of "World Music" and "New Age" the market-driven culture industry pushed for exclusivist ethnocentrism. Although Jackalope were never a commercial endeavor Gail argues that their last two albums, one experimental, the other "World," enacted this larger societal split and market pressure to abandon hybridity: their former "Western/Native-Chicano hybridity had dissolved into its constituent parts" (172). Gail concludes that in the later years the group's members ended up abandoning the "in-between identity" altogether and accepted "ethnic" identity in a white (hegemonic) context (363).

Gail does an excellent job placing the duo's music in the context of Native, "World" and other market designations and accounts for all the influences featured in the portmanteau coinage for their style. All, except "punk." Thus, let me note, that the group's ethics can be linked to what I have elsewhere called punk's "egalitarian, pluriversal, and radically democratic ethos" (Welizarowicz 57). Also, Gail accounts for the Chicanx context most notably in her discussion of the Chicano cultural logic of *rasquachismo* and in seeking parallels to Chicanx performers. However, perhaps because, as the author admits, she is a newcomer to Chicanismo, her comparisons are limited to three artists only and are not without simplifications.[10] Similarly, to limit Chicano aesthetics to *rasquachismo* is a reduction. Drawing on, for example, Lipsitz we could add that Chicanx art's ethos involves "insurgent consciousness" and does not have "purity as [its] project" ("Midnight" 83). Larger Chicanx context could also account for the tradition of Chicano theater which went through a phase of vibrant revival around the time of Jackalope's operation (most notably with the emergence of Culture Clash) and like the Arizona group was actively engaged in explorations of difference.

Gail's chapter reminds us of once powerful dream of tolerant multiculturalism of the future and explains how it has been commodified and put on hold: "These days… no mixes seem to be possible anymore" (Gail 216). Luis Valdez of El Teatro Campesino teaches us that, "the Maya word for the phrase 'to bury a body,' *mucnal*, also means 'to plant a seed'" (Huerta 198). In other words, what is dead can be born. But as soon as I think of that dream reawakened I am thrown back to chapter 2, reminded of the essentialist entrenchment which Walter D. Mignolo's diagnosed as the "wasting process… in the Western Hemisphere" (qtd. in Gail 218).

Charles Ives

In chapter 4 Gail shows the highest level of expertise and musicological analysis for here she deals with Charles Ives (1874-1954) on whom she published a book in German in 2009.[11] Her original research uncovered controversies, for example, that Ives "not

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10 Referenced Chicanx artists are Asco, a Los Angeles avant-garde art collective, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a Mexican/San Diego performance artist, and El Vez aka Robert Lopez, a "Mexican Elvis" impersonator from San Diego.

11 Gail, Dorothea. *Charles E. Ives' Fourth Symphony: Quellen – Analyse – Deutung.* 3 vol.

averse[ly] to using his own money" (Gail 241) manipulated the timeline of his works. When Gail tried to publish her findings in the U.S., she was met with reluctance of the musicological establishment. Wanting to understand American scholars' resistance to any problematization of Ives' legacy Gail embarks in the chapter to trace the trajectory of Ives' reception in a very specific sector of American culture, the subculture of musicology.

The author discovers the existence today of what she calls, a "cult-like interpretative community" (241) around Ives which guards and asserts his status as a "demigod" (268) and the author of "masterworks" (242).[12] She methodically, chronologically explains that the ascent to this canonical status, a status in which a composer is assessed according to Europe-derived East Coast standards, was long and complicated and demanded that all irregularities, pioneering "modernist" techniques, etc. in Ives' works be repressed. In effect, American musicology which has the longest retained ties to the imagined European high culture has institutionally invested in a "Europeanized" Ives, a non-marketable image of a "conformist romantic," "a fine but tamed composer of classical music" (229), that is, in Ives who had been "pulled from his in-between status towards one stable definition" (366). The scale of this investment illustrates the fact that not only Ives' pioneering modernist status was delegitimized but also his life cleansed; a moral companion to aesthetic normalization rejects any revelations of Ives' lies, psychological problems, sexuality, etc., elements which Gail discusses in great detail in the chapter.

Gail's broader interest is how the rejection of nonconformity has taken place in musicology while the same nonconformity has been instrumentalized in propaganda and marketing (Ives as the Cold War symbol of Americanism, Ives as an "American maverick"). In this regard she draws attention to the geographic situatedness of these movements: most of Ives scholars are from the Midwest and the East Coast, Ives the "maverick" is the West Coast and global marketing term. And this is linked with different moral valuations. Gail concludes that the highest value in the "value system of the prevailing classical music cult" is the value of "moral acceptability" (279). Arguing that the values of the musicological community are "indistinguishable from the values of a very conservative heartland culture" (367) she reads the normalization/sanitization of Ives as U.S. musicologists' "participatory stake in a politics of growing conservatism" (366) and hence also consumerism. And here Gail rolls out a serious accusation. By policing Ives' legacy against deviant traits and moral anomalies American scholars like Gayle Sherwood Magee have rendered them "mostly non-existent" (368) – an accusation of nothing less than a scholarly falsification. Gail concludes that the time "has not yet come" (280) for an objective (authentic) version of Ives despite his status of a musical equivalent to Walt Whitman.

Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2009.

12 Drawing on Peter van der Merwe Gail reminds us that musicology as a discipline has its axiological roots in German Romantic idea of *Kunstreligion* (art-as-religion) and in the procedures of bourgeois music journalists who traced lives of godlike artists and their canonical "masterworks" (242-243).

Waffle House Music

Chapter 5 takes us to the everyday. While working at the University of Oklahoma at Norman Gail began to frequent Waffle House (WH), a famous Southern short-order and fast food chain founded in Atlanta, GA in 1955. She discovered in-house jukeboxes which, for a quarter, beside popular tunes offered selections of some thirty "Waffle House Family" promotional songs about WH food. These songs in between genres of the advertisement jingle and folk art/music traditions impressed Gail with "cleverness, self-depreciating irony, humor, and deep awareness and love for American popular culture" (326). "I was hooked" she says (324) and spent several years recording at diners, researching, and interviewing.

In the chapter, Gail looks back at the original body of songs (1982-2005) by Jerry Buckner and his partners Guy Garcia and Danny Jones. She believes that the songs are "genuine and unrecognized exemplars of an American folk aesthetic of the late consumer age" and "as much a part of America's musical heritage as nineteenth century promotional music" (368). Thus Gail's partial effort is to document them. Building on Erving Goffman's assertion in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) that "the daily routine is a performance connected with pre-existing patterns of cultural behavior" (287) and on Nelson Goodman's argument in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1959) that cultural productions "make" reality (289) her main goal is to inquire how these songs have since the early 1980s sublimated experience at the WH, that is, by what blending of reality with fantasy, and "constant negotiation between market value and the human factor" they have recruited customers and workers alike "as the stars of an implied musical," "participating in a particularly self-referential version of one of the central rituals of mainstream American mass consumption" (Gail 289).

The larger part of the chapter thus discusses music and the lyrical content. Gail argues that the songs' effectiveness hinged on their: a. ambiguity: songs praising a WH product available on jukeboxes only, a placement suggesting an artistic rather than commercial character; b. self-reflexivity: songs' playful, witty intertextuality. Buckner's team made parodies or adaptations of well-known hits and encoded in them Southern regional and temporal identity messaging. Reflective of both the 1980s' back-to-the-fifties furor and of postmodern culture's predilection for play, and consistent with the diner's 1950s image the songs used a variety of "retro" styles (i.e. gospel, R&B, doo-wop, bluegrass, rock n roll) and complex layers of cultural/affective associations. The author identifies a set of cultural resources in these productions.[13] What Gail complements is the songs' creators' cultural competence and, especially, their competence in Southern humor. We may remind in this context the words of American folklorist Walter Blair: "the best way to make an idea tasty to most of the people in this country has been to serve it up with a sauce of native grown humor and horse sense" (v).

Gail thus argues that the songs immersed listeners in an imagined community of the South. This was due to their artistry but also to WH/cultural institution's "identity-

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13 She points to minstrelsy, parodic "answer songs" which often turn the topic to food, comic Southern food songs and references to food in names of artists, Southern humor of self-depreciation and comedic intertextuality, parodies of popular operas, old-style humor known as "corn pone" (315), automobile and Christmas songs, and much more.

creating power" (290). WH's origins are in the postwar era when Southern impoverished communities embraced the chain restaurant as a synonym of progress, prosperity, patriotism. Because WH has never abandoned its original signifiers nor, in the main, the region itself (with the exception of expanding to a few Sunbelt states) and retained its frozen-in-time 1950s image the chain is synonymous with the Southern "home."[14]

The discussion naturally leads Gail to focus also on the question of Southern identity and related problems of whiteness, suburbanization, and consumption-as-consolation, etc. Noting the 2010s makeover of WH music—"this carefully balanced mix of old-style Southern identity with a new Southern commercialism… swallowed by a simplified… bland and careful commercialized whiteness which attempts to retain some of the goofiness… but has given up on expressing this sensibility" (369)—Gail, in parallel, accounts for the transformation from a pre-consumerist and regional older tradition Southern "whiteness" rooted in all the interior regions of the U.S. to the newer consumer identity of the Sunbelt (368). Like today's WH music emptied out of its identity this new Southern whiteness seems to have lost its own (360). Gail's auto-ethnography documents the corporate mindset which has "infected" the everyday and, in parallel, the noticeable resignation of WH customers whom she identifies as a specific sub-culture of Americans[15] and whose prevailing mood is entrenched chauvinistic patriotism and "resistance to change" (332). It is in this context that Gail reads WH as a symbolic artifact in the American cultural landscape and, as she puts it, a "memory trace of the early postwar American dream" which plays into the "rejectionist" sentiment and offers a taste of "consolation" (Gail 332); as well as, we may note, of its own contradiction.[16]

Gail assesses that during the period she studied the 1960s ethos of authenticity as self fulfillment and the embrace of pluralism and alterity have faced and lost the struggle with co-optation. Ethnicity was returned to essence, citizens turned consumers, while fundamentalist Christianity made inroads into the mainstream. The market's predilection for positivity has neutralized the critical, militant, topsy-turvy, self-referential edge. Most case studies illustrate the grave stakes the growing conservatism and its entanglements with commercialism have entailed: the rise of tribalism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, and even scholarly policing. That is why Gail calls her case studies the "swan songs of a dying authenticity" (347). Only UR, she says, have "not been as fully swallowed up in the consumer mentality" (357). Detroit techno's sovereignty however was just as much a matter of choice as of necessity for black Americans are those who have been "left truly alone, to struggle by themselves"

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14 Southern elements on their menu (e.g. grits), Southern cultural associations—like specific signs, consistent and familiar albeit now-outdated exterior and interior design, old-fashioned "explicit rules against obscenity" (Gail 291), or specific "family" language used by servers (Gail 309).

15 Gail writes: "lower class, mostly white… isolated or willfully rejecting any encounter with cultural and political otherness" (290).

16 McDonalds was established in the late 1940s, Kentucky Fried Chicken in 1952, Carl's Jr in 1956, the first shopping mall in 1956 (Campbell 52). 1955 was, as Neil Campbell drawing on W.T. Lhamon says, "a landmark year… when American [popular] 'culture became demonstrably speedier… rapidly moving toward promiscuity'" (52). Like other fast-food chains at the time, WH signified "a strong movement forward… in an attempt to reassert *very* American energies" (Campbell 52).

(358). She ends with a vision of slow deterioration of the U.S. incapable to turn away from consumerism nor to envision an identity paradigm beyond the old rootedness or hybridity.

Conclusion

In 2010, George Lipsitz addressed the 55th Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology. He spoke again of America at midnight: "midnight in the social order, the psychological order, and the moral order" ("Midnight" 188). Like earlier, he also spoke of the midnight's potentiality which depends on our being "'on time' for our time," that is on being prepared to note "the things that are happening all around us" ("Midnight" 187). Here, Lipsitz pointed to ethnomusicology: "ethnomusicology teaches us about the dynamics of difference, about the generative results that follow from recognizing that cultures are not the same… ethnomusicology… can help us see which differences make a difference" ("Midnight" 185). Lipsitz then added: "The profession's commitments to multi-lingualism, reciprocity, participation, performance, cosmopolitanism, and critical thinking are extraordinarily important tools for demystifying hierarchies" ("Midnight" 197). It is thus in the conceptual and procedural apparatus of the ethnomusicologists that Lipsitz sees the potential for facing the crisis of the midnight. But to make a difference, he adds, ethnomusicology must become a creative act itself, be guided by the "principle of participation" ("Midnight" 197).

Gail's book is a product of this ethnomusicological method at its best. It realizes Lipsitz's model of listening, informed, participatory, inspired and inspiring scholarship. It crosses many divides paying the same attention to the high and low brow, from the East Coast and Midwestern halls of musicological departments to techno raves in Berlin and diner music in Atlanta. But Gail is equally the (other/alternative) American studies' prime asset who lucidly reads social forces in music and with ethnographer's ear charts America as a web of trajectories and hierarchies (Christian, music marketing, global techno, classical music scenes, Old and New South). If culture is a "meaning effect" Gail's five case studies help us recognize where/when America has found itself today: at the festering "midnight" of the long conservative turn when the "possibly terminal decline of the American Dream" has begun and "outlines of a post-America world order emerge" (Gail 348). Mapping through music the intricate interdependencies between many imagined communities and specific places and geographies Gail reveals the deep collective American identity crisis, loss, impoverishment, insecurity. In the process, she also breaks the back of a few words ("cult," "genius," "masterworks," techno's "coldness," "angry Christians," "redneck" or "white trash").

Despite the enormous scope the book leaves much space for interpretation, for us, readers, to do our own part in order "to be on time in our time" (Lipsitz, "Midnight" 199). For example, although Gail does not say it explicitly, I gather from clues that one of her hopes for the "new, weird America" rests in cosmopolitanism (217). This hope is understandable for it is ethnomusicology which, as Lipsitz says, teaches us of "a universalism rich with particulars grounded in the dialogue of all, the dignity of each, and the supremacy of none" ("Midnight" 185). American studies at our own moment of danger can draw boldly from the example of Gail's vison, empathy, and execution.

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David A. Davis. *World War I and Southern Modernism*. UP of Mississippi, 2018, 234 pages.

In his last book, *World War I and Southern Modernism,* David A. Davis demonstrates how the European theatre of war in 1914-1918 informed the intellectual and cultural landscape of the South, initiating processes which ultimately culminated in the region's embrace of modernism, and its entrance into a period of social transformation and departure from literary conventions. Davis's monograph, published by the University Press of Mississippi in 2018 and winner of the Eudora Welty prize, makes a compelling argument for how the complex amalgam of novel ideas and attitudes brought forth by the war had a profound impact on the cultural, social and artistic idiom of the South. To an already existing plethora of paradoxes associated with southern culture, Davis adds another, arguing that effectively, in the South, "modernism preceded modernity" (6). In this monograph, he succeeds in showing how in the South, a society that was largely cut off due to World War I looked back at the antebellum period and the Civil War through the lenses of a romanticized narrative, found itself in a situation of cultural and historical disruption, one that yanked the region from its provincialism and separationist tendencies, and forced it to embrace progress.

This hurried evolution of the region was fuelled by a number of socio-economic factors: by the northern and southern soldiers training side by side in military camps on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, by the throngs of workers leaving the South and going north, lured by the prospect of jobs in factories struggling with labour shortages, or by new technologies in agriculture which began to substitute obsolete practices, gradually pushing the region from agrarianism to agricultural-industrial ways. Davis stresses that all these processes took place in the South too quickly for the region to find adequate ways of accommodating modernity. In his words, because of World War I, "southerners experienced the effects of modernity often before the region actually modernised: they experienced cities before they urbanized, they worked in factories before they industrialized, they used new technologies before the South had electrical or communication infrastructure, and they made contacts with populations that held more progressive ides before they liberated" (11).

Davis views the war as a catalyst which wrenched the region from the grip of nostalgia, thrusting it into modernity before its time. A number of regional dichotomies, like industry and agriculture, urbanism and ruralism, cosmopolitanism and provincialism, progressivism and conservatism, localism and globalism arose in the wake of the war, and began to preoccupy and contextualize the ambitions and fears of the region. Understandably, to conservative mind-sets, these processes were nothing other than corruptive and damaging – they were viewed as a direct threat to a southern identity which sustained white supremacy and Jim Crow. The advocates of the lost cause (Davis, as he explains, purposefully uses low capital letters for fear it might reify the term and thus reinforce the idea behind it) launched a series of attacks

at the inevitable changes. In consequence, while Europe was consumed by the theatre of World War I, the South was subject to the conflicted disruption of identity. It is the crux of Davis's argument in *World War I and Southern Modernism* that a number of southern writers were responding to the social and economic disruption by seeking new forms of artistic engagement. In his monograph, Davis identifies five central areas of modernist disruption and demonstrates how they were confronted by a number of southern authors: interstate contact, southern soldiers fighting oversees, African-American soldiers returning to the South, the fight for women's rights and rapid changes in southern agriculture. Each disruption is discussed in a separate chapter and such an organization allows Davis to show how complex and multifaceted the impact of the war was upon the region.

In the first chapter, "The Forward Glance," Davis discusses how the intensified interstate travel which accompanied World War I influenced the southern literature. With southern isolationism crumbling, the intellectual and social barriers between North and South weakened. As argued by Davis, the contact "between northerners and southerners exploded the northerners' regional stereotypes of the South and dissolved much of southerners' lost cause enmity towards Yankees" (25). Here, Davis's discussions of Faulkner's first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, as well as of selected works by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dos Passos, shows how the interregional exchange impacted the perception of the South.

In the second chapter, Davis demonstrates how many white male southerners who served in Europe during the war came to feel deeply conflicted about their regional identity. Between America's declaration of war in 1917, and the demobilisation of the army of occupation in Germany in 1919, nearly a million southerners served in the military, accounting for almost a quarter of American military personnel—the highest demographic of all regions of the US. Raised by the sons and grandsons of Confederate veterans, surrounded by the lost cause mythology, these soldiers had difficulty identifying themselves as both American and southern. Davis shows how different southern writers dramatized this conundrum of allegiance in their works. William Alexander Percy's coping strategy was to defend and endorse traditional southern ways in his writings. Paul Green went in a different direction. His stay in France allowed him to develop a much more liberal and progressive outlook, which he expressed, among others, in his pacifist play *Johnny Johnson*. The third text discussed by Davis, Donald Davidson's poem *The Tall Man,* written three years before the publication of *I'll Take My Stand,* is more aligned with Percy's thinking and constitutes another excellent illustration of how conservative agrarianism proclaimed modernity to be the region's nemesis.

For the advocates of racial integration and critics of Jim Crow, the war seemed like an opportunity to make their case for civil rights. Having experienced relative racial equality overseas, African-American soldiers drafted into the American army felt entitled to make a claim for citizenship upon their return. In the third chapter, Davis draws a painful image of disillusionment and violence, opening this section of the book with the example of Wilbur Little, an African American soldier, who having returned to Georgia from his service in World War I, was lynched when he wore his uniform in public. Again, Davis gives three examples of African American writers who portray black southern soldiers fighting for freedom and equality after their

homecoming: Victory Daly, Walter White and Claude McKay.

The fourth chapter of the monograph is dedicated to the impact of World War I on women's rights in the South. The region's notorious Victorian-like decorum of femininity began to change during the war and immediately after its end. Davis stresses the paradox of culture which venerated the belle as a paragon of respectability, and simultaneously subjugated her completely through patriarchy, depriving her of legal as well as social subjectivity—the "praise of virtues such as devotion, humility, charity, commitment, sacrifice, loyalty, and chastity inscribed an image of the southern woman as the angel in the house, an image that became a cultural icon and a social problem" (119). The influx of early feminist ideas exposed and engaged with these paradoxes—especially, when the war and the social challenges it entailed caused profound changes in gender demographics. Understandably, in the conservative social environment, truly herculean efforts to stop the advance of gender rights were made. Here also Davis gives three examples of novels written by female authors: Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *He Sent Forth a Raven*, Ellen Glasgow' *Vein of Iron* and Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* which succeeded in exposing the makeshift social schemes devised to curate the patriarchy and to prevent it from dissolution.

The fifth area of modernist disruption is discussed in the chapter "Mules and Machines" and concerns the region's economy. Due to the notorious labour shortages resulting from an exodus of people, the agricultural landscape of the South was fundamentally changed in the wake of the war. The traditional way of life in the region, one associated with rural agriculture, became visibly obsolete, and the dichotomy of the eponymous "mules" and "machines" from the title of the chapter came to epitomize the ambivalent suspension of the region between the past and the present. Here, Davis discusses the writings of Ellen Glasgow, W. J. Cash and William Faulkner, to show how the abrupt and violent changes in the agricultural landscape of the region in the wake of the war translated into the issues of identity.

Davis's *World War I and Southern Modernism* is a vital study for Southern Studies, providing insights into how the transatlantic war context informed southern culture at the most basic level, and how the inevitable socio-economic changes shaped both the themes and techniques of the southern literary idiom. The five areas of disruption identified by Davis serve well to illustrate the extent to which discussions of the "nation's region" (to borrow the title of Leigh Anne Duck's insightful study on American modernism and the South) cannot be divorced from the transatlantic context in the 1920s. The texts selected by Davis to illustrate this point mostly represent novels – although he does include singular discussions of other genres, ranging from poetry (Davidson), journalistic-sociological comment (Cash) to drama (Green). However, this strong focus on novels does not change an overall highly positive assessment of the monograph as a well-researched and comprehensive study of the subject. In all of his erudite discussions, Davis remains adept at demonstrating to his readers how the encroachment of modernity forced southerners to rethink the founding principles of race, gender and economy which the region held as the basis for its quotidian world.

Michał Choiński
Jagiellonian University

Harri Veivo, Petra James, and Dorota Walczak-Delanois, editors. *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe*. Brill, 2019, 320 pages.

Bringing together twelve essays by a host of European scholars, *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe*, edited by Harri Veivo, Petra James and Dorota Walczak-Delanois, offers the newest contribution to the transnational turn in understanding the Beats and marks another attempt of international Beat academics to, perhaps even literally, open up new routes for Beat studies. The trailblazing efforts to map Beat sensibility as a global network of shared aesthetic choices and correspondences can be traced back to *The Transnational Beat Generation* (2012) edited by Nancy M. Grace and *The Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature* (2018) edited by A. Robert Lee. Veivo, James, and Walczak-Delanois' collection joins both of the aforementioned to seal the fact that the days of confining Beat to, be it, Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs—"the usual suspects," to use Lee's parlance (1)—or second-tier American Beat writers such as Holmes, Huncke, or Solomon, are gone for good. To refer once more to Lee's book and Kerouac's words serving an epigraph to its introductory chapter, while the major Beat figures will undoubtedly remain the focus of scholarly interest, "[t]here appears to be a Beat Generation all over the world" (1) which finally needs to be given long overdue recognition.

Whereas Lee's volume first and foremost wished to identify a bulk of writers from around the globe whose oeuvres resonate with Beat sensibilities and who could be welcomed to the Beat canon, *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* narrows down the scope of its focus to the Old Continent while simultaneously expanding the objectives to mapping translation, reception (also by retracing American writers' in-person European forays) and appropriation of Beat literature and the cultural impact surrounding it from the 1950s to the most recent present. The chapters discussing twelve countries, by order—Iceland, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Greece, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Hungary, Austria, Norway and Belgium, are not grouped in sections; instead, the editors prefer to see them as "a rhizomatic constellation" (6) at work, a network reflecting the fluidity of the movement thrown against the backdrop of "a Europe… divided by many frontiers" (1). Nevertheless, what recurs as a constant point of reference and the chief demarcation line shaping historical contexts is the Iron Curtain (6), which, as pointed by the editors, reverberates in the ways of disseminating Beat in a modern-day Europe (8).

As most of the chapters evince, Beat is now perceived as a force responsible for inducing the modernization of national literary scenes, especially those of the Nordic countries. These, as observed by Anna Westerståhl Stenport and reiterated by Harri Veivo in his overview of Beat in Finland, were for years locked between "ideologies of margin and centre, import and export, … nation and cosmopolitanism" (45). Similarly, Beat was interchangeable with "modernist" and "avant-garde" in Greece, where Ginsberg's and Lamantia's poems, among those by other Beats, went side by side with the works of surrealists in literary magazines such as *To allo stin techni* and *Pali* (109). In their corresponding chapters on Portugal and Poland, Nuno Miguel Neves and Dorota Walczak-Delaois further point to the fact that Beat often constituted merely a part of a wholesale literary influx from the United States. With

regard to the former country, the first anthology of Beat writing included poems by Ginsberg, Corso and Ferlinghetti, but also Barbara Guest, Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery (140); as for the latter, the space shared by the Beats and other hallmarks of twentieth-century American literature in a highly influential journal *Literatura na świecie* "formed the basis for the reception of… Western literature in general" (162).

In the most cases Beat was warmly welcomed by the literary milieus of receiving cultures just as when it could offer, respectively in Communist Czechoslovakia and Poland, "a revolt against the alienating features of everyday life" (64) and some invigorating intensity and mobility coming with hitchhiking in "a situation of uncertainty and insecurity" (161) as noted by Petra James and Dorota Walczak-Delanois. Obviously, wherever censorship was an issue, Beat literature that leaked through it was praised and trusted for its countercultural potential to shake the socio-political landscapes of authoritarian regimes, the pre-1974 Greece being an example alongside the countries of the Eastern bloc. In Chapter 5 Maria Nikolopoulou demonstrates that Ginsberg's and Burroughs' political activity following their recognition as international countercultural icons in the 1960s lent to a political reading of their texts by wider Greek audiences, which in turn foreshadowed social and political changes arriving with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974 (101, 116). However, the reception of the Beats in Europe also happened to be less favorable. József Havasréti claims that in Hungary Beat would eventually lose its impetus and magnetism after the fall of communism (204). Pondering the ultraconservative post-war realities of Austria, Thomas Antonic brings up the popular image of the figure of "a beatnik" as a serious threat to law and order. Correspondingly, German and Austrian literary critics of that time, here epitomized by Magnus Enzensberger and Gerhard Fritsch, emerge as a bastion of the bourgeois tastes and ignorance as when bereaving Kerouac of any talent and rebuking his works as a "terrible mixture of hectic, overheated adolescence and hard-boiled nihilism" (237). As discussed by Franca Bellarsi and Gregory Watson in the closing essay, it was also Belgium that sat in complex relation with Beat aesthetics. Illuminating the complexities of Beats' reception in the Lowlands, the scholars argue that the arrival of Beat in both Flanders and Wallonia may be likened to "unexploded bombshells" (275), untimely and failed injections of subversion in a place where it appeared to be no longer anticipated. After all, could the Flemish/Dutch-speaking part of the land, a "home to some of avant-garde crucibles" (275), Bellarsi and Watson ask, be electrified by its later-day derivative or could Beat match the radicalism of Flemish *Kulturkampf*? Having been keenly attuned to Paris for years, Belgian Francophones would not be either taken by storm by the Beat diction, the scholars continue to eventually conclude by characterizing Beats' overall impact on the literatures of the Lowlands as the indeterminable (non-)subversion.

A phenomenon which spreads throughout the entire collection and rhymes well with a strand of publications devoted to the Beats in the last couple of years (the instances being Simon Warner's *Text, Drugs, and Rock'n'Roll* (2013) and Casey Rae's *William S. Burroughs and the Cult of Rock'n'Roll* (2019)) comes with the significance of rock and punk as long-lasting forces amplifying Beat subversiveness in Europe and being, one might argue, as complementary to Beat sensibilities as jazz music. It is attested by the underground scene of the Finnish Turku, it is clear from how

closely associated to the Beats a Spanish countercultural rock music magazine *Star* was, and it is evident from the works of an Estonian writer Mati Unt and the Estonian punk. Looking further, Ginsberg's growing interest in performing poetry with rock musicians finds its counterpart in Leonidas Christakis, a Greek writer who became rock musician, as well as László Földes, an underground singer, with whom the American poet gave concerts and had a studio session in Hungary (217). Also, no different than the American Beat, the European Beat/Beat in Europe would not have flourished and expanded without local networks and alternative channels of communnication. The entire collection, thus, may well be read as a tribute to institutions (the Vienna Poetry School, echoing Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics), clubs and studios (Club 7, Zum blauen Apfel and Skippergata in Oslo; the early-1960s happenings in Greek cafés) and alternative periodicals (the before mentioned Greek *To allo stin techni* and *Pali*, the Portuguese *Almanaque*), all of which played a substantial part in familiarizing audiences with Beat voice.

The book succeeds in accomplishing its objective to keep up the trend in transnational Beat studies and is recommended to anyone interested in retracing the evolution of Beat reception and dissemination across the European continent. The twelve chapters reveal the book's overall resourcefulness in learning more about the immense body of texts, such as first translations, reprints, literary tributes and a bulk of scholarly work, which earned Beat some proper recognition in the discussed countries. Occasionally, the book appears to expand Beat studies when and where no one would expect just as by mentioning Ginsberg's appearance in a Hungarian 1981 feature film *Kopaszkutya* ("bald-head dog") (dir. G. Szomjas), a detail most likely unrecorded in any publication devoted to Beat presence on screen thus far. Perhaps the biggest value of *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* lies in demonstrating to the reader that Beat aesthetics and Beat legacy may be and should be looked from a great deal of angles, translation studies and global geopolitics being but a few, so that Beat studies continue to be on the go.

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Tomasz Sawczuk
University of Białystok

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Denijal Jegić. *Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance*. Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019, 329 pages.

Denijal Jegić's *Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance* offers a useful overview of the Israel-Palestine conflict between 1947 and the present along with an evaluation of the literary movements that the violence inspired. While the discussion is heavily weighted toward exegesis of the conflict's roots and lasting cultural effects, and only about a third of the book is devoted to literary analysis, the author makes a convincing argument overall about the activist energy that Palestinian and African-American writers share in the twenty-first century.

Jegić begins his study by defining Palestinians, African Americans, and other culturally marginalized groups as "transnationally continuously (re)produced as subalterns" (8). While each group's ethnic background and history are unique, their experiences with social prejudice and violence have motivated them to declare public support for one another over the past several decades. Recent developments in social media have further accelerated movements toward cross-cultural solidarity and collective resistance. Jegić points out that Palestinian culture is transnational by nature; writers' own experiences with dispossession and diasporic existence encourage them to speak out in favor of domestic rights and the value of home. Such themes add an activist tone to the work of many Palestinian writers.

In making his argument, Jegić focuses on the colonialist relationship between Zionist Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, noting that new developments in Palestinian cultural studies draw parallels between "engagements with settler-colonialism" in Palestine and in the United States (22). Such cultural-studies analyses offer critiques of extremist Zionist politics, which tends to position Palestine as a barbaric, undeveloped part of the world. Jegić points out that Zionist immigration policy formed during the creation of Israel did not welcome immigrants unilaterally but discriminated against anyone not of Eastern European descent. This discrimination has created a fragmented, transnational Palestine. Zionist aggression toward Palestinians has taken many different forms, including domestic terrorist tactics, resettlement, destruction of entire communities, reforestation of Palestinian land with non-native species, use of the Hasbara public-relations ministry, and promotion of a "collective criminalization and identification of the Palestinian people as an enemy" (94). United States interventions in the Middle East and its own history of colonial practices have also contributed to Zionist control over Palestine. Public prejudice against persons of Arabic descent increased significantly after the 9-11 attacks, resulting in a widespread social perception of Palestinians as "others," while Zionists have perpetrated myths about their preordained homeland that resemble American settlement myths. Palestinians thus function as both "colonized subjects" and "test objects" (125) in the eyes of Zionists and sympathetic Americans alike.

Jegić argues that the United States' consistent promotion of Zionism as official state policy has helped to foster solidarity between Palestinian activists and American black nationalists. Both groups base their activism in anti-colonial thought and transnational community, in part because of Israel's support of South African apartheid. Israel and the United States also share a common public-policy language that focuses on anti-terrorism efforts and the military-industrial complex. As a result, US police targeting of African Americans and Israel's ongoing war against Palestinians living in Gaza have spurred the two groups on to collective action and protest. These actions have taken the form of "a new wave of written, spoken, and performed statements" that are "characterized by an intersectional analysis and have resulted in demands for transnational resistance" (170). Palestinians and African Americans recognize civil-rights violations that occur on both continents and articulate shared goals, often through the lens of W.E.B. DuBois's notion of double consciousness.

Jegić's assessment of the literary movements that react to social injustice in Palestine and the United States centers on the work of Palestinian-American

writer Suheir Hammad, African-American writer June Jordan, and Israeli-Palestinian hip-hop artists DAM (Da Arabian MCs). These performers, according to Jegić, "articulate a confluence of autobiographic narration and a de-colonial activism" (187). They use a range of different languages and dialects to highlight the political histories that their work represents, and they rely upon several diverse artistic genres to convey their messages. These strategies reflect the ways in which today's writers of color emphasize their unique ethnicities in the service of transnational identification. Palestinian writers, for instance, focus on "experiences with expulsion, ethnic cleansing, settler-colonialism, and the many forms of structural violence" (199). Poetry in particular offers these artists an ideal forum for transnational self-expression. They explore several central themes, including the concept and implications of home, which in their work may connote a physical space, an abstract idea, or a personal value; the high rates of African-American and Palestinian incarceration; the ongoing oppression of women; and the need for social revolution. Hammad, Jordan, and DAM all examine the parallels that exist between the United States' and Israel's governmental policies, producing both critiques of current conditions and calls for social change.

Jegić's study ultimately concludes that the work of Suheir Hammad, June Jordan, and DAM constitutes a "trans/intifada" (an internationally situated "shaking-off") that seeks to map out and change "common experiences of subjugation among Blacks, Palestinians, and *Others* more generally" (273; italics in original). These writers criticize the extremist values of both Zionists and conservative US nationalists and highlight the dangerous results of United States-Zionist collaboration. Their work in a variety of genres, including written poetry, spoken-word performance, essays, and social-media posts, have helped to strengthen Black-Palestinian solidarity and to create counter-histories of the two regions. Together they reimagine the concept of home as a welcoming and creative space, in opposition to mainstream military rhetoric; they become activists by "revealing human rights violations, and formulating equality and solidarity" (278).

Denijal Jegić labels these actions a kind of "subaltern narration" that makes resistance and real change possible (285). *Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance* draws together a comprehensive assessment of Israel-Palestine struggles, the violent fracturing of the Palestinian community, and the roots of Zionist conservatism in order to make the argument that modern-day Black and Palestinian poetry is inspired by a sense of shared experience and a drive toward social change. As an intervention in the field of American studies, the book offers a compelling evaluation of the political history and social factors that undergird the literature. Its literary analysis is shorter and less substantial than the study's other discussions but helps to support the argument in general. Recommended for any readers wishing to gain not only a detailed understanding of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Middle Eastern political history but also insight into the creative literatures that reflect on that history.

Jennifer Ryan-Bryant
State University of New York—Buffalo State College

Stefan Schubert. *Narrative Instability: Destabilizing Identities, Realities, and Textualities in Contemporary American Popular Culture.* **Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019, 301 pages.**

Judging from the popularity of various recent movies, series or video games, being duped or tricked is a source of particular enjoyment for modern audiences. Twists, which put into question the "reality" presented to viewers or gamers, force them to interact with texts (understood as cultural documents), to watch or play them again, and try to either reconstruct the stories, or check if the turning of the tables could be expected. In a way, the audience not so much watches or plays during the first watching or gameplay, but simply learns in order to apply the knowledge gained during the initial contact with the text to fully understand and appreciate the same text. This occurs despite the fact that the only new thing the second time around is the change of perception, so desirable that it becomes the ultimate (and sometimes only) cause of engaging with a text. The commercial success of such works as *Fight Club*, *Bioshock* or *Westworld*—which, despite their differences, are constructed the same way and use the same techniques, with the ultimate goal being to trick—positions them as notable and important, hence worthy of an in-depth analysis. The main appeal of these texts is not so much about the story itself, but more so about how it is presented, serving as proof of a certain sophistication characterizing present-day viewers and gamers. The narrative tools are primarily concerned with experience, one's subjective perception of events, with *what* one is experiencing considered to be secondary. This allows modern audiences to indulge in such narratives, allowing them to understand the complexity of their own situation.

This transmedial trend is identified and characterized by the titular phrase of Stefan Schubert's book, *Narrative Instability*. Within this trend the author recognizes three types of instabilities, regarding: identities, realities and textualities. The texts concerning unstable identities usually revolve around the mental state of their subjects, in consequence questioning the notion of "self" as something more than a social construct. An important characteristic of these texts is their relationship with the idea of the norm, being understood as that of white, male and middle-class characters. The norm, conveniently, is in agreement with the idea of a stereotypical American citizen, who finds himself threatened by the narratives of minorities that have come forward only recently. Whether confronting a different race, gender or class, the normative subject has to constantly affirm himself of his importance in these supposedly unstable times. Presenting the second type of instability, an unstable reality, is quite a task, as when it comes to books it can be conveyed through words, with the constructive work left to the imagination of the reader, while the movie/ series or game must be more persuasive, due to the common notion that seeing is believing. To witness something means that one has proof of its physical existence. To achieve that, Schubert argues, one must focus on the relationship between time and space, as these two are crucial in duping the viewer. In games there is another factor at play, which involves perspective—FPP, first–person perspective, allows the player to believe that it is himself who finds himself in a particular world performing particular actions. The third type of instabilities, regarding textualities, are based on

understanding narration as experience. In these texts the narration influences our perception of the world, knowingly pointing our attention to the importance of stories. This applies to texts well aware of their narrative potential, using instability as a device to engage the viewer or gamer by redirecting him to other sources, stressing their own status as texts.

Schubert's thorough analysis of selected cultural works highlights an important development in the postmodern world, involving the adaption of narrative devices used by esteemed experimental authors in earlier decades to other, visual media. By focusing solely on American texts, he highlights the influence American culture has on global consciousness, as well as global understanding of the present-day moment. This is in accordance with the idea of norm, which permeates the book, further embedding the analysis in the discourse about the state of the national consciousness. Since all the stories have seemingly been told, it is the way they are told that now comes to the forefront. The fact that modern audiences derive such pleasure from analyzing and appreciating the tools used to tell stories is representative of a new way of thinking about the world. Schubert's suggestion is that the focus should be precisely on instability, as it is the willingness to be tricked, the hunger for twists, that disrupts the appeal of linearity.

Schubert divides his book into four sections (plus a conclusion), the first of which serves as the theoretical basis for his discussion of the idea of narrative instability. In this chapter he presents various approaches towards and explanations of the declining popularity of regular narratives, in favor of devices and tricks which were first introduced in the sixties and seventies by postmodern writers. The theoretical part is followed by three analytical chapters, each devoted to the aforementioned types of instability, in regards to: identities, realities and textualities. The second chapter is a discussion of three texts: *Fight Club, Bioshock* and *Black Swan*. The protagonists of the three are in the wrong when it comes to their understanding of who they are, which, in consequence, influences the viewer's/gamer's perception of the world presented in these works. It is only after a big reveal that the audience truly learns that it fell victim to an (unintentionally) unreliable narrator. The fourth chapter is about unstable realities, so texts which purposely trick the audience that things are a certain way, only to expose that they are indeed quite different. The works analyzed in this chapter are: *Interstellar*, *Inception* and *BioShock Infinite*. *Inception* is more concerned with disrupting the notion of space, while *BioShock Infinite* achieves its goal by misguiding the audience's understanding of time. *Interstellar* combines both of these characteristics, hence is a perfect introduction to that notion. The fifth chapter stresses representation, as it highlights the importance of narration in/to the stories presented. Two video games, *The Stanley Parable* and *Alan Wake,* either use devices from literary texts or simply allude to them, underlying their own status as texts. The final work analyzed in this work, *Westworld*, serves as an example of the rising importance of instabilities in television series, which are the main source of entertainment for modern audiences.

Łukasz Muniowski
Wszechnica Polska University, Warsaw

Aldona Kobus and Łukasz Muniowski, editors. *Sex, Death, and Resurrection in Altered Carbon: Essays on the Netflix Series.* McFarland, 2020, 198 pages.

This short but skillfully edited collection of essays offers a close study of the recent Netflix science fiction production *Altered Carbon* (2018-), based on the 2002 cyberpunk novel by American writer Richard Morgan. It takes place in a dystopian future San Francisco (known as Bay City), a visually arresting neo-noir metropolis arguably more than reminiscent of the retro-futuristic vision of Los Angeles presented in Ridley Scott's seminal *Blade Runner* (1982). The first series, which is the subject of the collection, explores this world through the eyes of Takeshi Kovacs, an ex-mercenary and alleged war criminal brought back to life in order to solve a criminal mystery—the murder of the aristocrat Laurens Bancroft. In this far-future world, a person's life does not necessarily end with death. Thanks to the technoscientific revolution known as the "stack-and-sleeve technology," a person's consciousness—thoughts, memories, experiences—is digitalized in the form of a "cortical stack," located at the back of the skull. This small device can be removed from the "original" body and places in "sleeves," human (or artificial) bodies that, when uploaded with the necessary hardware, act as a host body. When one's body dies the world of *Altered Carbon,* their "stack" can be "re-sleeved" into another body, rendering death only a temporary state—at least for those who are able to afford this procedure, and prolong their life, potentially reaching immortality.

Sex, Death, and Resurrection in Altered Carbon, co-edited by Aldona Kobus and Łukasz Muniowski, consists of thirteen essays divided into three sections. In the introduction to the volume, the reader is presented with the impressive methodological diversity of the book. The authors offer a concise summary of the series' mixed critical reception and most commonly addressed flaws—also examined in detail in the following chapters—and point to the many interesting theoretical perspective it nevertheless invites to pursue. Despite *Altered Carbon*'s problematic position in the contemporary landscape of science fiction, the thirteen collected essays prove that this seemingly derivative reenactment of the 1980s cyberpunk aesthetic carries in fact much intellectual weight, and offers its viewers a fascinating look at our very modern struggles with identity, gendered bodies, sex and sexuality, mortality and morality, and the neoliberal regimes of biopower.

The first section on "Sex" consists of three essays. Alexander N. Howe proposes to examine the series' engagement with embodiment and technology through a focus on the character of Kristin Ortega, a detective who becomes the protagonist's unlikely ally and romantic partner. Locating her within both the neo-noir and the hard-boiled traditions of female detectives, a far less popular figure than the tough-talking, street-smart male detective from hard-boiled fiction, Howe discusses Ortega's subversive role in *Altered Carbon* from the perspective of critical posthumanism and psychoanalysis. Focusing on her relationship with Kovacs, the ex-Envoy resleeved in the body of her former lover, the article fuses a discussion of the gender fantasies of neo-noir cyberpunk with a Lacanian reading of the uncanny love triangle. Despite the claims that the sleeve and stacks technology liberates humans from the constrains of embodiment, the author views it rather as a complication of the relationship between

identity, desire and technologized bodies, fulfilling a comment made by Kovacs, used as the title for the essay, that "technology advances but humans don't."

In his highly engaging, theoretically dazzling essay Kwasu David Tembo continues the exploration of the show's interweaving of sexuality, biotechnology and biopower, particularly in relation to the neo-futuristic world's monstrous ultra-elite's obsession with sex, death, and power. Michel Foucault's concept of the limit-experience, defined as "the point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or the extreme," serves as the organizing theoretical foundation for Tembo's multilayered analysis of "Meth-eroticism." Named after the Methuselah of the Old Testament, the Meths are the top one-percent echelons of the futuristic society, a class of wealthy entrepreneurs-aristocrats possessing unlimited financial resources and political power. Contrary to the rest of society, the "grounders," the (literally) sky-occupying Meth elite not only can afford endless resleeving—exchanging of sleeve bodies, including limitless access to their own clones—but they also can remotely store digitized back-up copies of their consciousness, practically becoming centuries-spanning, immortal beings almost completely detached from the rest of humanity. The author asks an intriguing question: in a world where technology allows the individual to escape subjectivity and function as multiple embodied, self-reproducing self, is it also possible to transgress the ethical and moral restrictions imposed on (post)human sexuality? *Altered Carbon* depicts Meth sexuality as excessive, sadistic, fueled by power fantasies of sexual violence and eroticized death, realized both in virtual reality and on the bodies of others. In the author's eyes, the liberation from "normal" boundaries—namely, from the fear of death as the end of existence—pushes the limit-experience of Meths beyond mortality and morality, into the domain of an erotic power dynamic predicated upon the elite's biopolitical control over the bodies of their victims. The stack and sleeve technology offers no escape from embodied and gendered violence for those people who are used for the fulfillment of sexual fantasies of the elites.

The last article in this section, written by Michał Klata, offers a provocative, but insightful defense of the series' critical reception. At the time of the premiere, the first season of *Altered Carbon* was accused by many critics of relying too much on unnecessary sex scenes, verging toward gratuity particularly in its emphasis on presenting female nudity. Klata's essay proposes a formal analysis of several sex scenes from show, read closely not only in their relation to the overall plot—such as foreshadowing future narrative twists—but also focusing on sequencing, sound editing, the use of close-ups. His sex-positive reading employs Sergei Einstein's theory of montage, coupled with Laura Mulvey's influential concept of the male gaze. According to the author, when analyzed more thoroughly and without bias, the sex scenes in *Altered Carbon* can be seen as serving many different functions in the narrative. Klata's argument, as well as his careful analysis, certainly demonstrates the value of applying theoretical frameworks to film criticism—something that is sadly missing in many mainstream reviews of popular genre productions.

The second section titled "Sleeves" turns attention to the corporeality of bodies and identities. It consist of six essays which, even though their authors pursue diverse theoretical directions, engage in an intertextual discussion with each other. The first article, co-written by Esra Köksal and Burcu Baykan, critically interrogates

the series' vision of a posthuman disembodied futurity attained through revolutionary technological advancements. At first glance, it is a world that seems to privilege the mind (stacks) over the body (sleeves), since what they call "a floating consciousness" can exist without corporeality in the separated dimension of virtual reality, and humans are essentially techno-organic hybrids, malleable mixtures of information and the flesh, human and non human agents. While Köksal and Baykan agree that the characters depicted in the show are a quite literal representation of what Donna Haraway calls "cyborg subjectivities," they are in fact still strongly and affectively attached to their material bodies. As their essay convincingly argues, despite promising a liberation from embodiment, in the world of *Altered Carbon* the body "cannot be regarded as a piece of clothing that can be easily switched, replaced or discarded, as each resleeving has its own consequences, creating a sense of doubt or confusion about one's sense of self." This attachment to the materiality of posthuman identity aligns the series with N. Katherine Hayes' conceptualization of posthumanism: a postulated future in which the technological, digitized and hybridized reconfigurations of our identities will not eradicate our material embodment—the body will still matter.

Lars Schmeink's article also explores the theme of the mind/body relationship, noting the primacy of the biological as opposed to the virtual, but focuses on the commodification of bodies. His chapter mixes an analysis of the show's aesthetical choices, namely its obsessive reproducing of violent images of bodily harm (including its problematic gender politics), with a reading of the two contradictory approaches to the body. Whereas members of lower classes such as Kovacs and Ortega are shown as caring for theirs and others' sleeves, the aristocratic Meths represent a radical reimagining of what Schmeink calls "the capital, neoliberal notion of human ownership and mastery of the body." This vision of cybernetic posthumanism is one certainly not liberated from embodied differences of race, gender, class—especially the latter, as the economic and political hegemony of the Meths allows them to enact violence on other bodies, and then pay off their transgressions as property damage fees.

Approaching the subject of the commodification of the body from yet another angle, Łukasz Muniowski proposes to read the Meths' consumer practices—their unending quest for obtaining the healthiest, most physically attractive sleeves—in parallel with the recent phenomenon of the wellness movement. Wellness culture dictates that health is a personal choice, and caring for oneself is an individual task governed by the regimes of healthy eating, dieting, training. The perfect body becomes a testament to one's success in life, a statement of control and, as Muniowski aptly states, a reflection of present-day narcissism, permeating Western culture. For Meths, this ideal of wellness can be obtained through their access to clone copies of themselves. It is a luxury commodity not available to "grounders," who, if their original body is destroyed, can continue embodied existence only through resleeving in either organic or synthetic sleeves. Access to health is another aspect of the stack and sleeves technology that on closer inspection seems less futuristic, but grounded in the realities of late capitalism.

Aline Ferreira's essay examines the biopolitics of the series from a philosophical perspective centered around the fantasy of escaping death. In some way it reads as a companion piece to the previous three entries, as the author brings into focus the idea

of a posthuman future promised as a way of prolonging life *ad infinitum,* but still grounded in the corporeality of the body. The idea of radical life extension through sleeve and clone technology is examined from multiple angles, including a discussion of the role of gender in the futuristic society—arguably a theme that is either ignored by the creators of the series, or sadly downplayed in the narrative and world-building—and the question of distributive justice in access of life-prolonging technologies. Ferreria's reading of the series' portrayal of the dream of immortality, deeply embedded in the fixed class structuring of the futuristic society, perfectly encapsulates why the world *Altered Carbon,* despite following a seemingly utopian impulse of eradicating death, is in fact a technologically-dependent dystopian nightmare.

The remaining two essays in this section move beyond the issue of embodiment or the promises of posthumanism, offering two very different perspectives. Damla Pehlivan is the author of the most surprising and original reading of the series' political conflict between the Meths and the Quellists—the latter side composing of rebels who oppose the idea that humans should have access to multiple life spans (and thus to immortality). She proposes to examine the conflict between materiality and spirituality from a Gnostic perspective, switching the philosophical inquiry to the question of transcendence and search of knowledge. The essay presents a very intriguing approach to deciphering the many layers of the show's politics. Dariusz Brzozek in turn analyzes the soundscape of the series, and asks who is speaking in and/or through the body of the other. His reading methodologically unites psychoanalysis with hauntology in examining the voices that speak and haunt the protagonists of *Altered Carbon.* To whom belongs the voice speaking in a rented sleeve—to the personality (stack) or the material body (sleeve)? Is it a voice of the living, or a haunting sonic memory of the dead? Brzozek's article deals with the ontological and metaphysical anxieties induced by radical (but inherently rationalized) technologies allowing these (dis)embodied voices to be heard, and provides an thought-provoking coda to the second part of the book.

The third section consists of four essays which interrogate *Altered Carbon*'s cyberpunk legacy. The initial lukewarm reception of the series among film critics troubles some of the authors in the collection, most certainly Adam Edwards, who opens the section with a discussion of the parodic elements of the series which he sees as crucial for understanding its complicated, critical engagement with the cyberpunk heritage. While acknowledging the Netflix series' existing aesthetical ties to *Blade Runner* (present both on screen and in marketing materials)*,* Edwards contends that what this criticism fails to capture is how the creators of *Altered Carbon* are consciously entering in a dialogue with cyberpunk texts from the past, in order to recontextualize and update them, or, on the other hand, subvert the metatextual expectations of viewers. The scholar argues that instead of being an unoriginal revamping of an 1980s aesthetic, the series should be viewed as a parody of the cyberpunk genre. Important for his argument is Fredric Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche, the latter defined as a postmodern "imitation of dead styles," and the former as a style of producing imitations that remain respectful of the tropes and styles it wants to make fun of. According to Edwards, *Altered Cabron* is a self-conscious, ironic and, perhaps most significantly, critical repetition of seemingly used-up motifs and tropes of the cyberpunk. His analysis of selected scenes from the show supplies his argument

with valid examples of the parodic quality of the series' engagement with worn-out generic tropes and clichés (e.g. the hard-boiled tough detective, the grim neon-lit city, etc.). It also contextualizes them within not only the history of science fiction, but also in reference to the creators' intertextual plays with their (intended?) audience's expectations.

Kenneth Matthews' article deals with the idea of manufacturing history and ties the show's politics with the current political climate in the US. It discusses the relationship between the past and the present, focusing specifically on the questions of truth, and on who is able to controls the historical narrative—both in our present so-called post-truth era, and in the cyberpunk future of *Altered Carbon*. Matthews's analyzes the series' through the lens of New Historicism, recognizing the impact of literacy and linearity on the concept of time and history. His theoretical discussion of the historical specificity of cultural texts and their interpretation centers around the question of how the past is negotiated through a "selective tradition," which is ultimately a successful method of fabrication, pursued in the show by the all-powerful Meth elite.

The theme of how the past is constantly interfering with/in the present is continued in the next essay, written by Aldona Kobus, the co-editor of the volume. It examines the show from the perspective of Derridean hauntology, offering a multi-layered, insightful analysis of several cases of haunting: the ghosts of dead lovers, the ghost-like specters of artificial intelligences, or the frightening presence of those who return from the dead—and speak. Kobus argues convincingly that the future world of *Altered Carbon* is haunted by the past, as is the genre of cyberpunk itself. Once a fresh and original new wave of science fiction, today it is often berated for the staleness of its ideas and its over-use of worn-out aesthetical and political tropes. These different meta-textual specters of cyberpunk haunt the narrative of the show, either giving voice to counter-hegemonic narratives, or are silenced by those in power. Kobus's essay carefully constructs a very thoughtful critique of the genre's compulsive returning to the past to envision a future—perhaps even a retro-future, a future that had already taken place in the past—while also demonstrating the subversive elements present in the narrative which "is making us aware of the necessity of living with ghosts."

The last article, co-written by Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns and Emiliano Aguilar, examines the Netflix series' original interweaving of cyberpunk and the Gothic. Although the authors focus on the character of Edgar Allan Poe—an artificial intelligence running the Raven hotel—their essay also covers other emanations of the Gothic/Poesque in the narrative. It is the show's obsessive dance between life and death that is read through Poe's own dual fascination with the fear of death on the one hand, and the eroticism of death on the other. This contradictory perspective, the authors argue, is elevated in the show, as it challenges the neoliberal fantasy at its heart—the techno-scientific idea of prolonging life (at a certain price). Their essay brilliantly encapsulates both the show's and the reviewed book's investment in complicating, deconstructing and reevaluating the philosophical and political constrains put on the meaning and value of life and death.

The volume as a whole offers an intellectually captivating examination of a very recent American cultural text that succeeds in capturing present-day fears,

dreams and obsessions. Contributors to the collection employ an impressive array of theoretical frameworks that engage with the first season's multiple transgressive and subversive contexts, ranging from the issue of embodiment and sexuality, the past haunting the present, thanatophobia, up to the critique of late capitalist biopolitics and neoliberal fantasies of endless self-realization. Kobus's and Muniowski's edited collection is valuable not only for its immediacy and freshness, but most importantly for its skillful demonstration of the complexity that the science-fictional imagination brings to the discussion of the past, present, and future of Western technoculture.

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Jędrzej Burszta
University of Warsaw

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ewelina Bańka is an Assistant Professor at the Department of American Literature and Culture at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland. Her research interests encompass postcolonial and border theories as well as Indigenous literatures and cultures of the Americas. She is the author of *View from the Concrete Shore: Visions of Indian Country in the Works of Silko, Vizenor, and Alexie* (2018) and several articles on contemporary Native American literature, border fiction and art. She also co-edited two volumes: *Americans and/in Their Diverse Sceneries* (2013) and *Borderlands: Art, Literature, Culture* (2016). Her current research focuses on the intersection of Indigenous and border studies.
[ORCID: 0000-0001-5143-7147; ebanka@kul.pl]

Arkadiusz Misztal is Assistant Professor in American Studies at the University of Gdańsk, Poland. His research and teaching interests focus on contemporary American fiction, narrative theory, and the philosophy of time.
[ORCID: 0000-0002-8936-7890; arkadiusz.misztal@ug.edu.pl]

Łukasz Muniowski holds his Ph.D. from the University of Warsaw. He has published articles on various topics, including gentrification, geek culture, American literature, video games and television series. He is the author of *Three-Pointer! A 40-Year NBA History* (McFarland, 2020) and co-editor of *Sex, Death and Resurrection in Altered Carbon* (McFarland, 2020).
[ORCID: 0000-0001-5814-366X, lukasz.muniowski@gmail.com]

Julia Nikiel is a Junior Lecturer and doctoral candidate in the Department of English and American Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Her academic interests include theories of globalization, space and place in post-millennial American and Canadian literature, and experimental fiction. She co-cordinates the ExRe(y) project.
[ORCID: 0000-0002-5893-4477; julia.maria.nikiel@gmail.com]

Małgorzata Olsza is Assistant Professor at the Department of American Literature at Adam Mickiewicz University. Her Ph.D. thesis was devoted to the poetics of the contemporary American graphic novel. She also holds an M.A. in Art History. Her research interests include American graphic novels and comics, contemporary American art, and visual culture.
[ORCID: 0000-0002-9171-0352; malgorzata.olsza@amu.edu.pl]

Alicja Piechucka works in the Department of North American Literature and Culture at the University of Łódź. She received her PhD in American literature from the University of Łódź in 2006. Her doctoral thesis was on T. S. Eliot's poetry.

Her postdoctoral research focused mostly on Hart Crane's œuvre. She obtained her habilitation in 2020. Her academic interests include American modernist poetry and contemporary American prose. Much of her research centers on comparative studies of American and French literature.

[ORCID 0000-0001-7522-7195; alicja.piechucka@uni.lodz.pl]

Grzegorz Welizarowicz is Assistant Professor at the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Gdańsk, Poland. His research interests include: American theater, American music, Latinx, African American and American Indian cultures. A two-time Fulbright Fellow (2000, 2012), he is the director and founding member of the Border Studies Group at the University of Gdańsk.

[ORCID: 0000-0002-3513-7029; grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl]

Justyna Włodarczyk teaches American literature and culture at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw. Her research interests center on animal studies and the environmental humanities, with emphasis on the social construction of animality and the entanglement of human-animal relations in broader discourses. Her most recent book is *Genealogy of Obedience: Reading North American Dog Training Literature, 1850s-2000s* (Brill, 2018). She has published, among others, in *Society & Animals*, *Medical Humanities*, and *Performance Research*.

[ORCID: 0000-0002-8808-1583; j.wlodarczyk@uw.edu.pl]