Toward a Global American Genealogy: Circumscribing Totality in a Globalized World

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Abstract

"Global American Genealogy: Circumscribing Totality in a Globalized World" contends that beginning with Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and extending through to the twenty-first-century present, a tradition of American literary works has emerged that are global in scope. The project draws on disparate literary and cultural materials in an interdisciplinary framework that includes literature, visual arts, film and media, technology studies, philosophy, political theory, and critical geography.

My introduction looks more closely at some of the central concepts of this study before investigating *Moby-Dick* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* as two early instances of the global American genealogy. While *Moby-Dick* is now canonized as the quintessential American novel, it is nevertheless "fixed in ocean reveries," as Ishmael says of his fellow New Yorkers—and turned outward towards the globe that American trade, industry, and capital, seafaring or not, were busy conquering. Similarly, I argue that Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,* despite its regionalist reputation, is fundamentally a novel about epic networks of people and ideas, and the utopian possibilities of cross-cultural global encounters.

The project turns in the first chapter to the Italian "Spaghetti Westerns" of the 1960's. I argue that these films translate a foundational American genre into a new mode of global epic concerned with transnational encounters that arise from America's presence abroad. Set in an empty desert landscape, the Spaghetti Westerns imagine their location as curiously placeless mythological landscapes, at once detailed and abstract, where violent encounters between characters (good, bad, and ugly) dramatize the complex and shifting relations between America and Europe and between the newly visible Global North and Global South.

My second chapter explores the texts and earthworks of the American artist Robert Smithson, whose turn away from the art galleries and museums of lower Manhattan and

towards the postindustrial vistas of New Jersey and the deserts of the American West envisions the American landscape as a challenge to reductive national historiographies. Written in the vein of the transcendentalists, Smithson's essays transpose Emerson's "transparent eyeball" and Thoreau's notion of the environment onto a global firmament by examining the outsides to perception and the nation in an exploration of the mutually engendering relations between dominant centers and neglected peripheries.

Thomas Pynchon's monumental novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) has rarely been viewed as a global text, despite its distinctly global setting, which spans postwar Europe, the United States, Southwest Africa, Argentina, Kyrgyzstan, and many other locations. In my third chapter, I argue that Pynchon's novel should be read as an investigation of the crux between the nation, the subject, and technologies that have become more urgent with the recent revelations about the National Security Agency.

The Caribbean-American writer Jamaica Kincaid specializes in small texts that might seem to be the antithesis of the epic. However, as I show in my fourth chapter, through her very compression, Kincaid forges a counter-epic of the Global South that needs to be addressed from within the framework of the global American genealogy. Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988) is an epic of irony and anger that addresses the complicity of American-influenced global institutions like the IMF with the national governments of the Global South in keeping the small places of the world small and disunited.

Finally, a coda looks briefly at the contemporary global American novel through discussions of Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* as recent examples of novels that explore the interrelation between America and globalization.

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Introduction

> America is really the property of the world, and not only of the Americans […] America was something dreamed by philosophers, vagabonds, and the wretched of the earth way before it was discovered by Spanish ships and populated by colonies from all over the world. […] the problems of America are the problems of the whole world: the contradictions, the fantasies, the poetry. The minute you touch down on America, you touch on universal themes.
>
> Sergio Leone

The United States of America, the world's sole remaining super power, dominates the planet militarily, economically, politically and culturally. Today, there is hardly a person on earth who has not been, in smaller or larger ways, influenced by American power, whether through military intervention, economic policies, or exposure to American commercial products or popular culture. From the archipelago of military bases to the streamlining of national economic policies to America's benefit through such international organizations as the International Monetary Fund, America's power over the world seems almost limitless, as if the world were its property. And yet, as the Italian film director Sergio Leone claims in the quote above, the obverse is also true: America is "the property of the world." The idea and reality of America remain inextricably entangled with the process of globalization, connecting people, objects, and ideas all across the planet. America's global presence does not evince itself solely by way of the one-way street of its imperial power but also through a network of global connections defined by cooperation rather than coercion.

The present study maps out what I term a global American genealogy. I contend that beginning with Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and extending through to the twenty-first-century present, a tradition of American literary works has emerged that are global in scope comprising a genealogy of global Americanism that runs parallel to the tradition of American exceptionalism. My project teases out this concomitant strand of the national imaginary, glimpsing an America that from its inception invited the whole world to participate in its experiment. Hearing this call, Django Reinhardt refashioned jazz, Sergio Leone reinvented the Western, and Jamaica Kincaid reframed the African-American diaspora. Correspondingly, the study reveals the understudied global imbrications of seemingly insular (even provincially regional) canonical American writers—from Melville and William Faulkner to Thomas Pynchon and Toni Morrison. While this global genealogy becomes easier to discern with the advancement of globalization in the recent decades, I contend that it has been present, if partially hidden from sight, from the nation's beginnings.

There are several possible starting points for the global American genealogy. A by no means exclusive list of potential points of emergence of the tradition would include literary utopias and fanciful travel narratives of the Middle Ages and Renaissance that would shape European ideas about the new world; textual sources describing the first encounters between European colonizers and native Americans; early literature about America by African writers such as Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley; or the transatlantic Enlightenment philosophy of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. What these myriad examples share, however, is that none of them are or should be seen as an origin of a single principle that through its gradual unfolding through history arrives us at our current globalized moment in time—and this is true as well of Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the text that I have chosen to inaugurate this present study. America's globality was present from the very beginnings.

It was against this idea of an origin as a starting point for a well-ordered and progressive history—specifically as it was exemplified by Paul Ree's *Origin of the Moral Sensations*—that Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* invented his genealogical method, which professed to find the real history concepts such as morality hiding underneath idealistic myths of progress and reason (17-18). Michel Foucault, taking his cue from Nietzsche, wrote of his own genealogical method that it "must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality" (139). It is with a nod to this tradition of philosophical historiography that I invoke the concept of genealogy in the title of the present study. Thus, one of my guiding ideas will be that the presence of the global in America and America's global presence, rather than following a straight line through the centuries, represents a contingent series of encounters without any underlying principle. Although a certain pattern of causality may seem to connect one event to the next, the present and future are not nestled within the past: each text that I focus on in this study represents, in its own way, an unforeseen turn in the global American genealogy that reinterprets the past as it charts a new future. As Nietzsche wrote in one of his *Untimely Meditations*, "when the past speaks, it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it" (94). As we will see, most of the texts I read in this study can be read as the work of such architects of the future.

The remainder of this introduction will look more closely at some of the central concepts of this study before investigating *Moby-Dick* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* as two early instances of the global American genealogy. While *Moby-Dick* is now canonized as the quintessential American novel, it is nevertheless positioned with its back to the land—"fixed in ocean reveries," as Ishmael says of his fellow New Yorkers—and turned outward towards the oceanic globe that American trade, industry, and capital, seafaring or not, were busy conquering. Similarly, I argue that Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,* despite its

regionalist reputation, is fundamentally a novel about epic networks of people and ideas, and the utopian possibilities of cross-cultural global encounters.

The project turns in the first chapter to the Italian "Spaghetti Westerns" of the 1960's. I argue that these films translate a foundational American genre—the American Western, which serves as a global synecdoche for the United States and its "cowboy" stance—into a new mode of global epic concerned with transnational encounters that arise from America's presence abroad. Set in an empty desert landscape, the Spaghetti Westerns imagine their location as curiously placeless mythological landscapes, at once detailed and abstract, where violent encounters between characters (good, bad, and ugly) dramatize the complex and shifting relations between America and Europe and between the newly visible Global North and Global South.

My second chapter explores the texts and earthworks of the American artist Robert Smithson, whose turn away from the art galleries and museums of lower Manhattan and towards the postindustrial vistas of New Jersey and the deserts of the American West envisions the American landscape as a challenge to reductive national historiographies. Written in the vein of the transcendentalists, Smithson's essays transpose Emerson's "transparent eyeball" and Thoreau's notion of the environment onto a global firmament by examining the outsides to perception and the nation in an exploration of the mutually engendering relations between dominant centers and neglected peripheries. Smithson's interest in the placelessness of the remote deserts of Utah and the overlooked, transitional landscapes of Passaic, New Jersey inscribes his work into the lineage of global American epics, epitomizing the genre's aspiration to represent ever larger and more complex totalities.

Thomas Pynchon's monumental novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) has rarely been viewed as a global text, despite its distinctly global setting, which spans postwar Europe, the United

States, Southwest Africa, Argentina, Kyrgyzstan, and many other locations. In my third chapter, I argue that Pynchon's novel should be read as an investigation of the crux between the nation, the subject, and technologies that have become more urgent with the recent revelations about the National Security Agency. Reaching back to the Puritans and their distinction between the elect and the preterite, the novel looks back at the birth of global American hegemony in the months following Germany's defeat in the Second World War from 1973, the very year that saw the abandonment of the gold standard and the move towards a neoliberal financialization of the world.

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Finally, a coda looks briefly at the contemporary global American novel through discussions of Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* as recent examples of novels that explore the interrelation between America and globalization.

In the present study, I define globalization as the process by which whole planet has become integrated into a unified whole economically, politically, and conceptually. This

process can be said to have started with the emergence of capitalism in the sixteenth century and the gradual mapping and incorporation of the world by Western European powers into an economic world-system. As the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk notes, this process was accompanied by a gradual (and by no means unwavering) turn away from extraterrestrial explanatory models, leaving the planet itself as the sole horizon of meaning:

> In a dawn that took centuries, the earth rose as the only and true orb, the basis of all contexts of life, while almost everything that had previously been considered the partnered, meaningful sky was emptied. This fatalization of the earth, brought about by human practices and taking place at the same time as the loss of reality among the once-vital numinous spheres, does not merely provide the background to those events; it is itself the drama of globalization. Its core lies in the observation that the conditions of human immunity fundamentally change on the discovered, interconnected and singularized earth (5).

America was from the very beginning imbricated in the process by which the whole planet became conceptualized as a unified whole. Columbus's "discovery" of the land he thought was Eastern Asia marked the beginning of a historical process to which we are still subjects today. As the sociologists Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein note,

> The modern world-system was born in the long sixteenth century. The Americas as a geosocial construct were born in the long sixteenth century. The creation of this geosocial entity, the Americas, was the constitutive act of the modern world-system. The Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas (549).

In a very real way, then, I contend, the study of the globe must be on some level the study of

America and vice versa. The rise and possible future fall of American global dominance and hegemony must be seen within the wider scope of the global American genealogy that this study traces. If this global American connectivity has not been obvious until now, it is because America's relationship with the globe has since its founding primarily been expressed through the discourse of American exceptionalism, casting America as the world's leader and only source of redemption.

American Exceptionalism and the Frontier

American exceptionalism is an evasive concept. Most scholars credit Alexis de Tocqueville with its invention in his *Democracy in America* from 1835, although the first recorded use of the term was by none other than Joseph Stalin, who in the 1920s used it to describe what he saw as the heretical view of one faction of the American Communist Party: that America did not conform to the same historical laws as Europe. Most scholars agree, however, that although the concept is embroiled in the context of the Cold War in which it was deployed most forcefully, "American exceptionalism" accurately describes a strand within American discourse about itself as a nation as well as that nation's relation to the world that has been present since before the nation's founding.[1]

Donald Pease views American exceptionalism as a fantasy that allows America and its citizens to forge a national narrative that overlooks or justifies any chapter of American history, from the genocide of Native Americans to slavery, that threatens to problematize the notion of America as the leader of the free world.[2] As such, American exceptionalism becomes an excuse for American empire, part of the justification for every exertion of

[1] For a general history of American exceptionalism, see Pease 2009, 7-13 and Spanos 187-241

[2] As Pease writes, invoking the work of Giorgio Agamben: "When it supplied U.S. citizens with the psychosocial structures through which to disavow the state's exceptions, American exceptionalism turned the nation in which the exception had itself become the norm into the State of Exception." (34).

American power all over the world, rendering all military interventions, political coups, and other interferences abroad as so many exceptions to the rule of American freedom and democracy. By calling itself exceptional, America has often meant that it excepts itself from blame. As a blanket excuse, American exceptionalism is less a coherent concept than a series of often very different ideas that together comprise what Pease calls a fantasy dimension.[3]

Yet despite the conceptual slipperiness of American exceptionalism, there are some constants in the way that it has been rhetorically deployed. One of the most dominant strands of American exceptionalism has been the emphasis on the frontier, which has played a major role in American historiography since the Puritans founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Phrases such as "City Upon a Hill" (from a sermon by John Winthrop) or "Errand into the Wilderness" (from a sermon by Samuel Danforth) have had a rich afterlife in the history of American political discourse. As William V. Spanos has argued, the concept of the wilderness, or the frontier, played an integral part to the Puritans' conception of their destiny and subsequently to the way America has thought of itself:

> The Puritans' […] urgent awareness of the need for a perpetual frontier between wilderness and civilization—the unending violent struggle it entails with a (usually defeatable) "enemy" who always threatens the "fulfillment" of the errand—that was the essential means by which their civilization would be, unlike an Old World that had run out of frontiers, always already rejuvenated, that is, would always remain an exceptional New World (197, Emphasis in original).

The frontier represents America's encounter with its Others, but in the discourses of

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[3] As Pease writes: "The fantasy dimension of the discourse is evidenced by the fact that U.S. citizens could express their belief that America was exceptional even though they harbored very different accounts of what that belief meant. American exceptionalism has been taken to mean that America is "distinctive" (meaning merely different), or "exemplary" (meaning a model for other nations to follow), or that it is "Exempt" from the laws of historical progress (meaning that it is an "exception" to the laws and rules governing the development of other nations)" (8-9).

American exceptionalism this encounter is often represented as the meeting between American settlers and the uncivilized nature which they must conquer, thus repressing the actual global encounter taking place within a purely nationalist and imperialist narrative structure.

After the Puritans, the most influential theoretization of the American frontier, was by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his lecture "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," originally given as a talk at the 1893 Columbian World Exhibition in Chicago and later published as an essay as part of the collection *The Frontier in American History*.[4] In his essay, Turner writes: "Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." (1)

Turner argues that the continual encounter with the frontier has forced settlers to adapt to nature and shed the traces of European civilization ("the wilderness masters the colonist." [2]), creating more independent individuals and, in turn, a more democratic nation: ("the frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy."[30]). This struggle with nature can, to a present-day reader, seem like a euphemism for the genocide of Native Americans, an incident that does not even get a footnote in Turner's essay. The period of this struggle, however, as Turner argues, is now over; the North American continent is fully conquered; the frontier, as it was previously understood, has ceased to exist.

Turner's essay—though it is more descriptive than proscriptive—was taken as a call to

[4] More recently, Richard Slotkin trilogy of books on the idea of the frontier in American History *Regeneration Through Violence, The Fatal Environment,* and *Gunfighter Nation* have updated and problematized Turner's thesis.

search for new frontiers: to keep the frontier perpetual, to use Spanos' terms.[5] According to Turner, America's founding moment is not something that happened once and for all at some point in the past, but rather something that took place continuously (at least while the frontier still existed) in a frontier space where settlers were confronted with a more primitive, and thus in Turner's progressionist view, earlier world: "A nation is being 'born in a day'".[6] Turner's representation of westward expansion also allows him to implicitly connect the United States to what George Berkeley called "the westward course of empire," the notion, that civilization is moving westward, from Troy to Rome, from Rome to Britain, from Britain to America—and, with Turner, from Eastern America westward (Cf. Quint 24). As the frontier moved westward, it symbolically conquered the globe.

Most of the works that I read in this study engage in one way or another with the American exceptionalism and the frontier, circumventing and deconstructing these discourses in order to project a more inclusive vision of a global America. They do so by summoning up and representing new and emergent totalizations of a global space of which America is only one part, the prime mover in space, the lone cowboy in the empty desert. In order to see how these totalizations are formed, we have to take a closer look at the genre that has since the time of Homer been associated with the representation of large totalities: the epic.

Global American Epics

While the recent turn toward the global in literary and cultural studies has taught us to look beyond the contexts of national, the hemispheric, and the lingering effects of colonialism

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[5] Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation*, the third book in his trilogy, is to a large extent a history of this search, from Teddy Roosevelt's colonial adventures in Cuba and the Philippines through the two world wars, John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier" of the sixties to Ronald Reagan's employment of the frontier myth to justify the invasion of Latin American countries and the pivot to finance capitalism.

[6] As Turner quotes the preacher Dr. Lyman Beecher (35)

(while never forgetting or jettisoning these frameworks), the relation between aesthetics and the emergent planetary space remains largely unexplored. Even in the most elucidative studies of the global, culture often takes a back-seat to other domains in accounting for the history of globalization and of the rise and decline of global American hegemony—as if all culture can do is reflect and at most help to explain other, more important aspects of human endeavor. Global literary studies could and should do more than simply note how world literature thematizes new political, economic, or historical developments, a move that suggests that these developments determine literary production. This study argues that aesthetic and literary modes of inquiry crucially contribute to our understanding of the process by which the world has come to appear as a singular, global totality.

More than any other literary genre, it is the epic that has been associated with the complete representation of a people, a nation, a culture, or a world. As Hegel said in his *Lectures on Fine Arts*, summing up the consensus on the genre since Aristotle, the epic "acquires as its object the occurrence of an action which in the whole breadth of its circumstances and relations must gain access to our contemplation as a rich event connected with the total world of a nation and epoch" (1044). Most of the works that I read in this study are in some way related to the history of the epic and reading them as epics allow us not only to make new sense of texts that have confounded our conventional generic categorizations, but also to come to terms with the changes in the world system during the last fifty years.

In "The Law of Genre," Jacques Derrida defines how genre functions, describing a law that simultaneously limits and engenders literature:

> [A]s soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity. […] The clause or floodgate of genre declasses what it allows to be classed. It tolls the knell of

> genealogy or of genericity, which it however also brings forth to the light of day. Putting to death the very thing that it engenders, it cuts a strange figure: a formless form, it remains nearly invisible, it neither sees the day nor brings itself to light (57-65).

This law applies particularly well to the epic, the history of which is one long struggle between prohibitions and transgressions. Every new epic functions as a challenge to older definitions of the genre. Arguably, this dynamic started with Aristotle's discussion of the genre in his *Poetics*.[7] In his work, Aristotle inaugurated a conceptual pas-de-deux between tragedy and epic—allowing the two genres define and delimit each other—that would continue until our day. Aristotle defines epic poems through their unified representation of a totality.[8] This definition has come to be known as the unity of action, a term that like the three of the dramatic unities, never appears in Aristotle's text, but rather was invented by Renaissance commentators on the Poetics.[9]

The account of the effects of a single incident (such as the rage of Achilles) through a representation all of its consequences as a unified totality became one of the defining characteristics of the genre after Aristotle, along with the use of hexameter, epic catalogues, the inclusion of a katabasis (or descent into the underworld) and of a pantheon of gods, the mention of the founding of an empire, the start in medias res, an ekphrasis of a work of visual art, and so on.[10] Few epics contain all these characteristics (in fact, probably only one, Virgil's *Aeneid*, really contains them all), so we would do well to see these traits not as essential parts of

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[7] Plato, of course, also discusses the epic, most notably in the two dialogues *Ion* and *The Republic*. As he is generally dismissive of the genre and of mimetic art in general, Platonic poetics have had very little impact on the practice and theory of the epic, unlike Aristotle's Poetics.

[8] Specifically, Aristotle writes: "As for the art of imitation in narrative verse, it is clear that the plots ought (as in tragedy) to be constructed dramatically; that is, they should be concerned with a unified action, whole and complete, possessing a beginning, middle parts and an end, so that (like a living organism) the unified whole can effect its characteristic pleasure" (59a).

[9] For a discussion of the unity of action, see Johns-Putra 36-38.

[10] For a list of characteristics associated with the epic, see for instance Gregory, Newman, and Meyers' entry on the epic in the newest edition of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

the genre but rather as a list of Wittgensteinian family resemblances (Wittgenstein 32): in other words, each one of these characteristics is shared by some but not all epics. Every new epic break some of these rules while adhering to others.

The history of the epic is full of greatly exaggerated rumors of the genre's death. The most influential example of this is probably Hegel's statement from his *Lectures on Fine Art*, posthumously published in 1835, that the modern world could no longer accommodate the epic.[11] With this assertion, Hegel joined a growing consensus of theorists and writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries asserting that the culture of modernity, with its simultaneous emphasis on individual psychology and larger geographical contexts, precluded the writing of epics, the genre most associated with a stable, homophonic, and centripetal expression of a culture. The totality of the modern world was simply too big, too complex, and too chaotic to be represented as any kind of unified whole. In the twentieth century, literary theorists like Georg Lukacs and Mikhail Bakhtin, each in their own way, developed this Hegelian notion. Lukacs used Hegel's description of the epic as the foundation for a new social totality, hoping to replace what he saw as the novel's "transcendental homelessness" with an epic, utopian Marxist social totality in which the world was exactly as harmoniously ordered as in the poems of Homer.[12] Bakhtin, on the other hand, in his essay "Epic and Novel," viewed the epic as an antiquated, authoritarian, and conservative genre, as opposed to the more democratic novel (13-20). Despite their differences, both Lukacs and Bakhtin agreed that the time of the epic had currently passed.

However, as Peter Sloterdijk argues, if modernity leads to the end of discreet and representable totalities, it is because with the rise of the capitalist world-system, the whole

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[11] Specifically, Hegel said that "the whole state of the world today has assumed a form diametrically opposed in its prosaic organization to the requirements which we found irremissible for genuine epic" (1109).

[12] See Lukacs 56-71. For the relation between Lukacs's conception of the epic in *Theory of the Novel* and his concept of social totality in *History and Class Consciousness*, see Jay 81-128.

globe itself becomes the one true totality, the single horizon of meaning for any action. In other words, globalization made the earth into what Aristotle would call a unified whole. Moreover, contrary to Hegel's implication, the aspiration to write Virgilian epics was still prevalent throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[13] Alongside these more traditional epic poems, however, a modern metamorphosis of the genre emerged. Poems, novels, operas, and later films began to borrow tropes and characteristics from the classical epics in the hope of achieving a more totalizing form. From Melville's *Moby-Dick* to Joyce's *Ulysses*, from Wordsworth's *Prelude* to Pound's *Cantos*, and from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to John Ford's *The Searchers*, epic works of art are all over modernity.

Discussing these epics, Franco Moretti, in his *Modern Epic,* argues that the stress of modernity changed not only the literary and aesthetic form of the epic but also the represented cultural totalities from nations to a new global space. What these new global epics share, Moretti argues, is an aspiration to represent a larger space than the nation-state and, in general, a precedence of space over time that is often, but not always, represented by the figure of the digression: " The interruption to the narrative is here part and parcel of a geographical extension. History becomes slower and the world wider" (47).

Naturally, the aspiration to write totalizing epics does not in itself eliminate the challenges of representing the modern globe, which—as Hegel was right to point out—ostensibly appears to be too large and complex to be contained within a single work of art. Not until the second half of the twentieth century, I argue, do modern epics turn from a national (or narrowly transnational) space and achieve a truly global scope. The new global epics grapple with the geopolitical, economic, and spatial conditions of our present age and with America's dominant place in the contemporary world-system by combining classical

[13] As an example of this trend, see for example Herbert Tucker's *Epic*, about epic poems in nineteenth-century in Britain.

tropes with formal innovations in their epic pursuit of new aesthetic strategies for representing a totalized world of ever-increasing complexity.[14] Though the rise of these global and yet also American epics has often gone unnoticed, I argue that for the last two centuries and especially since the end of World War II, this mode has been the primary site for understanding the displacements and dynamics of a global America, making the connections between America and the world visible.

Not a Pronvincial in Truth: Melville's *Moby-Dick*

Why, then, begin with Melville's *Moby-Dick*? Because more than most other literary texts, Melville's magnum opus incarnates the dynamic that this study traces, and its reception history evinces how a hegemonic American exceptionalist discourse can obscure a work's global relations. *Moby-Dick*, more than most other novels in world literature, has functioned as an "oracle" in the sense that Nietzsche uses the term (in the above quote): as a building block from the past that the architects of the future use to build a new present. As the de facto center of the American canon, Melville's novel has been read as prophetic for most of the twentieth century.[15] That was not always the case. In fact, as is well known, *Moby-Dick* along with Melville's other novels, stories, and poems were largely overlooked by readers until a new generation of critics starting in the 1920s began the work of reinterpreting Melville's novel as

[14] My conception of the new global epic coincides on several points with those of recent treatments of the genre by Wai-Chee Dimock and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, both approaches, in turn, inspired by the theoretical writings of Édouard Glissant. In *Through Other Continents*, Dimock argues that the epic was always engaged in representing and staging encounters between different cultures, in a reinterpretation of Aristotle's writings on the epic from the *Poetics*, Derrida's concept of invagination from "The Law of Genre," and the writings of Glissant (73-82). In her article "World Systems and the Creole," Spivak engages with Dimock's argument and adds further nuances to the use of the three theorists. Although I find much to agree with in both writers' engagement with the epic and, as will become clear, also find Glissant's work indispensable in theorizing the new epics, my aim in this article is primarily to focus on the way the new global totalities come into view as aesthetic objects rather than how these totalities negotiate inclusions and encounters between different cultures.

[15] For more on *Moby-Dick's* place within the American canon, see Buell 358-64.

an allegory of American society and history.

In 1954, the literary critic Malcolm Cowley—who also played a major role in the American reception of William Faulkner—quipped in the introduction to his book *The Literary Situation* that,

> "[p]erhaps the principal creative work of the last three decades in this country has not been any novel or poem or drama of our time, not even Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga or Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or Hart Crane's *The Bridge*; perhaps it has been the critical rediscovery and reinterpretation of Melville's *Moby-Dick* and its promotion, step by step, to the position of National epic" (14-15).

Chief among the re-discoverers of *Moby-Dick* was F. O. Matthiessen who in his famous study *American Renaissance* from 1941 not only placed Melville on the map but also did more to influence the study of American literature than almost any other figure in the twentieth century. Matthiessen's influential reading of *Moby-Dick* saw Captain Ahab as an embodiment of authoritarian will and Ishmael as the incarnation of freedom.[16] This formed the basis for the reading of *Moby-Dick* as a prophetic allegory of the Cold War, according to which Ishmael represented the freedom of America and Ahab the totalitarian temptations of the Soviet Union. As Donald Pease has argued in his article "Moby Dick and the Cold War," this interpretive frame was for a long time hegemonic in the Gramscian sense (153) ensuring that no other alternative readings were possible (114).[17] For much of the twentieth century, *Moby-Dick* embodied American exceptionalism.

For a national epic, *Moby-Dick* cannot get away from the dry land of the national

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[16] "Melville created in Ahab's tragedy a fearful symbol of the self-enclosed individualism that, carried to its furthest extreme, brings disaster both upon itself and upon the group of which it is part." (459), see also 445-60 for more on Matthiessen's influence see Arac.

[17] I share Pease's view of the Cold War's hegemonic influence on the interpretation of American culture in the latter half of the twentieth century and although the Cold War forms important part of my argument (especially in chapters 1 and 2) it is not the only explanatory model for America's global role that I will employ.

territory it purportedly represents quickly enough. In "Loomings," the novel's opening chapter, Ishmael describes the suicidal ennui he feels on dry land:

> Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me (3).

Like its narrator—and the majority of New Yorkers, if we are to believe Ishmael—*Moby-Dick* as a novel is "fixed in ocean reveries" (4). In one sense, this is not paradoxical at all. There is a long tradition of reading Melville's novel as being part of a tradition of frontier narratives, the oceans of the world standing in for the terrestrial frontier line where the nation is continually and violently regenerated—thereby making the ocean the most American of spaces, very much part of the national imaginary, if not also in a strictly territorial sense.[18] And yet, however insightful these readings may be, the oceans on which the Pequod sails can never be incorporated into the nation in the same way as can the territories around the westward-moving frontier line. Despite America's growing domination of the world's seas in the 19th century, despite the year-long voyages of whalers like the Pequod, the oceans can never be a place of habitation for Americans or any other peoples, but rather remain

[18] See in particular Richard Slotkins reading of *Moby-Dick* (538-50) from *Regeneration Through Violence*.

stubbornly a space of transition—or more simply put: if America is a place, and the frontier a space in the process of turning into a place, then the oceans are and remain a space.[19] The oceans are also, as Peter Sloterdijk reminds us, the space of modernity par excellence:

> The offensive sting of early globalization knowledge lay in the Magellanic views of the true extensions of the oceans and their acknowledgment as the true world media. That the *oceans* are the carriers of global affairs, and thus the natural media of unrestricted capital flow, is the message of all messages in the period between Columbus, the hero of the maritime medium, and Lindberg, the pioneer of the age of the air medium. […] Only the sea offered a foundation for universal thoughts; the ocean alone could bestow the doctorate caps of the true Modern Age. Melville rightly let the same protagonist [Ishmael] declare: 'a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.' (43, emphasis in original).[20]

The ocean is associated with the free flow of capital, goods, and people, but also with the acquisition and circulation of knowledge. Ishmael ventures into this space and brings back his tales and his wisdom to the reader (as Melville had done himself). In this analogy, land becomes the solid ground of stable identities but limited knowledge, while the sea becomes the protean space of truth. It is significant, then, that Ishmael's melancholia is so specifically bound up with land, with national territory, and that his longing is for the ocean's space of free flows. It is, I would suggest, a critique of the limited perspective inherent in the terrestrial, national experience. Melville lets on as much later in the novel, when Ishmael muses on the encyclopedic "cetological" classifications and descriptions of the whale:

> So that when I shall hereafter detail to you all the specialities and concentrations of

[19] I take the distinction between space and place from Yi-Fu Taun's study *Space and Place*, in which he argues that place is defined by security, dwelling, habitation while space as that one travels through to get from one place to another, is defined by freedom and transition (3-7 and throughout).

[20] The quote from *Moby-Dick* is on page 122.

> potency everywhere lurking in this expansive monster; when I shall show you some of his more inconsiderable braining feats; I trust you will have renounced all ignorant incredulity, and be ready to abide by this; that though the Sperm Whale stove a passage through the Isthmus of Darien, and mixed the Atlantic with the Pacific, you would not elevate one hair of your eye-brow. For unless you own the whale, you are but a provincial and sentimentalist in Truth. But clear Truth is a thing for salamander giants only to encounter; how small the chances for the provincials then? What befell the weakling youth lifting the dread goddess's veil at Sais? (370)

No fact about the whale should be too surprising for the reader after Ishmael's thorough categorization of all the details that comprise it—even if the whale were to create its own Panama Canal (more than five decades before the real one was build) by pushing its way through the narrow Isthmus of Darien separating the Caribbean Sea from the Pacific in Central America. The whale is a figure for the ocean itself, vast and almost unknowable.[21]

To understand the whale—to "own" it in Ishmael's terms—is the same as being in possession of the truth. Truth, however, is not a simple thing or a straightforward collection of facts. Rather, as Melville shows with an allusion to Friedrich Schiller's poem "The Veiled Statue At Sais" ("Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais"), truth is terrifying and potentially insanity-inducing.[22] Clearly this is an allusion to Ahab's monomaniac pursuit of the whale, but it also resonates, as we shall see, with Pip's experience of being thrown overboard, as well as

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[21] Sloterdijk is on the same page when he notes that "Moby Dick's grandeur represents the eternal resistance of an unfathomable life to the calculus of hunters. His white simultaneously stands for the non-spheric, homogenous, unmarked space in which travelers will feel cheated of any feeling of intimacy, arrival or home. It is no coincidence that his color was reserved by cartogrpahers for *terra incognita*. […] Ahab's whale must wear this color, as it symbolizes an exteriority that is otherwise neither in need nor capable of manifestation" (14, emphasis in original).

[22] In Schiller's poem, a young man is told that the truth resides behind the veil of a statue in an Egyptian temple. He lifts the veil and evidently beholds the truth (the narrator, and thus the reader, does not know what he sees) but instead of being liberated the truth, whatever it is, robs him of all happiness for the rest of his life.

with Ishmael's desires to leave dry land for the sea.

It is significant, then, that Melville chooses to discuss this pursuit of truth in spatial terms. The truth is contrasted not with untruth but with provinciality, which implies that the truth is characterized by being the opposite of provincial—that is, by being global.[23] With this spatial metaphor for truth, Melville yokes together several levels of meaning. On one level, Ishmael is discussing the business of whaling: in order to "own" the whale—that is, kill it and take its oil—one must first "own" it—that is, understand it in its every detail. This practical method is mirrored on another level by Melville's (or Ishmael's) extremely detailed representation of the whale in the novel itself. The reader's experience is thus meant to mirror that of the whalers: only through understanding the whale in its immense totality will the reader "own" the whale—that is, grasp the significance of the novel *Moby-Dick or, The Whale*. As we have seen, to represent a totality in a literary form is one of the defining characteristics of the epic. However, whereas earlier epics were confined to a smaller—or provincial—geographical space, Melville here signals that the new kind of epic that he is in the process of inventing will have to go beyond conventional provinciality and become global. The critics arguing that *Moby-Dick* should be read as an epic at whom Malcolm Cowley poked fun at were not wrong to read the novel as an epic, but rather than a national—which is to say, provincial—epic, the novel should be read as the inauguration of the global American epic, a genre to which many of the works within the global American genealogy will conform, as we will see.

Moby-Dick, however, is also a global text in a more mundane way: namely through its description of the global implications of the whaling industry. Despite the relatively short-lived

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[23] There is a parallel in this, in Melville's theory of truth, in the ontology of Alain Badiou which I will discuss in the following chapters. Badiou also operates with a concept of truth that is on the far side of any representation because it is literally infinite.

lifespan of whaling for oil as a global practice in the nineteenth century, the industry is an exemplary way for Melville to examine the global connections, not all of them obvious, between an America that was growing into its own as a world power and the rest of the globe. As Charles Waugh writes,

> Melville was aware of the global interconnectedness of whaling to more things than any one could ever hope to count. The combined effect of all of these interconnections is that the world is a smaller, better-known place, and that the average person, while perhaps ignorant of the underground, rhizomatic way in which whaling has made this world and these multitudes a part of their life, nevertheless is a more globalized human being because of them (214).

More than any of these global connections of the whaling industry, it is the Pequod itself that gives us the best representation of this early stage of globalization. As Melville writes about the labor force on this floating factory: "As for the residue of the Pequod's company, be it said, that at the present day not one in two of the many thousand men before the mast employed in the American whale fishery, are American born, though pretty nearly all the officers are" (131). Indeed, throughout the novel Melville emphasizes the truly international composition of the Pequod labor-force, which besides American sailors includes Tahitian, Chinese, Lascar, African, French, English, Dutch, Portuguese, Icelandic, Irish, Maltese, Sicilian, Azorean, and Danish sailors. One of the only critics to note this diversity was C.L.R. James, who in his groundbreaking (and yet for a long time overlooked) study *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways,* written and published in 1953 (as James awaited his deportation in a cell on Ellis Island) described *Moby-Dick* as,

> the grandest conception that has ever been made to see the modern world, our world, as it was, and the future that lay before it. […] The three American officers represent

> the most competent technological knowledge, brains and leadership. The harpooners and the crew are the ordinary people of the whole world. The writer of this book confesses frankly that it is only since the end of World War II, that the emergence of the people of the Far East and of Africa into the daily headlines, the spread of Russian totalitarianism, the emergence of America as a power in every quarter of the globe, it is only this that has enabled him to see the range, the power and the boldness of Melville and the certainty with which he wrote down what he intended to do. In this no writer, anywhere at any time, has ever surpassed him (19).

Making a case for a prophetic Melville—but a very different one from that of the Cold-War Americanists—James was the first to note that *Moby-Dick* was a global text, the full impact of which could not be felt until the onset of what would later be called globalization after the end of the Second World War.

As James notes, the globe in *Moby-Dick* is refracted through America. Melville is not simply presenting a vision of a mystical, Utopian truth likened to, and dependent upon, the definitive mapping and integration of the globe. Rather, he shows that the process by which every point of the world is incorporated into a global network of goods, people, and ideas is intimately connected with the battle for influence between the different nation states and in particular those concerning the United States, the country that became the dominant superpower as the process of globalization took hold. As the rest of this study will show, America is a part of the global in a way no other nation is: it is impossible to discuss or imagine the integrated global space of the twentieth and twenty-first century without including America's role.

Noticing perhaps the connection between *Moby-Dick* and Badiou's ontology (as mentioned above) while simultaneously being indebted to James's reading of the novel,

Donald Pease in his article "Pip, Moby-Dick, Melville's Governmentality" reads Melville's novel as a truth-event that presents the global scope of America's rise to the world for the first time.[24] However, I argue, *Moby-Dick* that is not simply an account and a prophesy of a growing American empire, though it is also that, but also of another kind of global community: one that is bound up with America's rise to global dominance while not defined by its logic of domination and hegemony—but rather by a more egalitarian totality. This other global Americanism, closer to Badiou's notion of truth (as well as Melville's in the passage quoted above) evinces itself in Melville's discussion of Pip, the African-American cabin boy who after falling in the water and being left for dead is rescued. Although he is unharmed, the experience permanently changes Pip:

> The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad (453).

Like the young man at Sais in Schiller's poem, Pip has seen the truth, the global totality of creation, and he is forever changed by it. Occupying the true oceanic perspective which

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[24] Pease writes: "Read as a catastrophically exemplary event, Moby-Dick opens a vista in which a total event becomes retrospectively and prospectively visible—the inauguration of a finance-driven regime of US global hegemony that began with the commercial imperialism of the nineteenth century and mutated into debt imperialism at the outset of the twenty-first.. Dominated at both ends by the stocks, bonds, and other financial instruments of speculative capital, US global capitalist modernity circulated through an archipelago of circum-oceanic port cities and was facilitated by white settler colonialism, market revolutions, the slave system, the massive collateralizing of networks of finance, goods, and the inauguration of a transnational state of exception" (329).

Ishmael initially longs for but without the terrestrial urge to "own" either the whale or the ocean that Ahab evinces and which corresponds to perspective and methods of the American empire, Pip can perhaps be said to represent the liminal value toward which all representations of the infinite global space tends—though we cannot be sure since we, as was the case in Schiller's poem, cannot fully access his experience.[25] With Pip, Melville has given us a figure representing a non-imperial global America: impossible without the industrial, financial, military, and political machinations of the United States on the global stage and yet not part of that American empire—indeed, Pip as an African-American cabin-boy from Alabama on an American whaling ship before the Civil War who is left for dead in the ocean feels the full force of America's imperial power on his own body more than any other character on or off the Pequod in Melville's novel. Yet it is to him that Melville grants the mystical access to the unprovincial global truth which the novel has been pursuing since its beginning, with as much zeal as Ahab pursues the white whale. Pip is the early embodiment of the global American genealogy that this study traces through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

A Commonwealth of Voices: William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

As a novel that literally takes its reader more than halfway around the globe, and the cast of which includes people from all over the world, it is not surprising that I as well as others view *Moby-Dick* as an early meditation on America's global presence. By contrast, the inclusion of William Faulkner into my global American canon might seem like a less obvious choice. What does Faulkner, probably the most famous regionalist of twentieth-century American letters, the quintessential Southern writer, have to tell us about globalization and America's place in the world? Quite a lot, as it turns out. Not only is Faulkner keenly aware of the growing

[25] Pease reads Pip differently, though arguably not incompatibly with my reading, as the "complete witness" (335) of America's global truth-event.

American empire of his own time, as I will show, he is also deeply interested in the dialogic possibilities of cross-cultural and international literary encounters. Yoknapatawpha, the small county in Mississippi which Faulkner invented and populated, became the model for other literary worlds all across the globe. From Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Macondo to Kateb Yacine's Algeria, Faulkner's particular attention to local detail inspired other authors to make their places of origin part of world literature.[26]

In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,* the act of narration itself takes center stage.[27] The novel tells the story of the rise and fall of the ruthless planter Thomas Sutpen and his dynasty and of the murder mystery at the center of this story: why did Thomas Sutpen's son Henry kill his sister's fiancé Charles Bon? Nearly every single one of the characters in the novel's frame narrative tries to recount and make sense of this story and solve the murder mystery. However, most of these attempts founder, as if the task of narrating the story of a single life and the region everybody agrees it somehow represents is simply not possible.[28] This search for an origin that can explain all of society, places *Absalom, Absalom!* and Faulkner's work as a whole, in the category of the epic—but it is an exploded epic, where the foundation, more often than not, is missing.[29]

It is in the midst of this early twentieth-century South of failed narration and arrested development that the protagonist Quentin Compson comes of age, as Faulkner's narrator informs us at the outset of the novel:

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[26] For more on Faulkner's international influence, see Casanova 336-45.

[27] For a thourough structural (and structuralistic) analysis of the narratology of *Absalom, Absalom!*, see Brooks 286-312.

[28] As Glissant writes in Faulkner, Mississippi, "his works tend to return to a hidden source and find a secret there (the impossibility of establishing a foundation), which from that point on determines everything—without anyone's realizing it" (112).

[29] Glissant discusses Faulkner as an epic writer throughout *Faulkner, Mississippi* (as well as his other books): "The epic may be literal or artificial, concerned with appearances or the look of things (as with Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind), or it may be erratic and disturbed, toucing on veiled or buried questions, as in the work of Faulkner" (18).

> Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them; his very body an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness, looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence." (7)

This is the language of psychological trauma expanded to a societal and historical scale. The whole county remains in the grip of a compulsion to repeat and make some kind of sense out of the trauma of the past. But Faulkner's language moves beyond the commonplaces of personal or regional development: the South does not simply need to accept its loss and move on; rather the South's historical trauma has far larger political and even metaphysical implications. Quentin feels like a commonwealth, as if he is inhabited by generations of vanquished, yet slowly recovering ghosts. These phrases point to a theme that Faulkner returns to time and again throughout *Absalom, Absalom!*: The superimposition of characters and places on top of each other.

Of all the narrators, Quentin himself comes closest to solving the murder mystery—but he does not accomplish this task alone. In a cold dorm room by the Harvard quad Quentin and his Canadian roommate Shreve McCannon come up with an answer to why Henry Sutpen shot his sister's fiancé: namely that Charles Bon was the son of Thomas Sutpen's first marriage to a partly black Haitian woman. Thus, Henry Sutpen killed his own half-black brother in order to protect the racial purity of their sister, and of the Sutpen

dynasty—the threat of miscegenation being much worse, as they see it, than that of incest.

This solution, however, does not represent any kind of emotional breakthrough for Quentin, who six months after the events of *Absalom, Absalom!* will take his own life by throwing himself into the Charles River, as told in Faulkner's previous novel, *The Sound and the Fury*. Neither does the untying of the Gordian Knot of Thomas Sutpen's life bring any kind of closure to Yoknapatawpha County, or the South as a whole; they remain intractably stuck in the condition that Faulkner in the passage quoted above calls the freedom of impotence.

In order to unpack this enigmatic phrase we will need to look more closely at the political situation in which the South found itself in the first decade of the twentieth century as well as in the 1930s when Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!*—and look at how the seemingly secluded County of Yoknapatawpha comes into relation with not just the North and the rest of the nation but with a global space from which it was never wholly divorced. This relation is ever present, if always partially hidden, throughout the novel and provides more than a few clues to the continued relevance of *Absalom, Absalom!* in today's globalized world.

At the outset of the novel, Quentin is invited to come to the house of Miss Rosa Coldfield, a local spinster who was Thomas Sutpen's sister-in-law and briefly his fiancée. Miss Rosa wants to relate everything she knows about the Sutpen dynasty to Quentin and she proceeds to do so—an event which sets in motion the major plot of the novel. Before starting her tale, however, Miss Rosa muses on why she has summoned Quentin all these years after the fall of the Sutpen dynasty and the death of Sutpen himself:

> Because you are going away to attend college at Harvard they tell me," she said. "So I dont imagine you will ever come back here and settle down as a country lawyer in a little town like Jefferson since Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man. So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so

> many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines. Perhaps you will even remember kindly then the old woman who made you spend a whole afternoon sitting indoors and listening while she talked about people and events you were fortunate enough to escape yourself when you wanted to be out among your friends of your own age." (Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 5)

Although as Quentin will discover, this is hardly the only reason Miss Rosa has for relating her version of the events surrounding the life and times of Thomas Sutpen, this initial attempt at a definition of the motivating force behind all the story-telling that makes up *Absalom, Absalom!* manages to encapsulate some of the central political and spatial concerns that in my reading constitute one of the major themes of Faulkner's novel and his work as a whole. According to Miss Rosa, there is nothing to do for a Harvard-educated man in the South: "Northern people" have already seen to that. This relationship between a wealthy center and a wholly subdued poor peripheral region closely resembles that between a metropolis and a colony. Of course, the idea that the Postbellum South is in a colonial relationship with the industrial and financial North is not an original one, but where Miss Rosa's analysis (if we can call it that) differs from most others is in her keen awareness of the marketability of the one resource that the South seems to have left, the one activity that defines its entire existence: its storytelling. In what may be a sly reference to Faulkner's own practice of selling short stories to literary magazines to keep up his (and his wife's) lifestyle, Miss Rosa graciously lends Quentin her unrealized capital. Like any other colonial raw material, Miss Rosa implies, the story she is telling can only be valorized by being circulated through the metropolitan center.

Miss Rosa is herself not just a storyteller but the unofficial "poet laureate" of Jefferson. She has been writing poems since she began writing laudatory odes to the Confederate troops during the Civil War. Telling her story to Quentin, even if she does not herself reap any monetary rewards, can also be viewed as her circuitous attempt to gain access to a larger national and perhaps even global literary market. But why does this market exist at all? If the North does indeed control the South to the degree that Miss Rosa seems to think, why does the literary profession remain not just one of several options open to educated Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen but the one option that will allow a Southern family to live comfortably? The answer to this question, I want to suggest, has more than a little to do with the freedom of impotence that characterizes the South's structural position.

When Quentin does travel North, he finds that Miss Rosa's prediction holds: Northerners display an almost insatiable curiosity about the South. As Shreve excitedly encourages Quentin to tell his stories we can hear in Shreve's breathless questions the sense of wonder that, as earlier accounts of colonial marvels evince, is a reliable representative of economic demand: "Tell about the South. What is it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all." (142) and "Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it. No wonder you have to come away now and then, isn't it" (176). Shreve's reaction is historically accurate. The first half of the twentieth century saw a boom in interest in the American South not just in the rest of the country but all over the world. The same year as *Absalom, Absalom!* was published saw the publication of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind,* which sold 1.7 million copies within its first year and in 1939 became one of the first Technicolor feature films and which remains one of Hollywood's largest global box-office hits.

Faulkner's own literary career, though less lucrative than Mitchell's, represents another

example of this trend. Indeed, Faulkner global success preceded his national fame. It was not until French literary critics and writers "discovered" Faulkner that the American reading public started paying attention to him—by then read and emulated all over the world, a development that culminated in 1949 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in Stockholm.

As Shreve's quote above makes clear, the South—in the minds of people not from there—is shrouded in an air of unreality. As a vanquished civilization that inexplicably continues to endure, the South is a specter of the past that continues to haunt the rest of the world. Shreve also suggests that the South itself is, or can only be conceived as, an aesthetic object such as a motion picture or a dramatic play. Indeed, it is arguably by treating the story of Thomas Sutpen as a detached aesthetic object geographically and emotionally removed from the scene of the crime that Shreve and Quentin come up with the solution to the mystery of why Henry shot Bon.

However, I argue, the South is more than just another lost empire. There is more to the story of Thomas Sutpen than a Gothic ghost story easily exploitable for monetary gain. There is no doubt that Miss Rosa wants the story to be told in the North not just so that Quentin might be able to buy his future wife a dress but also in order to tell the people in the North something of which they are not aware. Faulkner is not nostalgic for the antebellum period of slavery and plantations—even if the same cannot be said for all of his characters. As Faulkner puts it, the South is paying the price for "having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage" (209). But this "moral brigandage" is not exclusive to the South. Since the 1970s, historians have begun to uncover the extent to which slave labor more than any other factor produced the wealth that allowed the colonies to become independent.[30] The lesson of the South originates not in its

[30] See for instance Morgan, 4-5 or Grandin, 7.

supposedly pastoral paternalism, which is to say, in its difference from the North, rather it comes from what Faulkner sees as the inescapable similarities between the South and the kind of empire the United States as a whole has grown into since the end of the Civil War.[31]

In Faulkner's novels, the South stands as an unwelcome reminder of the nation's colonial past. The plantation system of the Deep South arise out of a Caribbean context and that close relation makes it unpalatable for an American nationalist exceptionalism that prides itself on severing ties with its colonial origins and on emphasizing its insularity and difference from other nations, both the former imperial centers in Europe and the other postcolonial nations of the Western Hemisphere. Interestingly, as we shall see, the South's close relation with what we would today call the Global South, however visible it might be from the North or from the viewpoint of Faulkner's narrator, is nowhere more repressed than in Yoknapatawpha itself. The morbid curiosity with which Shreve and others view the South might then be explained as a fascination with the return of the nation's repressed colonial origins, in a detached aestheticized form. Moreover, this happens at the exact historical moment when the United States has itself begun annexing, occupying, and outright colonizing islands in the Caribbean from Cuba and Puerto Rico to the U.S. Virgin islands and Haiti.

This, more than anything else, seems to be Yoknapatawpha's lesson to the North: it is replicating the sins of the past as it expands into a global empire and the South—vanquished but not dead—is in a unique position to diagnose this development, having seen it all before. This is what constitutes the South's "impotent freedom"—both part and not part of the nation, it is in a sense outside of that imperial history, that rush to found and grow a dynasty, that Faulkner likens to a disease. Moreover, the South knows this disease intimately, having

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[31] In *Our South*, Jennifer Rae Greeson traces the North's staging of the South as different in kind from both the North and the nation as a whole, out of a "lurking fear that a Plantation South rife with tropical deviance could contaminate or overcome U.S. nationality" (74).

only recently awoken—again in Faulkner's metaphor—from the fever which cured it. More than anybody in all of Faulkner's novels, Thomas Sutpen represents this blind will to create an empire—this longing for history as Edouard Glissant calls it in *Carribean Discourse* (79)—and it is through him we must understand not only the South but America's rise to global dominance in all its Gothic horrors, from the annexation of the Philippines to Guantanamo Bay.

The most important event in Thomas Sutpen's life happens when he is fourteen years old. More than halfway into *Absalom, Absalom!* we finally hear Sutpen's own voice as he tells his own life story as he understands it—although, characteristically for Faulkner, it is mediated four times; Sutpen tells his friend General Compson, who tells his son, who in turn tells his son Quentin, who tells Shreve. Sutpen is born in 1807 in the mountains of what would later be called West Virginia into what Faulkner describes as an almost mythic egalitarian society based on barter and gift economy, and with little real private property or ownership of land, and no ethnic or racial boundaries. While he is still a child, however, Sutpen's family moves east to the Tidewater region of Virginia with its plantation economy in full flower. Here Sutpen's father starts working on a big plantation. The discrepancy between the two societies has a profound impact on the young boy:

> He had never even heard of, never imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them; he did not even imagine then that there was any such way to live or to want to live or that there existed all the objects to be wanted which there were, or that the ones who owned the objects not only could look down on the ones that didn't, but could be supported in the down-looking not only by the others who owned objects too but by the very ones that were looked down on that didn't own objects and knew they never would.

> Because where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say 'This is mine' was crazy; and as for objects, nobody had any more of them than you did because everybody had just what he was strong enough or energetic enough to take and keep, and only that crazy man would go to the trouble to take or even want more than he could eat or swap for powder and whiskey (179).

The disparity between these two societal systems—egalitarian West Virginia and the thoroughly hierarchized Eastern Virginia— comes to a head when Sutpen as a boy of fourteen goes to the front door of the plantation house with a message from his father. A house slave opens the door and tells Thomas Sutpen, before he has time to deliver the message, to go around the house to the back door, to never use the front door again. Sutpen's impoverished appearance marks him as belonging to a different class of people than the ones allowed to use the front door. To be told to use the back door—the door reserved for slaves in the antebellum South and the door African-Americans had to use in the Jim Crow-era South in which Faulkner was writing his novels—is an insult so grave to the young man that it defines the rest of his life. As Hortense Spillers and other have argued,[32] this event in a sense inscribes Sutpen as black himself in the hierarchies of race and class, and makes him realize that he and his family are at or near the bottom of the social pyramid. Sutpen comes up with the only plan he can think of to combat this system: to himself one day own a big plantation house and his own slaves.

Sutpen refers to this plan as his "design" and he does not deviate from it from that day and until the day he dies, despite all of the setbacks that befall him. He goes to the West Indies, having heard in school that that's where poor men could go to get rich. In Haiti, he starts

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[32] See Spillers 329-32. For a reading of race as performance in Faulkner see Duvall 106-8.

working on a plantation, somehow saves the owner's life during an insurrection, marries the daughter of the owner, has a son, and when he finds out that his wife is part black, divorces her and moves to Yoknapatawpha, Mississippi where he marries a local woman and proceeds to build the plantation dynasty he has been dreaming about his whole life. All through his life, Sutpen maintains, his problem is one of "innocence" : first, he does not know or understand the social system of which he is part, then he fails to anticipate that his wife might be part African, and so on. This innocence, or what we might less charitably call, obliviousness does indeed seem to be a determining factor in Sutpen's life, but not quite in the way he thinks it is.

When Sutpen goes to Haiti in the 1820s, more than two decades have passed since the revolution that not only made the former colony independent from France, but also outlawed slavery and ownership of land by whites. Previously, most readers who noticed this incongruity assumed that Faulkner had simply made a mistake, but more recently scholars have begun to argue that there is a great significance to Faulkner's choice of Haiti, the one place in the Caribbean where slavery had been outlawed. Historical sources tell us that by the time Sutpen came to Haiti, all the plantations were owned by light skinned Afro-Caribbeans and all the darker skinned laborers were barred from leaving the plantation on which they worked. It is possible, therefore, that Sutpen was simply not aware of the differences between the slave South from which he came, and the different plantation system of Haiti in the 1820s.[33]

When he discovers his mistake, Sutpen quickly takes action. As He tells Quentin's grandfather: "I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind, so I provided for her and put her aside" (194). But, as in the rest of the novel and in Faulkner's work more generally, the past is

[33] I rely here on John T. Matthews's groundbreaking reading of the role of Haiti in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

not dead, it's not even past, and one day in Mississippi on the eve of the Civil War Sutpen finds himself face to face with his partly black son Charles Bon, asking for his own sister's hand in marriage. To accept the miscegenation, even if no one else knew about it would invalidate the whole design and, according to Sutpen himself, "be a mockery and a betrayal of that little boy who approached that door fifty years ago and was turned away, for whose vindication the whole plan was conceived and carried forward" (220).

If the purpose of Sutpen's design is to right the wrong he felt that day at the front door of the plantation house, he cannot, according to his own twisted logic, admit even a drop of African blood into his family. The result of the original affront was to inscribe Sutpen as comparable to, or perhaps even lower than, a black slave and his whole life can be seen as an attempt to correct this judgment. It is an attempt, however, that is doomed to fail. Everywhere he goes, and no matter his level of success, Sutpen is forced to relive the indignity. In Haiti he is unknowingly surrounded by black people who perhaps think of him as one of their own—why would a white person barred from owning land come to Haiti? And when he first comes to Jefferson, as Miss Rosa relates the tale, he is seen as an outsider, lumped together in the local imagination with the supposedly wilder kind of slaves he brings with him. Forced to face the permeability of the color line and the instability of racial categories, his response is to attempt to re-essentialize race, as it were, with himself on the right side of the line. His impossible design is the same as that of Yoknapatawpha and of the South as a whole, a society built on white supremacy that simultaneously seeks to erase any trace of contribution from people of other races even as it exploits African race labor to establish and advance that society.

According to Faulkner, antebellum Yoknapatawpha is blind to the composite nature of its own culture, from the heterogeneity of cultures and ethnicities that make up the county

to the many relations with other parts of the country and with other places all over the Global South. That is why the choice between incest and miscegenation becomes the central interpretive crux in *Absalom, Absalom!*: it represents the larger schism facing society as a whole between atavistic desires and composite realities—between the dream of unblemished white supremacy and the reality of multiculture.[34] It is exactly because Yoknapatawpha County fails to achieve the status of a complete world unto itself that it evinces what Faulkner calls the freedom of impotence, through its failure to found a white dynasty, it uncovers the real, composite, indeed global, nature of the South, and that, in a nutshell, is the message Yoknapatawpha County passes on to the growing American empire.[35] It is not a message that a nation as recklessly determined to achieve a position of global dominance as Sutpen was in furthering his design, is likely to heed, however. When it comes to America as a whole, obscured global relations do not limit themselves to matters of race—although certainly white supremacy plays a major role in the history of the country—but also to an exceptionalism that would profess that the United States is completely different from other nations past and present, even as it merged into a global empire by annexing islands and nations all over the Caribbean and the Pacific in the early twentieth century.

The composite ideal that I claim *Absalom, Absalom!* embodies is nowhere better exemplified than in the cooperation between Quentin and Shreve which precipitates the solution to the decades old murder mystery of why Henry Sutpen killed Charles Bon. Only

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[34] For the distinction between atavistic and composite cultures, see Glissant 2000 114.

[35] Leigh Anne Duck makes the related point that Faulkner saw American neocolonialism in Haiti as an echo of Northern attitudes toward the South: "Unlike earlier European imperialists, the U.S. in the early twentieth century claimed the objective of preserving stability in occupied nations, but it sought more urgently to preserve its strategic interests in the hemisphere and to serve the needs of U.S. capital. This pattern was amply demonstrated by its 1915 occupation of Haiti, which elicited increasing protest in both countries over its nineteen-year duration. Faulkner may have been attentive to this occupation long before he began work on Absalom, Absalom!, because early U.S. representations of the Haitian occupation echoed paternalist images of the pre–Civil War U.S. South; further, the brutality of the occupation was often attributed to the purportedly disproportionate number of Marines—solely white at this time—from the racially segregated U.S. South" (30).

when the many narrative dialogues that make up the novel coalesce into a truly communal discourse, can the story be told. As Faulkner's narrator tells us immediately before Quentin and Shreve conceive of the solution to Sutpen's murder mystery:

> It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal (243).

Shreve and Quentin have become a commonwealth, not a lonely commonwealth as Quentin is initially described, but a commonwealth of different voices that belongs to everyone, a potentially communal literary discourse reminiscent of Sutpen's mythic childhood in which no divisions exist and in which no land or people were owned. With *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner hints at a utopian global literary community through which the truth about the South, the United States, and the World can be told.

Chapter 1. Placeless Epics: The Italian Spaghetti-Westerns

In the vignette film *Toby Dammit*[1] from 1969, Federico Fellini creates a brilliant and idiosyncratic parody of the Spaghetti Western and the discourse surrounding that genre.[2] The film starts as Toby, a British actor (Terrence Stamp) arrives in Rome to film a Spaghetti Western funded by the Catholic Church. The priest and the two directors lay out the project in an extended, almost breathless, and distinctly Felliniesque, discourse as they drive the actor from the airport towards the center of Rome:

> It's the first Catholic Western. Christ's return to the bleak, desolate prairie. And is this not the secret desire of all men? A new incarnation of Christ. Our Savior appearing this time in concrete, tangible form. Christ already lives in us, but to show him in a violently mundane context... It may seem a desperate gamble. Blasphemy, almost, I agree. But I know an artist such as you, whether a believer or not, will understand that structuralist cinema can recapture sublime poetry through primal images that are spare, eloquent in their poverty - syntagmatic, as my friend Roland Barthes would say. Something between Dreyer and Pasolini with just a hint of John Ford, of course. As long as it reflects the death throes and decay of our capitalist system... a Western can claim to be militant. That's what Lukacs says. We'll create historical characters sociologically contextualized. Thus, our two outlaws represent irresponsibility and anarchy. The busty girl is the illusory escape into the irrational. The prairie is beyond history and the bisons are man's struggle for subsistence. This film will be in color. Harsh colors,

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[1] The film was part of the French episodic film *Spirits of the Dead* in which three directors (Fellini, Louis Malle, and Roger Vadim) each adapts a story by Edgar Allan Poe, *Toby Dammit* is very loosely based on the tale "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."

[2] Although the term Spaghetti Western was coined in the United States as a derogatory term for the Italian Westerns, it quickly won recognition among fans, critics, and filmmakers. Most of the Italian directors (with Giulio Questi as a notable exception) approved of the term and used it themselves. I will therefore use the term throughout this dissertation.

> rough costumes to reconcile the holy landscape with the prairie. Sort of Piero della Francesca and Fred Zinneman...[3]

There is probably no better representation of the state of the Spaghetti Western at the height of its influence than this loquacious sales pitch. By the end of the sixties, the Spaghetti Western had become a hermeneutic frame for discussing current affairs, a genre that could ostensibly incorporate any contemporary issue, fashionable theory, and aesthetic allusion into its representations of windswept, placeless deserts. Everyone, even the Catholic Church, as Fellini sardonically suggests, wanted a piece.

In this chapter, I argue that the Spaghetti Westerns represent a privileged site from which to observe global American hegemony in the period after the Second World War as well as the beginning of the unraveling of that hegemony in the 1960s. As outsourced productions partly financed by American capital and made to fill a gap in the global market for Westerns, and as very real evidence of the cultural and economic American hegemony that prevailed around the world at least up until the middle of the sixties, these movies were not mindless copies of their American models; rather, they were complex cultural productions made by artists who knew the inner workings of the American film industry well and who wanted to contribute to a genre they had grown up with. This surprisingly resilient genre, always part homage and part critique, playing out in placeless deserts and towns on the American hegemonic frontier, can be read as the perfect barometer of changing sentiments towards America as the revolutions of the sixties restructured the global economic and political landscape into the contemporary globalized order.

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[3] As the rest of the film, Fellini's vignette is dubbed in French. I quote here from the English subtitles.

Machine Gun in a Coffin: Violence, the Western, and the Epic

For the first third of Sergio Corbucci's 1966 movie *Django,* the horseless and shabby protagonist (Franco Nero) drags a coffin behind him by a rope.[4] As he makes his way through the rain-swept landscapes of the credit sequence and the muddy streets of a nameless town into a decrepit saloon, the eponymous hero hauls the coffin, like a horse with a carriage, letting go of the reins only once, in a showdown by a bridge outside of town where he frees a woman and shoots her capturers. The coffin, almost more than the man dragging it, is the central character of the first part of the movie. Several shots begin or end with a close-up of it as it slides along the muddy streets or sits on the floor in the middle of a barroom.[5] Almost all of the characters Django meets ask him about it: the men at the bridge (before they are shot), the bartender, Nathaniel, the prostitutes at the saloon, and Major Jackson (a Ku Klux Klan-affiliated officer and one of the movie's main villains). Django himself continually refers to the casket, but without shedding any light on its contents. When a prostitute asks him if someone is inside it, Django answers "Someone by the name of Django," suggesting that he is the ghost of the body inside— or at least that the coffin contains the key to understanding his character.[6]

The town is torn between two warring factions, Major Jackson's men and a Mexican gang, who have reduced the town to a barren and desolate war zone. As several short,

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[4] Throughout this chapter I will refer to the Spaghetti Westerns by their English title and quote the English dialog, unless there is a significant difference between the English and the Italian. As will become clear, the Italian Westerns were from the beginning a hybrid, international genre. Many of the actors only spoke English and the script was written in (at least) two languages. Apart from the fact that most Spaghetti Westerns use very little dialog—their resemblance to silent movies one of the possible explanations of their international success—it would thus not make sense to speak of an original language and a translation. For the Italian titles of the films, see the filmography.

[5] There is a possible parallel here to Queequeg in *Moby-Dick* who also carries around his own coffin everywhere he goes.

[6] Although this is not the case in *Django*, several later Spaghetti Westerns—most notably Sergio Carrone's 1969 film *Django the Bastard (Django, il Bastardo),* which despite its title is not directly related to Corbucci's movie—have main characters that turn out to be ghosts. This was later emulated by Clint Eastwood in his two US-produced Westerns: *High Plains Drifter* (1973) and *Pale Rider* (1985).

expository dialogs outline the background of the movie's plot, it becomes increasingly clear that the motivational key to the protagonist's character and the film's violence is to be found inside the closed casket. The almost compulsive iterations of the importance of the inanimate object, by the townspeople as well as by the cinematography and editing of the movie, raises the level of suspense for the moment when the coffin will finally be opened and its secret revealed. However, when Django finally lifts the lid off the casket, what emerges, rather than an explanation or an excuse for the actions that have already taken place, is simply more violence. Hiding behind a tree trunk while Major Jackson and forty of his men close in on him, Django carefully opens the lid of the coffin and takes out a machine gun with which he then shoots all of his assailants, saving only Major Jackson.

Django influenced countless Spaghetti Westerns as well as many American, European, and Global South films. The name "Django" features in at least a dozen other Italian Westerns between 1965 and 1975, whether the movies in question purport to be unofficial sequels or prequels or the moniker was simply tacked on to a film in the hope of making it more attractive to investors or the public.[7] (This was the case with Giulio Questi's 1967 Spaghetti Western originally known as *Sei si Viro, Sparo,* where the distributors, against the expressed wishes of the director, simply changed the name of the movie from Questi's original title—meaning "If you live, shoot"—to *Django, Kill* for the international market. Django's name was a reference to the French jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt, who after he injured his hand had to come up with a new style of playing. Corbucci's Django has his hands crushed toward the end of the movie but still manages to shoot the villains. The title can arguably also be understood as a wry reference to Reinhardt's prowess, a European outplaying his American counterparts, beating them at their own game despite a handicap, as it were, just as Corbucci hoped to do with his

[7] No official sequels were made to Corbucci's film. However, as will become clear, Italian studios allowed for a lot of borrowing of names, characters, and plotlines between different films.

Western. Although Corbucci's *Django* had been a big success in Italy, Spain, and Germany, it was banned outright in Great Britain because of its excessive violence, and failed to find a distributor in the US. The strategy to rename other Spaghetti Westerns was after *Django* consequently also a ploy to trick the English and American public into believing they were about to watch Corbucci's banned film—the violent reputation of which preceded the movie itself.

There can be little doubt that it was the violence, more than anything else, and in particular the machine gun massacre that attracted audiences and filmmakers around the world to *Django*. The film's other infamously violent scene, in which a member of a Mexican gang cuts off a preacher's ear, had a cinematic afterlife almost as prolific: Quentin Tarantino's shot-by-shot recreation in *Reservoir Dogs* is perhaps the best example. Of course, Tarantino eventually remade Corbucci's movie with his own *Django, Unchained* (2013) set in the antebellum-era Deep South. In Perry Henzell's Jamaican movie *The Harder They Come* from 1972, one of the first things that the protagonist Ivan (played by Jimmy Cliff) does after arriving to Kingston from the countryside is to ask a local, "What's showing at Rialto?" The answer, as it turns out, is *Django*, and Henzell's film proceeds to show the whole scene with Django and his hidden machine gun, crosscutting between the screen and the poor, black audience cheering Django on as he guns down Major Jackson's racist army—an act of violence that foreshadows *The Harder They Come's* own violent, grand finale.

It was in other Spaghetti Westerns, however, that the scene's most powerful and immediate influence was felt. The machine gun shootout became a staple of the genre.[8] Despite this, Spaghetti Western scholarship, to the extent that it mentions *Django* and the machine-gun scene at all, has tended to see Corbucci's use of the coffin as something like a

[8] The examples are too numerous to list but the final scene of Ferdinando Baldi's *Django, Prepare a Coffin* with Terrence Hill or Corbucci's own *The Mercenay* with Franco Nero might serve as examples.

joke or as a simple way to propel the plot forward.[9]

In order to see the significance of this scene, we will have to look more closely at the ways in which *Django* differs from its American models—and how this difference relates to the question of the American frontier as theorized by Frederick Jackson Turner.

As Slotkin shows, Turner's thesis forms the conceptual basis for the genre of Western movies, the epics of American national origins. Indeed, Turner's essay reads almost like such an epic itself. If one way to understand the epic is as a genre that perpetuates a national culture through a representation of a founding myth, then we can understand Turner's Frontier Thesis as an epic, though with the important difference that Turner claims to describe a process that is actually taking place rather than a fictionalized representation of the past. Turner effectively finds a "spatial fix"—as David Harvey would later call it (284-311)—for the epic, he changes the dimension in which the founding moment takes place from time to space; no longer is the origin a point receding into the past, as it was for Vergil, rather it is point, or more specifically a line, the frontier, moving ever westward.

Turner might have sensed that the national epic he was theorizing also had a dark side. In the published version of his lecture, he has added a long footnote to a sentence dealing with the economy of the frontier that deserves to be quoted at length:

> I have refrained from dwelling on the lawless characteristics of the frontier, because they are sufficiently well known. The gambler and desperado, the regulators of the Carolinas and the vigilantes of California, are types that line the scum that the waves advancing civilization bore before them, and of the growth of spontaneous organs of authority where legal authority was absent. […] The humor, bravery, and rude

[9] See in particular Eleftheoriotis 123-24.

> strength, as well as the vices of the frontier in its worst aspect, have left traces on American character, language, and literature, not soon to be effaced. (32-33)

It is curious that Turner chooses to relegate this observation to a footnote that was not part of the original address. If the struggle with nature happening along the frontier line performs a purging rejuvenation of a decadent civilization through an encounter with a more natural world, there is no reason why the realm of law should be exempt from this rejuvenation. Why would the "spontaneous organs of authority" that Turner mentions not have the same purging effects on the civilized laws of the "legal authority" as the encounter with the frontier has on civilization more generally? By Turner's own logic, nature rejuvenates civilization exactly because it is not part of society, but because it is lawless. Yet Turner conflates "the growth of spontaneous organs of authority" with the "scum" of gamblers and desperadoes supposedly borne westward by the wave of civilization. The crime of the frontier is at the same time Eastern degeneracy borne forward by the wave and left as scum along the shore and a spontaneous product of the frontier space. That this conflation should happen in a footnote and only after Turner has assured the reader that it is not worth mentioning because it is already well known has all the characteristics of a repression. The spontaneous, extra-legal justice that Turner is evoking is an integral part of most American Westerns. The hero of the Western inhabits the frontier between nature and civilization and he protects and advances the community by resorting to violent actions that would not always be acceptable by the legal standards back east, but are nevertheless justified through an evocation of a higher, more natural sense of justice. Turner, however influential his essay is for the Western genre and the myth of the frontier in the twentieth century in general, conspicuously conflates this kind of redemptive violence with simple criminality and, in doing so, I would argue, undermines the very foundation of his thesis.

Most Spaghetti Westerns, I want to suggest, can be seen as exegeses and explications of the consequences of this footnote. Corbucci, Leone, and other Italian Western directors portray the frontier as a place where violence is ubiquitous but not regenerative. The Italian Western frontier is not a place where civilization meets its outside and is purged in the process, but rather an anarchic world where any sense of justice, if it can be said to exist at all, is situational, perspectival, and closely associated with the individual rather than the transcendent or any larger nation state, society, or community.

After having seen Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Western *For a Few Dollars More* (*Per Qualche Dollaro in Piu*) from 1965, the same year as *Django*, the American director Anthony Mann made the following comment:

> In that film the true spirit of the Western is lacking. We tell the story of simple men not of professional assassins; simple men pushed to violence by circumstances. In a good Western the characters have a starting and a finish line; they follow a trajectory in the course of which they clash with life. The characters of *Per Qualche Dollaro in Piu* meet along their road only the 'black' of life. The bad ones. And the ugliness. My God, what faces! One or two is all right, but twenty-four no, it's too much. (Frayling 2000, 181-82)

Mann's investment in the definition of the Western went beyond simple interest. After directing a string of film noirs in the 1940s, Mann made a series of Westerns over the course of the fifties that pushed the boundaries for the depiction of violence in American movies. *Winchester '73* and the four other Westerns starring James Stewart as well as *The Furies* with Barbara Stanwyck became influential for Western directors on both sides of the Atlantic. Coincidently, both Leone and Mann worked as uncredited second unit directors on the 1951 Hollywood epic *Quo Vadis*, directed by Mervin LeRoy, one of the first American movies to be produced in Rome—although it is less than certain whether they ever met each other.

Mann's critique of Leone's film—despite a certain essentialist strain, implying that only native Americans could possibly understand "the true spirit of the Western"—cogently lays bare the difference between American and Italian Westerns. Mann is correct in asserting that the violent acts of the protagonist in an American Western are often motivated in the way he describes: a good, essentially non-violent man is pushed to violence by circumstances beyond his control. In *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin argues that violence in Westerns is often if not always portrayed as a means to advance civilization and help the progress of communities:

> [I]n general, when we are told that a certain film is a Western, we confidently expect that it will find its moral and emotional resolution in a singular act of violence. Moreover, since the Western offers itself as a myth of American origins, it implies that its violence is an essential and necessary part of the process through which its democratic values are defended and enforced (352).[10]

For the hero of the American Western, then, violence becomes something like a solemn duty, something he (or, very rarely, she) must do in order both to solve whatever local predicament the plot of the movies revolves around and to advance a more extensive national cause. Naturally, not all acts of violence in Westerns fall under this rubric. The violent acts of the villain, for instance, have no redeeming qualities except that they might spur the protagonist's own act of righteous violence. As Gilles Deleuze writes in the first volume of his work on cinema, it is only when the protagonist represents a community that his violent action can re-establish the endangered local and global order (146). This violent act—usually the final

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[10] Although I will rely on Slotkin's magisterial readings of the myth of the American West in the twentieth century, I differ with Slotkin as to how American Studies should treat American global involvement. Even though Slotkin's book is to a large extent about American foreign policy, he almost always writes as if the United States is an entity onto itself, imposing its will on the rest of the world. (He does briefly admit that Sergio Leone's films influenced American Westerns in the 1960s and 70s (628)). The present study, while not forswearing the dominant role of the United States in the twentieth century, will insist that it is impossible to narrate the story of America from the 1960s to the present moment without examining the complex interplay between different nation states and territories in the political, economic, and aesthetic spheres.

duel—that encompasses both a community and a cosmic or global order is, as Deleuze writes, related to the epic: "the hero becomes equal to the milieu via the intermediary of the community, and does not modify the milieu, but re-establishes cyclic order in it" (146).[11] As Deleuze hints, this definition is very close to Hegel's definition of the epic, from his *Lectures on Fine Arts,* as an act that in its consequences evokes a totality. However, whereas the classic epics started with an initial act or a passion (like the rage of Achilles), which through a description of its effects would conjure up a whole culture, the epic act of the Western is more dynamic. Placed as it often is at the end of the movie, the act is both a consequence of the past and a harbinger of the future that it helps bring about. As Deleuze writes, "there are, as it were, two inverse spirals, of which one narrows towards action and the other broadens towards the new situation: a form like an hour-glass, or an egg-timer, which include both space and time" (142).

Combining Mann's, Slotkin's and Deleuze's theories of violence in the American Western, we can conclude that if the protagonist represents the community as well as a larger cosmic order, and if his violent act is brought about by fate, then the violence is epic and regenerative. This effectively sets up a standard for the use of violence: we can judge whether an act of violence is sensible, excessive, or counterproductive based on its effects. However, as Slotkin suggests, the implication of this standard is that violence is a both justified and necessary means to defend and advance the values of the community—something which becomes acutely significant if we understand American Westerns not only as investigations of the nation's origins but also as meditations on America's role as a dominant global power. To take a closer look at these political implications of the Western, I now turn to two of Mann's

[11] Deleuze, however, subsequently points out that the Western shares just as many traits with tragedy or romance as it does with the epic (147).

own movies.[12]

Mann's *The Naked Spur* from 1953 and *The Tin Star* from 1957 were some of the earliest examples of American Westerns to feature bounty hunters as protagonists, and as such they were almost undoubtedly seminal inspirations for Leone and later Spaghetti Western directors who chose to portray the West through such characters. Where the Spaghetti Westerns generally depict these men as the unscrupulous "professional assassins" that Mann mentions—they are almost always referred to as "bounty killers" rather than "bounty hunters" in Italian Westerns—Mann's two films revolve around the complicated personal and societal implications of the legally sanctioned but morally dubious act of hunting criminals for money. In *The Naked Spur*, Howie Kemp (James Stewart) struggles with the morality of bringing Ben Vandergrout (Robert Ryan), a supposed murderer, to justice in order to earn enough money to reclaim his farm. Ultimately, he rejects the prospect, buries Vandergrout (who has been killed trying to escape) instead of bringing his body to the authorities, and leaves for California with his newfound sweetheart. In *The Tin Star*, Morg Hickmann (Henry Fonda) is a former sheriff who out of anger at the hypocrisy of his fellow citizens has turned to a life of bounty hunting. Under the influence of the younger sheriff Ben Owens (Anthony Perkins), he also changes his ways and helps bring in the two criminal McGaffey brothers (one of whom is played by Lee Van Cleef, who throughout the sixties and seventies would have a successful career playing both heroes and villains—and often bounty killers—in Spaghetti Westerns) and then subsequently protects them from an angry mob so that they can have a fair trial.

In both movies, the profession of hunting of criminals solely for monetary gain,

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[12] Although Mann's Westerns from the fifties were generically innovative and were part of a transition toward a new interpretation of violence (a transition the spaghetti Western, in a sense, would complete), they by and large adhere to the conventions of the classical Western. However, Mann's placement within the history of the Western is a complicated question. Deleuze groups him with Sam Peckinpah as a representative of the neo-Western (166-69), while Slotkin sees his movies as forming a unique strain of revenge-Westerns within the larger sub genre of Westerns dealing with the predicaments of the elite gunfighter (379-405).

although it is perfectly legal, as is often emphasized, is abandoned in order to help preserve and progress a community. This all the more remarkable since the communities that are being advanced are in both cases corrupt—and it is here that we see Mann moving away from the more classical Western model. Howie Kemp was cheated out of his land by his fiancé, and Morg Hickmann's family died as a result of his failure to secure a loan from the very townspeople he protected. In both movies, the violent, epic acts—the final duels—are accompanied by a renunciation of another kind of violence—getting a reward for a dead body and handing over two supposed criminals to a lynch mob. Both Westerns hinge on the protagonist's choice to act as a representative of a community that is not yet present but is (at least partially) brought into existence by their regenerative and epic acts. The choice that Howie Kemp and Morg Hickmann face is whether to continue to act violently on their own—not outside the law but outside that sphere of communal and cosmic sovereignty that the hero of the Western may incarnate—or whether to lend their violence to a greater national project of constituent power.

There is no doubt that Spaghetti Westerns were more violent than their immediate American counterparts. Yet, by the time that these Italian movies had made it across the Atlantic in the mid to late sixties, American Westerns had (in part inspired by Leone, Corbucci, and other Spaghetti directors) themselves introduced a whole new regime of representational violence. As Austin Fisher writes *Radical Frontiers* (168-81), these new American Westerns and action movies, including Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* and Don Medford's *The Hunting Party* (and even Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*), all showed a new attitude towards portraying violence, often indulging in close-ups and slow motion shots to emphasize bloodbaths. Compared to these movies, the violence in Spaghetti Westerns seemed almost lighthearted and comical, a fact that did not stop American critics from lambasting the

Italian films as some of the most terribly violent spectacles ever produced.[13] While Fisher sees this as unfair bias against Italian movies, I would like to suggest that it is exactly the lightheartedness of the violence that affronted critics. For all their differences from the classical Westerns, Peckinpah's movies shared their preoccupation with the ideological role of violence. Where the Spaghetti Westerns treat violence almost comically, a film like *The Wild Bunch,* with its close-up shots of blood spurting out of bullet holes in slow motion, shares the preoccupation with the ideological uses and effects of violence specific to earlier American Westerns—instead of accepting the regenerative role of violence, Peckinpah examines and critiques it, but he is just as interested in the solemnity of violence as his predecessors, if not more. Spaghetti Westerns, on the other hand, treat violence entirely differently; none of their violent acts—whether they are committed by the hero or the villain—live up to the standard for the use of violence that I have been discussing. Violence is simply presented as a ubiquitous and inexplicable condition of the diegetic world that the movies depict. This can perhaps explain the reaction of American critics, as well as that of Anthony Mann; rather than the frequency or the extremity of the violence, what they primarily object to is what they see as the *gratuitousness* of the violence.[14]

The violence of Spaghetti Westerns, then, takes place outside of the specifically American ideological framework that scholars like Slotkin have delineated. Although this does not make the violence of the Spaghetti Westerns un-ideological (if such a thing is even possible), the unique aesthetic, geographical, and political perspective of the genre vis–à–vis its American precursors allows it to re-situate the discussion of violence into an entirely new setting. This undoubtedly accounts for some of the animosity against the Spaghetti Westerns,

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[13] See Fisher 168-81 and his Appendix D (227-35) for an itemization of the contemporary American response to the violence of the Spaghetti Westerns.

[14] See Frayling 1981 121-41, where he cites several American, British, and French critics' condemnations of Spaghetti Westerns—several of them calling the violence gratuitous, as compared to American Westerns.

from the press and from older filmmakers like Anthony Mann if not from American audiences and a new generation of directors coming into their own in the mid to late sixties. However, the accusation of gratuitousness that I have identified as one of the main strains in American criticism of Spaghetti Westerns still needs to be considered. By American standards, the violence of Spaghetti Westerns is often gratuitous in both meanings of the word as defined by Thomas Gould in his short article on violence in drama: violence existing for its own sake and violence presented as a shocking injustice (1). However, as Gould is quick to point out, the distinction between gratuitous and essential violence is more difficult to make than might appear initially since unreasonable, unjustifiable violence is inherent to drama as a genre. Although he does not mention this, Gould's argument is clearly inspired by Nietzsche's theory from *The Birth of Tragedy* of the origin of drama and (art in general) in a primeval dialectic between the Dionysian and the Apollonian—the chaotic, violent, and dark versus the well-ordered and beautiful—a dialectic that was soon eclipsed by the Socratic spirit of reason and purpose, which resulted in a banishment of the kinds of representations of violence that had formed the center of Greek tragedy. Nietzsche does not mean to suggest that violence disappears from art but rather that it gets tamed by a Socratic will to truth that tries to explain away the chaotic conditions of life that art—and, with Nietzsche himself, philosophy—might help reveal: "[T]heir [the Greeks'] whole existence, with its temperate beauty, rested upon a base of suffering and knowledge which had been hidden from them until the reinstatement of Dionysus uncovered it once more" (34). I want to suggest that we can understand the Spaghetti Westerns, and in particular *Django*, as such a Nietzschean uncovering of the inherent violence of the American Western.

Sergio Leone often repeated that he wanted to recreate the Western as it had appeared to him as a child, or rather, to isolate those parts of the Westerns that had appealed most to

him when he went to see American Westerns dubbed into Italian in his local cinema in Rome (see Frayling 2000 1-25). This meant that Leone's films, and the many other Italian Westerns that followed in their footsteps, had fewer female characters and less focus on the local community, but most of all it meant that the Spaghetti Westerns had more violence than their American counterparts. To a child—to Leone, at least—Westerns were first and foremost movies that involved a lot of violence. No other genre had as much shooting, fighting, and killing, and Leone was hardly the only viewer attracted to the genre chiefly for that bloody spectacle. There is a strong convergence between this childish interpretation and a Nietzschean reading of the Western: the main attraction of the Western is the depiction of the Dionysian, cruel violence even if this fascination is cloaked under an Apollonian or Socratic justification of violence as part of a larger political project. In Leone's adherence to his childhood sensibility, we can even recognize a parallel to Nietzsche's genealogical method of going back to a perhaps fictitious originary state before morality concealed the true, visceral conditions of the world. Accordingly, Leone's films, and Spaghetti Westerns in general, can be seen as Nietzschean uncoverings of the real nature of the Western by standing it on its head—or rather back on its feet.

With that in mind, we can return to the iconic machine-gun massacre from *Django*. The international resonance of that scene, I want to suggest, stems exactly from Corbucci's playful Nietzschean undercutting of the ideological framework that until then had sustained the Western and justified its violence. If Leone's Spaghetti Westerns foregrounded violence as something like a universal condition—made it the end rather than the means of the Western—Corbucci, with *Django*, took it one step further and deconstructed the mechanism by which the American Western snuck violence into its plot. When Django is sitting on his coffin, waiting for Major Jackson's men, it is clear that there is violence on the horizon—in

fact Corbucci employs the familiar suspense conventions from traditional Westerns that signal the approach of a duel. What is equally clear is that whatever is in the coffin will play an important part in what is about to happen—the visual hints to the coffin all through the first third of the movie are too many and too obvious to miss. Had this been a traditional Western, the coffin would contain some clue regarding Django's motivation for wanting to fight Major Jackson and his men—although it must be said that even if such a clue had been provided, it would be hard to imagine a scene in a traditional Western in which the hero kills fifty adversaries.[15] In fact, such motives are not lacking in the movie. The viewer already knows that Django fought for the North in the civil war, and that Major Jackson is advancing his racist and, by implication, Confederate ideology in the small town where the movie takes place, and, immediately following the machine-gun massacre, we learn that Jackson killed Django's sweetheart. These clues, however, are played down by the movie, passed by in brief lines of expository dialog, compared to the over-played visual intimations that whatever turns out to be inside Django's coffin is going to justify all the violence to come. The reversal that what the coffin contains is not a reference to a larger ideological, nationalistic project that would put the violence in perspective, but instead more violence in as excessive, even caricatured and grotesque, form one could imagine, functions like a punch line: Corbucci plays with the viewer's anticipation to find inside the coffin an ideological excuse to condone and even enjoy the expected violence.

It is no coincidence that Corbucci chooses the moment of the duel to level his critique against the ideological scaffolding that justifies the use of violence in what the French critic André Bazin calls "the American film par excellence," the Western. Rather, it is through a

[15] One exception, which is clearly an inspiration for Corbucci, is Robert Aldrich's Western *Vera Cruz* from 1954 set in Mexico during its revolutionary war, where the two protagonist Ben Trane (Gary Cooper) and Joe Erin (Burt Lancaster) kill almost a whole regiment of Mexican troops with a machine gun. That scene, however, is part of a larger battle for the city of Vera Cruz, not a duel in the streets of a Western town, as is the case in *Django*.

re-appropriation of the epic instant—the moment, as Hegel tells us, when an act can connect with and encompass a whole culture—that the Spaghetti Westerns extend beyond mere homage, deconstructing not just American representations of violence, but the actual use of force that these representations sought to justify and excuse. That the time for these justifications had passed is nowhere more evident than in the setting of *Django*. Corbucci's film does not represent the West through the thriving towns and virginal wide-open plains audiences were familiar with from the classical Hollywood Westerns; instead, he depicts a claustrophobic, dirty, and over-trodden space where violence reigns. It was a representation of America that, as the 1960s wore down, resonated with an increasing number of viewers worldwide, from Naples to Kingston. To understand why this was the case, we need to take a closer look at the prehistory of the Spaghetti Western and of the relationship between America and Italy along what I will call the semi-peripheral frontier.

"Esisteranno Veramente Questi Americani?": Italy, America, and the Semi-Peripheral Frontier

In a scene in Roberto Rosselini's *Rome, Open City* from 1945, a policeman helps Pina (Anna Magnani) carry a bag of stolen bread back to her apartment. As he hands her the bread, he asks her, "Sora Pina... Ma che dite voi, esisteranno veramente questi americani?" ("Sister Pina… What do you think, do these Americans really exist?"). By way of answering, Pina looks up and the picture shifts to a shot of a bombed out building; "Pare di sì!" ("It seems so!") she says.

Although the film never shows any Americans in person, the viewer, like Pina, sees plenty of secondary evidence of their presence. *Rome, Open City*, like other neo-realist films, was shot on location in the streets of Rome; the newly ruined buildings that form the background of many of the scenes were not movie sets but the real results of Allied (and to a smaller extent Axis) bombings in 1943 and '44. This military invasion went hand in hand with another

invasion, one that was equally ambiguous to most Italians, part encroachment and part liberation: the invasion of Hollywood movies.

The Italian film industry had been competing against its American counterpart almost since the invention of cinema. Italy's financial gains from film exports were considerable until the introduction of sound-movies caused Hollywood's decisive annexation of the world market. In the years leading up to the First World War, especially lucrative for the Italian film industry were the Roman epics, whose thinly veiled ideological purpose was to strengthen the Italian loyalty to the still relatively newly formed nation state, and to gain support for new colonial adventures through evocations of a glorious past when Rome ruled the known world. These films also turned out to be very successful internationally due, to a large extent, to their sheer scale: these Italian epics were longer and had more extras than any films made before them. Enrico Guazzoni's 1913 adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's nineteenth-century novel *Quo Vadis*—a book which would be adapted countless times— played for more than twenty weeks in New York; Giovanni Pastrone's film *Cabiria* from 1914 was equally popular and greatly influenced D.W. Griffit's *Intolerance* from 1916 (Bondanella 8-12). Soon, however, the traffic in films started moving the other way. Through the creation of a de facto business cartel of American distributors, it became nearly impossible, from the mid-twenties on, for foreign producers to export their movies to the United States. Simultaneously, the American State Department intervened whenever a European country tried to protect its own market by limiting the import of American movies; citing the need for a free market (belied by its own domestic policies), the State Department attempted to keep overseas markets open, which, until the outbreak of the Second World War, accounted for a third of Hollywood's revenues (cf. Guback 463-70).[16]

[16] For more on Hollywood's early global dominance, see Panitch & Gindin, 50-51.

In reaction to these American aggressions, Italy, along with other European countries, took measures to protect its own production. On April 21, 1937, the supposed anniversary of the founding of Rome, Benito Mussolini officially opened the Cinecittà film studios, which is still to this day one of the world's largest cinema complexes (Bondanella 22). The following year saw the passing of the Alfieri law, which granted a monopoly to a state-sponsored organization to distribute foreign movies on Italian soil, a decision that lead to the withdrawal of American studios from the Italian market (Bondanella 52). Although this was solely a protectionist move to boost the domestic film industry by the Italian government, who at this point had no intentions of encouraging anti-American sentiments (this changed when Italy entered the war; in 1941 an actual ideological ban on American movies was enforced), the passing of the law was seen as an infringement by a generation of young Italians who had grown up with Hollywood movies. Sergio Leone called America the religion of his childhood, a religion he observed mainly by going to the movies; the anti-fascist intellectual Giame Pintor, wrote about his generation that Hollywood movies "ha[d] changed the history and geography of our brains" (quoted in Brunetta, 142); and the writer Italo Calvino, who would later join the resistance, recounts in his memoirs that the ban on American movies was "the first time that a right I was enjoying was being taken away from me personally: more than a right, a dimension, a world, a mental space; and I saw this loss as a cruel oppression" (Quoted in Weiss, 199).

Sergio Leone, contemplating this relationship between Italy and America said in an interview:

> America is the determined negation of the Old World, the adult world. […] America is really *the property of the world*, and not only of the Americans, who, among other things, have the habit of diluting the wine of their mythical ideas with the water of the American Way of Life. America was something dreamed by philosophers, vagabonds,

> and the wretched of the earth way before it was discovered by Spanish ships and populated by colonies from all over the world. The Americans have only rented it temporarily. If they don't behave well, if the mythical level is lowered, if their movies don't work any more and history takes on an ordinary, day-to-day quality, then we can always evict them. Or discover another America. The contract can always be withdrawn. […] the problems of America are the problems of the whole world: the contradictions, the fantasies, the poetry. The minute you touch down on America, you touch on universal themes. (Hamill 23. Emphasis in original)

In addition to the world's relationship to America, Leone's quote more specifically describes Italy's idea of a continent that, as Italians will remind you, was discovered by one Italian and named after another. While many European countries had close bonds to the Americas, and the United States in particular, Italy's connections with the new world have always been especially close. Bondanella notes how the Italian phrase "il mondo nuovo" ("the new world") was used both as a poetical shorthand for the Americas (as in English) but also to designate devices such as magic lanterns and perspective views and other pre-cinematic, theatrical special effects (1-2). America undoubtedly holds a special place in the Italian popular imagination, to the extent that it at times becomes the place of imagination per se—a connection Federico Fellini has explored in several of his films depicting Americans in Italy, most notably *Variety Lights* (1950) and *La Dolce Vita* (1960) where art and entertainment is almost synonymous with American influence. This trend is also exemplified by a series of Italian operas from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, set in the United States and written about Italian immigrants, Quakers, and cowboys. These operas, from Niccolò Piccinni's *I Napoletani in America* (1768) to Giacomo Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* (1910), explore the freedom of an ostensibly empty and imaginary continent—as well as the particular sovereignty

of violence that would be so important to both the American and Italian Westerns (Polzanetti 22-38). As a genre, these operas participate in the myth of regenerative violence that Slotkin identifies in American culture, and they constitute an important precursor to the Spaghetti Westerns.

Of course, the connections to America were not all imaginary. The number of people emigrating from Italy to North and South America between 1870 and 1920 was among the highest in Europe. Especially the impoverished southern part of Italy, the *Mezzogiorno*, saw its population diminish through immigration. Moreover, the migration westward had other, more complex effects on the regions from which people left.

In 1935, the anti-fascist writer and intellectual Carlo Levi was banished by the government from his native Turin in Northern Italy, to a small village in the impoverished Basilicata region—then known as Lucania—of the *Mezzogiorno*. Levi quickly found out that many people in the tiny village in Lucania where he was forced to stay, had lived and worked in America for several years before returning—the depression in the United States made it harder for immigrants to find jobs. These people were known as the "americani" easily recognizable because of their gold-teeth and their stories about life in New York or Boston. Along with the communications from emigrated family members who did not return to Italy, the "americani" in Lucania created a perception that America was much closer to the Mezzogiorno than the rest of Italy. Shrines with pictures of Franklin D. Roosevelt next to local saints were to be found all over the village, and the overall impression Levi gives of the region is of an Italian-American diasporic community residing within the borders of the Italian nation state. Levi writes, "Yes, New York, rather than Rome or Naples, would be the real capital of the peasants of Lucania, if these men without a country could have a capital at all. And it *is* their capital, in the only way it can be for them, that is as a myth" (123). It was originally and

primarily for the people of these regions that the Spaghetti Westerns were produced thirty years later. The subaltern people of the *Mezzogiorno*, suspicious of any state intervention and prone to what the American sociologist Edward Banfield called amoral familialism, as we will see, formed a special relationship to the myth of the American West that turned out to be prophetic rather than retrograde.

If the relationship between the America and Italy was already complicated, the Allied invasion of the Italian peninsula only added to the complexities. Although many Italians welcomed the liberation from Mussolini's rule by British and American troops, their encounter with real Americans often came as something of a shock. In an interview, Leone commented on this meeting:

> Throughout my childhood and adolescence (and I am by no means sure that I have grown out of that stage even now), I dreamed of the wide open spaces of America. The great expanses of desert. The extraordinary "melting pot", the first nation made up of people from all over the world. […] Then, real-life Americans abruptly entered my life—in jeeps—and upset all my dreams. They had come to liberate me! I found them very energetic, but also very deceptive. They were no longer the Americans of the West. They were soldiers like any others, with the sole difference that they were victorious soldiers (Quoted from Frayling 2000, 23-24).

This encounter was restaged numerous times in films made in the decades after the war, perhaps never more effectively than in Roberto Rosselini's neo-realist *Paisan* (1946), which in six vignettes retells the story of the American invasion of Italy as a series of fraught encounters ripe with misunderstandings, despite good intentions on both sides, from Sicily in the South to the Po Valley in the North. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this film to Italian film-makers from Rosselini's fellow neo-realists to younger, more political artists like

Gillo Pontecorvo and Franco Solinas, and to Spaghetti Western directors like Sergio Leone, Sergio Corbucci, Sergio Sollima, and Damiano Damiani.

The United States exerted considerable pressure in Italy both before and after the signing of the final peace treaty: American troops were stationed all over the country, which was intended (and understood) as a less-than-subtle message to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to refrain from any kind of popular uprising. The American government worked closely with prime minister Alcide De Gasperi and his conservative Christian Democratic Party (DC) especially around elections by making Italy's Marshall Aid appear to the Italian voters connected to, if not contingent on, the DC being in government rather than the PCI. Moreover, Italy's aid was made dependent upon the passing of harsh monetary policies (Ginsborg, 112-18).

These policies were mirrored in the world of movies. Immediately following the war, Americans not only had entry into to the Italian cinema market, but were also in control of Italian economic policies. The result of this was a near-monopoly of American movies in an eager Italian market that, at this point, had not seen a new American movie for six years (Wagstaff 1995, 92). The flooding of the market with American movies was more than a strategy to benefit American businesses: American movies also served propaganda purposes. In fact, it was the Bureau of Psychological Warfare and the Office of War Information that were in charge of the distribution of American movies in Italy and other European countries until the studios could reopen their European offices (Guback 473).

Although American film companies kept dominating the Italian market, the excessive dumping policies of the immediate post-war era came to an end in the late '40s. Like other European countries, Italy imposed some toll barriers on foreign (which chiefly meant American) films in order to aid its own industry. These policies, introduced in the late forties,

meant that some of the revenue that distributors of American movies made in Italy had to stay in the country (see Wagstaff 1995, 97-98, Guback 474-75). This is usually interpreted as a victory for the Italian movie industry over its American counterpart, a sign that Italy, along with the rest of Western Europe, was now strong enough to fight back against American economic dominance. However, it is important to remember that an economically strong Europe was always a crucial part of the United States' global policies; in fact, that was one of the primary motives behind the Marshall Plan. Thus, even though individual Hollywood studios and distributors might have wanted to continue their dumping policies as long as possible, America had a clear interest in a strong (but not too strong) Italian film industry. In sharp contrast to this approach, as Guback notes, both European and American film companies practiced, and to a large extent still practice, an exploitative dumping policy on developing nations, making the establishment of national movie industries or even active cinema policies, especially in African countries, nearly impossible (482-83).

Rather than establishing a complete dominance over the European markets, the goal of United States policies seems to have been to create a group of less powerful yet healthy economic allies in Western Europe, both in order to have a growing market for American goods (movies among them) but also because America strongly believed that an expanding economy and improved standards of living would be the best means to stave off the rise of communism. The United States created in Western Europe what Immanuel Wallerstein, in his World-Systems Analysis, calls a semi-peripheral territory.[17]

The United States moved from being one of the most powerful players on the global economic stage in the inter-war years to being the sole dominant core nation after the war, gaining the power to dictate economic policies in large parts of the world—a power it often

[17] For the distinction between core and periphery, see Wallerstein 2004, 23-42.

used to protect its own industries, like Hollywood. However, rather than creating a peripheral zone out of Western Europe—or more precisely, perpetuating the peripheral position it held by the end of the war—the United States, as we have seen, sought to help develop western European economies, in effect creating a series of semi-peripheral nations.[18]

Semi-peripheral nations are, as the name implies, states with a mix of core- and peripheral production processes that form a middle tier between core and periphery. The existence of a semi-periphery is crucial to the survival of the capitalist world-system as a whole, as Wallerstein argues:

> This semi-periphery is then assigned as it were a specific economic role, but the reason is less economic than political. That is to say, one might make a good case that the world-economy as an economy would function every bit as well without a semi-periphery. But it would be far less *politically* stable, for it would mean a polarized world-system. The existence of a third category means precisely that the upper stratum is not faced with the *unified* opposition of all the others because the *middle* stratum is both exploited and exploiter. (Wallerstein 2000, 91. Emphasis in original)

This, then, might help explain America's interest in an economically strong Western Europe, even beyond its rivalry with the Soviet Union.

The Italian sociologist and economic historian Giovanni Arrighi argues that economic dominant powers do not maintain their position through economic and military dominance alone—they also manage to establish themselves as hegemonic powers in the Gramscian sense

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[18] The economic framework for America's global dominance was established during the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 during which the foundations for such international organizations as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was laid. For More on Bretton Woods see Arrighi 69-70 and Panitch & Gindin 72-79.

(29).[19] As Wallerstein notes (2000, 90), the semi-periphery is crucial to the establishment and maintenance of what he calls the legitimation of the whole system. In other words, it was in Italy and other semi-peripheral countries that the American hegemony was forged. The United States used its influence in Italy to thwart developments that might help the PCI but also to steer the DC in a more liberal direction than they might have wanted.[20] Despite their arguments about the importance of hegemony, neither Wallerstein nor Arrighi sees culture, to the extent that they concern themselves with it at all, as anything other than a reflective and determined sphere, incapable of changing the conditions it is determined by—and the same can arguably be said about literary scholars, such as Franco Moretti, who are drawing on Wallerstein's work.[21] Contrary to this, the present study proposes that cultural productions, however they might be implicated in and determined by the economic conditions, of which they form a part, can still play a part in changing those conditions.

In Luchino Visconti's 1951 film *Bellissima*, Maddalena, a young housewife and vaccinator (again played by Anna Magnani), watches the American Western *Red River* with John Wayne and Montgomery Clift, dubbed into Italian at an open air screening next to her apartment complex in a run-down part of Rome. As so many fictitious and real Italians before her, she allows herself to dream of the new world portrayed on the screen. When her husband Spartaco (Gastone Renzelli) asks her to focus on her real life and not spend so much time watching movies, she answers "Guarda che bei posti... guarda noi 'ndo' vivemo." ("Look at those beautiful places… look where we live"). Spartaco responds, "Madale', so' tutte favole..."

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[19] In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci defines a hegemonic ideology as one that manages to bring about "not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate social groups" (181-82).

[20] See Ginsborg 166-67 and 210-254. I use the term liberalism in the sense Wallerstein does, to designate a centrist movement favoring strong state power, gradual change, and civil liberties (see Wallerstein 2004, 60-68). In a sense, as we shall see, the breakdown that the Spaghetti Westerns foretold was the breakdown of liberalism.

[21] For more on Wallerstein and the humanities see Palumbo-Liu, Robbins & Tanouhki.

("Maddale', they're all fairy-tales.") But Maddalena disagrees: "'n so' favole, 'n so' favole... " ("They're not fairy-tales, they're not fairy-tales") she says and continues to watch the Western.

Bellissima may poke fun at Maddalena's desire to be a part of the world that Hollywood movies evoke, but it also shows how this desire is produced and, more importantly, how her wish almost comes true as she enters her daughter into a beauty contest organized by the Italian movie industry at the Cinecittà studios. By the early fifties, Hollywood companies were working closely with Italian film studios both by supporting Italian films and by making use of Italy's cheap labor and excellent facilities (Cinecittà was then the biggest film production complex in Europe). Maddalena was not wrong; Hollywood movies were not faraway fairy-tales—they were being produced right in her own backyard.

The post-war rise of the Italian film industry started with neo-realism. These cheaply produced films never made a lot of money in Italy or elsewhere, but the critical acclaim they generated at festivals around the world put the Italian film industry on the map. Often a neo-realist movie would be sold to distributors abroad as parts of larger packages together with a series of popular, and therefore more lucrative cheaply produced genre films (Wagstaff 1998, 75). Although the neo-realist films were about the lives of ordinary people in Italy, their subjects and themes were never limited to strictly national concerns; as elsewhere in Italian culture, America played a crucial role. Visconti's *Ossesione* from 1943, which is generally considered the first neo-realist film, was an unlicensed adaptation of James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (as was Michelangelo Antonioni's first feature film *Story of a Love Affair* from 1950). Pietro Germi's two Sicilian movies *In the Name of the Law* from 1948 and *The Path of Hope* from 1950 both modeled themselves closely on the Westerns and social dramas of John Ford. In the first, echoing Ford's *My Darling Clementine*, a magistrate attempts to submit a small, corrupt Sicilian village to the rule of law, while the second, more closely related to *The*

Grapes of Wrath, tells the story of a group of poor Sicilian workers as they journey across Italy and into France searching for work. We have already mentioned Rosselini's interest in America in *Rome, Open City* and *Paisan;* his interest in the encounters between Italians and foreigners (not always Americans) continues in such films as *Stromboli* from 1950 and *Journey to Italy* from 1954. Even a quintessential Italian film like Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* from 1948—in which a young Sergio Leone had his first film-job playing an Austrian seminarian who takes shelter from the rain under a canopy together with the main characters Antonio Ricci (Lamberto Maggiorani) and his son Bruno (Enzo Staiola) —is not bereft of American influence. In the crucial scene where Antonio's bicycle is stolen, he is standing on a ladder posting a movie poster of Rita Hayworth.

Since the introduction of toll-barriers in the late forties meant that a large part of the profit made from American movies in Italy had to stay in the country, American studios started investing in Italian films. Because American studios set up Italian companies to funnel money to Italian production companies, the films that were produced were not officially Italian-American co-productions and it is not always clear which Italian films were financed with American money (Wagstaff 1995, 106-108). What is clear is that there was a lot of American money in Italian movies during this period. Guback writes that from 1957 to '67, American companies spent about 35 million dollars a year acquiring and producing Italian films. Many of the larger Italian productions had American stars playing the lead. Examples include Fellini's *La Strada* from 1954 with Anthony Quinn, Antonioni's *Il Grido* from 1958 with Steve Cochran, and Visconti's *Senso* from 1954 with Farley Granger, and *The Leopard* from 1963 with Burt Lancaster.

The toll barriers were not the only reason that the American film industry went into movie production in Italy. The United States Supreme Court's so-called Paramount Decision

of 1948 introduced a major economic drawback for the movie studios by forcing them to dissociate their exhibition venues from their production and distribution companies. Through the fifties, changing consumer habits and the spread of television also greatly impacted domestic ticket sales. These changes broke down the studio system that had been in place since the thirties and opened up the American market to foreign films, initially mostly from Europe (Guback 475-77). Hollywood's answer to this industry-wide recession was to consolidate their production in larger and more expensive movies—the epics of the fifties and early sixties.

These movies chiefly earned their designation as epics through scope and content; they were called epics because they were long and expensive, and because they portrayed ancient civilizations. That is not to imply, however, that movies like *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1960), and *Cleopatra* (1963) were not also epic in the sense that I have been using thus far: just like the classical Westerns that they replaced, these epics were meditations on America's origins and destinies as a nation state and as an empire. Most of the films, with *The Ten Commandments* and a few other Old Testament epics as notable exceptions, were Roman epics; they portrayed the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, often set against the rise of Christianity. Many of them were also Roman epics in another, more literal sense: they were filmed and produced in Rome.

Italy presented near-perfect production conditions for Hollywood studios. Mussolini had curbed the unions so wages for local cast and crew were much lower than in the United States; their production facilities were second only to Hollywood's own; and, not least, Hollywood studios had ticket revenues in the country that were blocked for transfer back to the United States; but that the studios were free to use for production in Italy. These so-called runaway productions (see Guback, 478), just like the runaway factories of the seventies and eighties, can be seen as textbook examples of outsourced production: no longer lucrative

industries move from the core to the periphery or semi-periphery to make up for lost profit by lowering wages and other production costs. As such, the Spaghetti Westerns would be some of the first examples of outsourcing and of globalization.[22] American studios were thoroughly embedded in Rome—sometimes referred to during this time as "Hollywood on the Tiber"—as seen in the famous scene from Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* in which several stranded, American B-list actors (played by real stranded, American B-list actors) dressed as ancient Romans throw Anita Ekberg's character Sylvia a rock 'n' roll welcome party while the confused Italians watch.

American depictions of ancient Rome in the decades after the end of the Second World War display all the characteristics of Freudian over-determination. On the one hand, as Martin M. Winkler notes, Rome is almost always seen as an evil empire, oppressing early Christians, neighboring peoples, and its own citizens alike (51-58). In films like *Quo Vadis* and *Ben Hur,* there are clear parallels between Rome and fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and Imperial Britain.[23] British actors often had the dubious honor of portraying depraved and decadent Roman tyrants, as in Peter Ustinov's pouty and grandiloquent portrayal of the emperor Nero as a spoiled child and failed epoist in *Quo Vadis*. However, it is hard not to see Hollywood's repeated return to the Roman Empire as a meditation on America's new role as dominant power and hegemon in the post-war period (see Wyke 14-33). The Roman Empire also stood in for the very spectacles and special effects Hollywood studios used to distinguish themselves from television. These movies were epic precisely because of their scope: they were

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[22] Panitch and Gilpin mentions the production of oil in the Persian Gulf by American companies for the European markets shortly after World War II as one of the first examples of globalization as we know it: "US companies producing abroad for markets abroad" (103). This model would by the 1970s be copied by other industries and multi-national corporations.

[23] One exception worth mentioning is Anthony Mann's last film, and one of the last Roman epics *The Fall of the Roman Empire*from from 1964, a film that tries to present a more historically accurate picture of Rome in the second century AD. Mann's film later became the model for Ridley Scott's revival of the Hollywood Roman epic *Gladiator* from 2000.

long, colorful, and in every sense large—it is no coincidence that the first movie to be shot and shown in the widescreen format was *The Robe*, a Roman epic. As Michael Wood convincingly writes:

> All these stories invite our sympathy for the oppressed, of course—all the more so because we know that by generously backing these losers we shall find we have backed winners in the end. But then the movies, themselves, as costly studio productions, plainly take the other side. They root for George III against the founding fathers, they are all for tyranny and Rome, more imperialist than the emperor. The great scenes in these films, the reasons for our being in the cinema at all—the orgies, the triumphs, the gladiatorial games—all belong to the oppressors. (184-85)

A generation of Italian filmmakers coming of age throughout the fifties, Sergio Leone and Corbucci among them, worked as assistant or second-unit directors, credited or uncredited, on these American productions and as directors of Italian genre-films and would later thematize their relationships with the American directors in Spaghetti Westerns.

These smaller and cheaper genre-films could be produced quickly (with or without American financing) and they were some of the most popular movies within Italy, especially in the so-called *secondo-* and *terza-visione* movie houses, the cheaper theaters that catered to the rural and urban working classes.[24] The genre-films, or *filoni* as they are known in Italy (meaning current or vein), were part of a boom-bust cycle economy where one successful movie would spark numerous imitations over a period of years until the audience grew tired of that particular *filone*. The *filone* directors were often southern Italians and made up a kind of working class within the Italian film industry to the more famous northern art-film directors. In the

[24] These were also the movies that were exported as part of larger packages that included the more serious neorealist and post-neorealist films that had attracted attention on film-festivals across the globe.

early fifties the prevailing *filone* had been romantic comedies, a genre that by the end of the decade gave way to the so called *peblum* movies, sword and sandal films that portrayed the trials and triumphs of Greek heroes such as Hercules and Perseus, almost always played by former body-builders.[25]

Of all the American films being produced in Italy—in addition to the epics, comedies and dramas such as William Wyler's *Roman Holiday* and Fred Zinneman's The *Nun's Story* merit mention—none were Westerns. Sergio Leone had a chance to meet and work alongside several of his favorite Western directors during the fifties, Raoul Walsh, Fred Zinneman, and George Stevens among them. However as Frayling relates, they all told him the same thing: the Western was dead, the times had changed (Frayling 49-79). The production of Westerns went markedly down in the mid to late fifties as Hollywood turned to fewer and larger productions, a dearth that did not go unnoticed in Italy where American Westerns were still as popular as ever. Unlike in America where popular television Westerns such as *The Lone Ranger*, *Gunsmoke*, and *Rawhide* (featuring a young Clint Eastwood) had taken the place of Hollywood Westerns, the Italian public did not see any reason why the steady stream of Western films that they had grown accustomed to should stop. These were the conditions that, more than anything else, paved the way for what was to become the most successful and long lasting *filone* the Italian film industry ever produced: the Spaghetti Western.

The crisis of the American film-industry that led to its outsourcing of production occurred during a period when the American economy was on the rise, but it was a harbinger of things to come. Arrighi writes about the moment in every cycle of economic dominance, what he calls the signal crisis, when the leading power can no longer make the same amount of

[25] Although the peblums were clearly inspired by the Roman epics being produced by Americans in Italy, the Italian filmmakers almost always chose to portray the ancient world through Greek myths rather than Roman history.

profit on production and trade and so switches its surplus capital to high finance; a move that, at least for the economic world system's three previous cycles (the Genoan, the Dutch, and the English), marked the end of the dominant power's hegemonic position and the beginning of the end of its dominance of the world system altogether—the point (called the cycle's terminal crisis) when another power emerges as the new global, economic leader (Arrighi 2010, 219-23). As we will see, this is exactly what happened to the American economy in the late sixties and early seventies: less profitable production was outsourced and the American economy pivoted to finance. We might say, then, that the crisis of the American film industry represented a preview of the much larger crisis that was to come more than a decade later, the outsourced runaway-film productions heralding the American-built, low-wage factories that started spreading all over the global periphery, from Asia to Northern Mexico, with the switch to an American economy based on what would by the late 1970s be known as neo-liberal high finance. The breakdown of American hegemony did not entail an end to the dominant global position of the United States. Rather, as we shall see, it inaugurated a period when America dominated without hegemony, using such institutions as the World Bank and the IMF. When Sergio Leone stated that "the minute you touch down on America, you touch on universal themes" was true in more senses than the one he intended. The semi-periphery stabilizes the entire world-system by creating a frontier between the core and the periphery where the battles over hegemony could be played out. It was on this frontier that the Spaghetti Westerns would take place.

Global Placelessness: Sergio Leone's Dollar Trilogy

Had it not been for Sergio Leone, there would be no Spaghetti Westerns. Together with important collaborators like the production and costume designer Carlo Simi, the composer

Ennio Morricone, and Italian and American actors including Clint Eastwood, Lee van Cleef, and Gian Maria Volonté, he practically invented the new genre. More than 500 Spaghetti Westerns were produced between 1964 and 1975, all of them, however formally, politically, or generically innovative, were all closely indebted to Leones's formula. Another collaborator, the screenwriter Luciano Vincenzoni, commented, "Sergio Leone did a thing which created jobs for ten thousand people for ten years. In a way, he was a saint" (Frayling 2000, 168). Nonetheless, Leone did not invent the European or even the Italian Western. Several European Westerns had been produced in the first decades of the twentieth century, among them the movie *La Vampiria Indiana* (*The Indian Vampire*) from 1913, directed by Vincenzo Leone, Sergio's father, partly inspired by Puccini's opera *La Fanciulla Del West* (Frayling 2000, 29-30). From 1940 to 1960, almost no European Westerns were produced, but in the early sixties West German production companies started adapting the popular Western novels of Karl May into a series of movies shot primarily in Yugoslavia. The success of these movies in the European market led Italian producers to try their hands at Westerns themselves with some success (Frayling 1981, 33).

By the time Leone's first Western, *A Fistful of Dollars*, premiered in 1964, more than twenty five Italian Westerns had already been made, shot in Franco's Spain in the desert near in Almería, some of them with American stars; it was considered a short-lived *filone*, already on its way out. The immense success of *A Fistful of Dollars*, making more money than even the large Hollywood productions both in Italy and then later in the rest of Europe, caught everybody by surprise (Cox 43). Directing under the pseudonym Bob Robertson (a tribute to his father who had used the pseudonym Roberto Roberti in the 1940s) in order to hide the fact that he was not American from Italian audiences, Leone soon not only directed under his own name but also became famous worldwide as a new kind of popular auteur. Leone's first three Westerns

A Fistful of Dollars, *For a Few Dollars More* from 1965, and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* from 1966, sometimes known as the Dollar Trilogy, laid the foundation not only for a new *filone* but also for the critique and renegotiation of American myths that would reverberate on both sides of the Atlantic as the global American hegemony was challenged and the financial crises of the late sixties and early seventies threatened to undermine the economic world system.[26]

In Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars,* a stranger called Joe (Clint Eastwood) comes to San Miguel, a small Mexican town ruled by two warring families, the Rojos and the Baxters, both selling liquor and guns to the Indians. A small family is trapped in the middle: the mother Marisol has been kidnapped by Ramon (Gian Maria Volonté), one of the Rojos, while the father and the little son are powerless to stop him. By cleverly playing the two sides against each other, the stranger frees the family and rids the town of the two families, shooting Ramon Rojo in the final showdown before leaving town.

Clearly, the plot of *A Fistful of Dollars* is heavily indebted to Akira Kurosawa's samurai movie *Yojimbo* from 1961, in which a traveling *ronin*, played by Toshiro Mifune, saves a small town by pitting the two ruling families, the sake merchants and the silk merchants, against each other. *Yojimbo*, in turn, was based on Dashiell Hammet's novel *Red Harvest* from 1929, in which a nameless detective, called the Continental Op, plays many different fractions in the criminal underworld, law enforcement, and the ruling elite against each other in Personville—or, as it is more often called, Poisonville—a small Colorado mining town. Slotkin argues persuasively that *Red Harvest,* and the hard-boiled, American detective genre in general, is closely related to the Western, the mean streets of the inner city replacing the frontier in similar stories about

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[26] In his book *The Cinema of Economic Miracles*, Angelo Restivo, drawing on Pier Paolo Pasolini's essays, argues that Italy as a nation state only came into being in the economic upturn of the late 1950s and early 1960s (the period known in Italy as the *miracolo economico*)—and then only as a postmodern simulacrum (3-22). I argue that—in the same way that the films of Pasolini and Antonioni that Restivo analyzes construct and critique this new simulacral national space—the films of Leone and other Spaghetti directors construct a new international space.

regenerative violence (194-228). Hammet himself, before he became a writer, was a Pinkerton agent, traveling all over the West an intervening in labor disputes on the side of the owners but later, changing his allegiances, he became a member of the American Communist Party. It is no coincidence, then, that the changing of sides is so heavily thematized in his books as well as the works they inspired.

Kurosawa's movies were also heavily inspired by American Westerns, especially the movies of John Ford; his film *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*) from 1954 was an acknowledged attempt to transpose the American Western onto Japanese soil. After the worldwide success of *Seven Samurai*, the director John Sturges shot an American version of it in 1960, called *The Magnificent Seven,* as a Western about seven unemployed American gunfighters protecting a small Mexican village from a local warlord.[27] Leone's idea to remake *Yojimbo* as a Western, then, was not as counterintuitive as it might appear. In fact, the title of Leone's first script for the movie was *The Magnificent Stranger* (Hughes, 3), a clear reference to Sturges' Westernization of Kurosawa's samurai-film.

Apart from *The Magnificent Seven*, Leone was also inspired by other contemporary American Westerns. The Westerns of Anthony Mann (already mentioned) and Budd Boetticher from the fifties portrayed a West where personal motives like revenge and greed threaten to overshadow nobler concerns about the community; although by the end of these films, the community is usually redeemed in a classical Western fashion. Boetticher's five films starring and sometimes produced by Randolph Scott (*Seven Men from Now, Decision at Sundown, The Tall T, Buchanan Rides Alone, Ride Lonesome*) with their small budgets and casts, their revenge-plots, and their visual attention to desolated landscapes as backgrounds and

[27] Slotkin interprets this movie as a fantasy about contemporary American counterinsurgency, specifically in South-Vietnam, where American foreign policies (and, increasingly, American troops) were seen as protecting a local, innocent population from a belligerent neighboring enemy. The Spaghetti Westerns, though clearly inspired by Sturges' movie, would take a view diametrically opposed to this stance on American foreign intervention.

metaphors for the taciturn characters' inner lives were an acknowledged model for Leone. *Buchanan Rides Alone* in particular was an important inspiration for Leone, as it had been earlier for Kurosawa; the film, clearly inspired by *Red Harvest,* is set in a small village on the Mexican border where Randolph Scot's Buchanan plays three powerful and corrupt brothers against each other to save a town. Another precursor was *Vera Cruz*, maybe the most cynical of the American Westerns from the fifties, in which Ben Trane's last-minute change of heart in favor of the revolution is the only thing that redeems the American characters. Finally, another string of Westerns were important models for Leone; these films—including Fritz Lang's *The Return of Frank James*, Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar*, Edward Dmytryk's *Warlock*, and John Ford's *The Searchers* and *The Man who Shot Liberty Valance*—had started to delicately question some of the myths that sustained the genre, and more broadly the representation of the Old West in American life, interrogating the media's role in the invention and perpetuation of the construct of the West as well as the foundational importance of racial prejudice to frontier ideology.

Although inspired by—even sometimes outright copying from—its sources, *A Fistful of Dollars* remains a highly original Western, more radical than any of its models. Unlike its precursors, there is hardly any community to save in Leone's movie. The town of San Miguel seems completely empty apart from the Rojos and the Baxters and a few minor unaffiliated characters: a bartender, a bell-ringer, and a coffin-maker. Eastwood's character seems chiefly to be motivated by money. He does save the little family (by killing a group of unarmed men working for the Rojos) and asks them to leave town, telling Marisol, "I knew someone like you once and there was no one there to help. Now, get moving." This act, however, seems closer to the kind of instinctive personal attachment that is usually transcended in favor of a more universal commitment to the community and the nation by the end of a traditional Western—the little family does not represent any larger society or civilization as women and

families nearly always do in American Westerns.

As an indication of how unusual Leone's portrayal of the old West was, it is worth mentioning that when the movie was first shown on American television in the seventies, the studio shot and added a completely new sequence, placed before the main titles of the movie, in which Clint Eastwood's character (shot from the back and played by a stand-in) is released from prison by a governor on the condition that he clean up the town of San Miguel (See Hughes, 15). This addition to the plot frames all of Joe's actions as a clandestine operation on foreign soil sanctioned by the United States government in the interest, presumably, of establishing peace in the border regions. That the American studio saw the need for this plot intervention should alert us to the radical novelty of Leone's film and its portrayal of an anarchic world without the kind of lasting commitment to local communities and the nation-state that the liberal hegemonic consensus had taught moviegoers worldwide to expect from a Western.

Frayling has explained this absence of a community and civil society in Leone's movies and other Spaghetti Westerns with a reference to what the American sociologist Edward Banfield in his study of Southern Italy from the 1950s has called "amoral familialism" (1981, 60-61). Banfield wrote that the underdevelopment of the Basilicata region (whci Carlo Levi also wrote about in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*) was due to "the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good, or indeed, for any good transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family" (quoted in Ginsborg, 2). The explicit condemnation in Banfield's explanation—reminiscent of Anthony Mann's judgment of the Spaghetti Westerns and perhaps even of a liberal American attitude towards Italy in general—does not take into consideration the weakness of the Italian state and the repressive measures that inhabitants of Southern Italy had been subject to (as Levi reminds us) practically from the time of the Roman

Empire—the inhabitants of Basilicata had good reasons not to see the state (whether the Italian or the hegemonic American) as a universal force for good.

Although Frayling uses Banfield's concept of amoral familialism too uncritically, his claim that we can understand the absence of communities in early Spaghetti Westerns as a symptom of Italian (especially southern Italian) lack of trust in state power is apt. Unlike most of the famous neorealist and post-neorealist directors, many of the Spaghetti directors came from the south and their work show strong southern sensibilities. Their work represents a powerful corrective to the American Western's ideological preoccupation with founding and building communities. As we shall see, when communities are represented at all in Spaghetti Westerns, they are nearly always repressive and malevolent. This southern Italian critique of state power proved a powerful antidote to the American hegemonic narratives of progress that was such a large part of the classical Western. The perspective of the *Mezzogiorno*, of the far side of the hegemonic frontier of the 1960s, unexpectedly, for a brief moment, acquired a voice on the world stage and managed to reverse the direction of economic and cultural flows.

There is a certain logic behind the emergence of Italian-produced Western movies in the early to mid-sixties. As the profit rate of the American film industry diminished, due mostly to industry-specific developments, that industry moved towards the periphery—while still not, to this day, losing its leading global position. However, other global economic developments during the course of the sixties revealed that the recession in the American film industry was not a single occurrence but rather part of a broader trend. What had initially seemed like a less lucrative industry's movement from the core towards the periphery within an essentially stable system showed itself, before the decade was over, to be a part of a systemic crisis that would change the global economic landscape into the globalized order of the present day. For a first sign of this American signal crisis, as Arrighi calls it, we might do worse than look at the legal

battle following in the wake of the global success of *A Fistful of Dollars*.

Leone's first Western was a typical example of an Italian *filone* in that it closely mimicked a successful source. In keeping with Italy's semi-peripheral position, Italian copyright laws were lax enough for this practice to take place almost without any disputes, even in instances where not just plot lines but also characters or even whole scenes were lifted from one film to another, which would never have been allowed in a core country like the United States. *A Fistful of Dollars*, as we have seen, took Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* as its model, which would probably not have been a problem if the movie had turned as little profit as the typical Italian Western in 1964. However, when Leone's film became a huge success both in Italy and internationally, Kurosawa and his distributors took notice. Kurosawa wrote a famous letter to Leone which in its entirety reads "Signor Leone - I have just had the chance to see your film. It is a very fine film, but it is my film. Since Japan is a signatory of the Berne Convention on international copyright, you must pay me." A lawsuit was filed, which meant that the British and American distribution of *A Fistful of Dollars* was delayed by more than two and a half years. At first, Leone's producers tried to argue that the movie was actually an adaptation of the baroque Italian play *Arlecchino Servitore di Due Patrone* (*The Servant of Two Masters*) by Carlo Goldoni, a claim that however much Leone's style owed to *commedia dell'arte* and Sicilian puppet plays was nothing short of ludicrous to anyone who had seen both Leone's and Kurosawa's films. In the end, a settlement was reached that awarded most of the film's profits to Kurosawa, making *A Fistful of Dollars* by far the most profitable movie of Kurosawa's career (Frayling 2000, 148-50). It is worth remembering that *Yojimbo* itself, as previously mentioned, was an adaptation of Hammet's *Red Harvest* and of Boetticher's *Buchanan Rides Alone,* and that Kurosawa did not pay any royalties to the copyright holders of either work.

The lawsuit between Kurosawa and Leone, though a small event in larger context of

the economic developments of the sixties, marks an important watershed moment when the flow from the core to the periphery was halted and reversed. A small, low-budget Italian movie went up against an international art-house film, produced in Japan but backed by American distributors, and although the Italians lost the lawsuit, Leone's movie paved the way for many other Italian Westerns that not only outcompeted international art-house movies like Kurosawa's, but also large Hollywood productions . Suddenly the films that had been outsourced from America because they did not make enough money made it back into the American and world market and outcompeted even the most profitable American-made movies.

Leone's films were part of a broader development in the economic landscape of the sixties as the industries of Western European and other semi-peripheral zones were suddenly competing with the core products of the United States—American foreign imports rose and exports stagnated as foreign cars, furniture, clothes, and other consumer goods made their successful entry into the American market. This economic escalation of the semi-periphery went hand in hand with a growing global criticism of American foreign policy, mainly centered around the Vietnam War but with much wider consequences, showing that the United States, while still the dominant global power economically and militarily, was beginning to lose its hegemonic position. The signs of its unraveling hegemony were perhaps most visible in the world of popular culture, where America had been dominating the world market since the end of the Second World War. Suddenly a host of British bands that were imitating, and sometimes outright copying, American rock-and-roll and rhythm-and-blues groups were dominating the American music charts. This aptly named "British invasion," like the Spaghetti Westerns, was at the same time evidence of the strong American hegemony and a harbinger that the United States could no longer take its leading global position for granted.

Just as it would be absurd to suggest that the early work of bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, or The Kinks that most closely imitated their American models constituted intellectual theft and could therefore be dismissed as aesthetically uninteresting, so *A Fistful of Dollars*, whatever the outcome of the Kurosawa lawsuit, is far from derivative, in the usual senses of the word. Although both Leone and the bands of the British Invasion over the course of the sixties would go on to create work that was as innovative and groundbreaking as any of their precursors, their initial efforts were already highly creative. Indeed, the early success of The Rolling Stones' reappropriation of the songs from Chess Records' back catalog, to give just one example, or Leone's knowing allusions to Kurosawa and a host of American Western directors should point us to a new understanding of originality, based on novel combination of already existing elements rather than the invention of new forms. This innovation could be seen not only in the popular genres of film and rock music (and later, even more recognizably, in hip hop and other forms of electronic music) but also in the return to the theories and practices of the historical avant garde across a series of artistic movements from pop art, to minimalism, and conceptual art.[28] *A Fistful of Dollars* can therefore arguably be seen as one of the first examples of what would later be called a sampling aesthetic, a postmodern artistic practice in which what Kurosawa had conceived of as the transposition and re-situation of the Western onto Japanese ground in films like *Shichinin No Samurai* and *Yojimbo* gave way to a new visual language consisting of quotes and simulacra of other sources.

The unraveling of the American hegemony of the post-war era reached its climax with the abandoning of the American gold standard in 1973. As we have seen, the causes that led to this collapse were many—from the rise of competition from semi-peripheral nations in Western Europe and Asia to global political dissension with American foreign policies.

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[28] For more on this, see Kraus 151-70.

However, one factor in particular, the Eurodollar market, seems to have played a pivotal role and is interesting for our purposes both because it provides us with an interesting parallel to the Italian Westerns of the 1960s and because it proved to be a harbinger of the new placeless and globalized economic order that followed the crisis. Since communist countries needed a small amount of American dollars in order to trade with the West, and since the Eastern bloc feared that their holdings would be confiscated should they place them in the United States, a small market for US Dollars based in European banks was established in the 1950s. The deposits from communist nations were never very large but soon European as well as American businesses started using this market for financial speculation, taking advantage of the lower expenditure and increased freedom of an offshore market (Arrighi 310).

As Arrighi writes, it was the sudden expansion of the Eurodollar market in the late sixties that would later cause the abandonment of the American gold-dollar exchange standard that had anchored most global currencies to the American dollar (and the dollar to the price of gold), and the inauguration of a more centerless, though still US-dominated, global financial market (310). As argued earlier, this was not the end of the dominant position of the United States but rather the beginning of a period of dominance without hegemony. It was the placelessness, the offshore position, of the Eurodollar market that both precipitated the collapse and supplied the model for the solution to the crisis. Moreover, it was the global dominance of American currency, the fact that even communist countries at the height of the Cold War had to have a supply of US Dollars that helped pave the way for its downfall.

The parallels between the Eurodollar market and the Spaghetti Westerns are many—starting with the uncanny linguistic parallelism between the two paradoxical monikers "Eurodollar" and "Spaghetti Western." In both phrases a proper noun signifying a European association becomes an adjective modifying a proper noun signifying an American affiliation.

Like the Eurodollar market, the Spaghetti Westerns were a very real result of American global dominance that, as the sixties wore on, crucially contributed to the unraveling of American hegemony. Furthermore, both the market and the *filone* became crucial models for the new post-1973 order in which the hegemonic master narrative of United States liberalism was no longer valid.[29]

The most crucial correspondence for our purposes between the Eurodollar market and Spaghetti Westerns is that they both inaugurate a new placeless spatiality. Arrighi notes, with a quote from the economist John Ruggie's appropriation of Fredric Jameson's work on postmodernism, that the way most global markets after 1973 function, taking their cue from the Eurodollar market, can best be described as a "postmodern hyperspace,"

> resulting from the "internalization" of international relations within global capitalism's own institutional forms. […] the tendency whereby "transnationalized microeconomic links… have created a non-territorial 'region' in the world economy—a decentered yet integrated space-of-flows, operating in real time, which exists alongside the spaces-of-places that we call national economies." (81)

This space of flows of the transnational markets and multinational corporations is at once placeless and global, a new kind of space that ushered in the globalized age. This space, I argue, was in important ways prefigured and critiqued in Spaghetti Westerns. When Sergio Leone appropriated the plot of *Yojimbo*, he not only struck a chord with Italian, European, and, as it would turn out, global audiences, he also managed to articulate the possibility of an outside position within the mythological universe of the Western. When Eastwood's character Joe, in

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[29] The breakdown of the master (or meta) narratives is of course one of Francois Lyotard's definition of the postmodern condition (see especially 31-41). This breakdown is usually understood as the impossibility of any alternatives to a capitalistic economy. While retaining this interpretation, I want to suggest that the collapse of the hegemonic liberal progressionist American discourse, as exemplified by the classic American Western movie, is as important a starting point for postmodernism as the perceived exhaustion of Marxian critique.

the beginning of *A Fistful of Dollars*, surveys the town of San Miguel from the roof of the inn with the innkeeper Silvanito, the following exchange occurs:

> Joe: The Baxters over there. The Rojos there. Me right in the middle.
>
> Silvanoto: Where you do what?
>
> Joe: The crazy bell-ringer was right. There's money to be made in a place like this.

This (lucrative) position "right in the middle," neither Baxter nor Rojo, neither American nor Mexican, neither north Italian nor south Italian, and neither American nor Italian (and perhaps neither American nor Soviet) is the first articulation of the possibility of a third space in a Spaghetti Western: a global yet placeless site that exists alongside a more traditionally territorial world onto which it can be mapped in numerous ways, a site that is formulated through a refusal to participate in the already-established ideologically motivated order—the smoothing of a striated space, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms from *A Thousand Plateaus* (474-500).

This new in-between space, I argue, is an attempt to forge a placeless space, a space that does not map on to any known locality but is virtual in its potentiality. The Spaghetti Westerns are set in America, inspired by Japan, conceived in Italy, and shot in Spain and this globality is what makes them placeless. Like the any-space-whatevers ("lieux-quelconques") that Deleuze sees emerging in the postwar Italian neorealist films filmed in the bombed out cities of Italy and Germany (1986, 212), these placeless places, or "sites" as Alain Badiou calls them, become the place where the new, the event, can emerge.

The success of *A Fistful of Dollars* reinvigorated the Italian Western, and before long a multitude of movies—often modeling themselves more closely on *A Fistful of Dollars* than that film had modeled itself on *Yojimbo*—were under production. The already mentioned custom of the Italian film industry of copying a successful movie with minor variations until the audience grew tired of that particular *filone* proved imminently fruitful in exploring the rich set

of thematics that Leone had discovered. The plot revolving around a lone hero stuck in between two powerful groups was taken up and examined in numerous films, and soon a new genre with its own particular visual language and thematic concerns was established.[30] The development of a new genre in a matter of months could only have happened in a country like Italy where the intellectual property laws were so profoundly lax (or unenforced). Contemporary parallels to this development in which peripheral or semi-peripheral zones, with little or no copyright law enforcement, reappropriate aesthetic tropes from core nations into new genres with global resonances might be Bollywood movies (including "Curry Westerns" like *Sholay*), Kungu Fu movies from Hong Kong, the Nigerian film industry, several different Latin American music genres including Puerto Rican and Panamanian Reggaeton, Colombian Cumbia and Brazilian Baile Funk.[31]

With much of the earnings from *A Fistful of Dollars* tied up in a court case that would not be concluded for several years and with other Italian Westerns profiting from a trend he had started, Leone did not wait long to produce his next film. *For a Few Dollars More*—the title being a nod to both the previous movie and to the sudden profitability of the *filone* he had helped spawn—did not rely on earlier sources as had his first Western. Written by Leone and Luciano Vincenzoni, the film had an original plot involving two bounty-killers, Manco (Clint Eastwood) and Colonel Mortimer (Lee van Cleef), and their pursuit of a criminal gang led by Indio (Gian Maria Volonté), a notorious bank robber and rapist. This movie, which Anthony Mann found so distasteful, portrayed a slightly different kind of society than had *A Fistful of*

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[30] Both Frayling and, in particular Fridlund, divide the Spaghetti Westerns into different groups defined by their plots. Friedlund devises an impressive and complex system of plots and variations ("the infiltrator plot," "the partnership plot," and so on) in order to classify hundreds of Spaghetti Westerns. Although such structuralist exercises can help give an overview of the genre, I find it more useful to treat each film as a discrete entity that combines quotes from earlier sources and innovations in a particular way. Even viewed on its own divorced from its American models, the Spaghetti Western was a mongrel genre constantly combining components of an continually expanding film language. Fridlund and Frayling are using a Levi-Straussian structuralist language to describe a post-structuralist genre.

[31] For a contemporary exploration of this theme, see the documentary *Good Copy Bad Copy*.

Dollars. Leone's first Western presented the viewer with a deserted space totally lacking civilization and community. By contrast, *For a Few Dollars More* represents a diegetic world in which all the familiar signifiers of society from the classical Western—the sheriff's office, the barbershop, the saloon, the bank—are still present, but are never valorized or sentimentalized and often not even acknowledged as anything more than mere backdrop. Manco and Mortimer, just like Joe, are "right in the middle," shooting criminals for personal monetary gain without any aspirations to help society or advance civilization.

Through a series of flashbacks towards the latter half of the movie, the viewer learns that Mortimer's sister killed herself just as Indio was about to rape her, and thus that Mortimer, in his hunt for Indio, and perhaps his whole life as a bounty killer, is driven by a motive beyond the aspiration to earn money. This plot twist certainly portrays Mortimer as a more classical, American Western hero in the mold of the characters played by Jimmy Stewart and Randolph Scott in the movies of Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher, respectively. However, unlike in those movies, Mortimer's revenge motive is never connected to any larger aspiration to help the local community or rid the world of crime in general. It is a strictly personal, familial affair.

What this explication of Mortimer's motives does is create a distinction between an older protagonist with a more conventional set of motives and a younger, more dynamic and cynical protagonist who is only interested in bounty killing for the money. This distinction between Mortimer and Manco also becomes the distinction between an American way of life and an Italian world-view. This reversal of the familiar, liberal American discourse about Italy—perhaps best exemplified by Edward Banfield's abhorrence of the "amoral familialism" that he encountered in Basilicata—where America is represented by the old man on the way out and Italy is personified by the young man of the future allows Leone to poke fun at the masters of the classical American Western, by suggesting that the days of the American

Western are approaching their end and a new, more dynamic kind of Western is about to emerge, but also, more crucially, to critique the American discourse of development that held that communities such as the villages of Basilicata represented a backwards stage of civilization bound to be overcome by a more integrated, American-led world order with strong government institutions. As it turned out, Leone was right; the anarchic world of the *Mezzogiorno* was a more accurate model for the globalized world of the succeeding decades.

Although Manco and Mortimer agree to join forces in their pursuit of Indio, their alliance is precarious at best. Throughout the movie they continue to bicker and fight over how to divide up Indio and his gang—and the reward for shooting them. This trickster relationship, with the two parties constantly attempting to outsmart each other, is also vaguely eroticized. As mentioned, most Spaghetti Westerns had very few female characters and were even more misogynist than classical American Westerns.[32] Of more than 500 Spaghetti Westerns, only a single one was directed by a woman—Lina Wertmüller's *The Belle Star Story* from 1968.

That film remained an extreme outlier in a *filone* that often purged female characters along with the classical representations of frontier communities. What was left was a greater emphasis on male homosociality. Although Sergio Leone usually tried to rid his movies of love stories of any kind, to the point that the only sexual encounters that happen in any of his movies are rapes, the relationship between Manco and Mortimer became the model for the depiction of a series of queered relationship in Spaghetti Westerns, often between an older an a younger man, that ranged from slightly suggestive to outright homosexual.

In *For a Few Dollars More*, when Manco and Mortimer first meet each other, a playful duel ensues in which each man playfully steps on the other's boots, and then they take turns shooting the hats off each other's' heads, to finally exchanging sardonic double-entendres ("Is

[32] For a reading of the misogyny of American Westerns, see Jane Tompkins' book *West of Everything,* 1-69.

that a proposition?"). This queered relationship was later copied and exaggerated in movies like Damiano Damiani's *A Bullet for the General* (1966), Giulio Petroni's *Death Rides a Horse* (1967), Sergio Sollima's *Face to Face* (1967), Giorgio Capitani's *The Ruthless Four* (1968), and Enzo G. Castellari's *Johnny Hamlet* (1968). In other movies, queer or homosexual interactions, voluntary as well as involuntary, occur in different constellations: in Giulio Questi's *Django, Kill,* an evil gang of outlaws, all dressed in the same tight, black outfit (courtesy of a Venetian fashion house), rape a young man in their capture; in Corbucci's *The Mercenary*, the villain Curly (Jack Palance) has a young male lover who gets killed early in the movie.

No systematic reading of this aspect of the Spaghetti Western exists, though the high frequency of male homosocial and homosexual interactions is often remarked upon. I want to suggest that one way of understanding these representations, apart from the relatively greater freedom of expression enjoyed by Italian directors during the sexual revolution as compared to American directors, is that the depictions of queer relationships between younger and older men in Spaghetti Westerns became a way to visually and narratively negotiate the heritage of American Western.[33] If the older character, as in *For A Few Dollars More*, is portrayed as the more American of the two, then Spaghetti Westerns can be read as the result of a what is both a love affair and a homosocial (or outright homoerotic) competition between the older, more traditional American directors and their younger, more adventurous Italian admirers—a relationship that closely mirrors the actual division of labor on the sets of the many Hollywood films shot in Rome in the fifties and early sixties. Spaghetti Westerns, then, recreate, in fictionalized (and exaggerated) form the relationships between American directors and their Italian assistants who would later go on to direct films of their own.

Jean Baudrillard called Sergio Leone "the first postmodernist film director—the first

[33] Like so many other tropes of the Spaghetti Westerns, Hollywood movies eventually came around to the same position, in this case with Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* from 2005.

to understand the hall of mirrors within the contemporary culture of quotations." (quoted from Frayling 2000, 492).[34] I have already mentioned how Leone and other Spaghetti directors contributed to the deconstruction of the master narrative of American liberalism by copying and combining sources in their movies. While this practice continued—and arguably found its culmination in Leone's fourth Spaghetti Western *Once Upon a Time in the West,* written by Leone and Sergio Donati (after a treatment by Leone, and the two young directors Bernardo Bertolucci, and Dario Argento), which featured hundreds of quotes from classical Westerns (see Frayling 2005, 59-63 for a list of some of references)—Leone also developed a personal visual style that allowed him to examine the free flow of signifiers of these new, postmodern movies. The most important component of this style was the extreme close-up, a framing device that Leone turned into a new art form, perhaps his most important contribution to a new language of cinema.

Like most of Leone's other movies, *For a Few Dollars More* was shot with Techniscope, a new film format invented by Technicolor's Italian branch in 1963. This wide-screen format only used half the film stock and was thus much cheaper than regular widescreen film, and thus perfect for low-budget, semi-peripheral films. Although it had certain limitations compared to the more expensive widescreen formats used by Hollywood studios, Leone and the Spaghetti Western cinematographers Enzo Barboni, Massimo Dallamano, and Tonino Delli Colli found certain advantages to the new format.[35] Techniscope proved exceptionally well suited for extreme close-ups, especially in shots in which both the close-ups in the foreground and the distant background were in focus. Leone would use these extreme close-ups throughout his career but in particular during his iconic final duels, when close-ups

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[34] Baudrillard's has never written extensively on the Spaghetti Westerns, but there are many parallels between his concept of the third order simulacrum (See especially 1983) and his meditations on the American desert (1988).
[35] See Frayling 132 and the discussion of Techniscope in the Documentary *The Spaghetti West*.

of faces and sometimes eyes take up several minutes of screen time before any shots are fired. Whether the duels are between Joe and Ramon in *A Fistful of Dollars*, between Mortimer and Indio in *For a Few Dollars More*, in a three-way duel between Blondie (Clint Eastwood), Angel Eyes (Lee van Cleef), and Tuco (Eli Wallach) in *The Good The Bad and The Ugly*, or between Frank (Henry Fonda) and Harmonica (Charles Bronson) in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the duel is always preceded by the extended series of extreme close-ups that became Leone's most famous stylistic characteristic, inspiring filmmakers all over the world, whether they were shooting Westerns or not.[36] In the documentary *Once Upon a Time, Sergio Leone,* Quentin Tarantino tells how as a young filmmaker, before he learned all the established terms for the various shots. He would make up his own expressions; he called the extreme close-up "a Sergio Leone":

> I'm thinking in terms of the effect I want. And so I'd say: "I want a 'Sergio Leone', give me a 'Sergio Leone' here." And when I'm saying 'Sergio Leone,' that's more important than saying an extreme close-up because anybody can give you an extreme close-up but when I'm say "give me a Sergio Leone" I'm implying the feel I want, it's just not an extreme close-up—it's not just the frame.

In Deleuze's discussion of the close-up in *Cinema 1*, he writes, "*The affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face*" (87, emphasis in original). Any close-up, even if it is of an inanimate object, according to Deleuze, acquires the characteristics of the face.[37] In classical films, close-up shots are used to show reactions and affects, and the face becomes the screen on which subjectivity is created and where the perceptions, emotions, and judgments caused by

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[36] Cumbow argues that Leone was inspired by Kurosawa's framing of the final duel in *Sanjuro*, although he admits that the stylistic traits are very different and that where Kurosawa only waits fifteen seconds, Leone often lets several minutes pass before any shots are fired (26-27).

[37] For a comparison between Deleuze's ontology. As he presents it in his *Cinema*-books and Jacques Lacan's theories of subjectification, see Vangelo 105.

the actions of the movie are represented. Because the face is where the perception of images is registered, it is the starting point for subjectification, but also for any process of signification—in fact, *in A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari define the face as the mechanism situated at the intersection between subjectification and semiotics.[38] Because the face precedes the subject, ontologically speaking, the face is not part of the subject. The face, then, is what makes communication possible; it is a figure of potentiality. In Leone's films, this potentiality takes on epic proportions.

In *For a Few Dollars More*, Indio uses a musical pocket-watch (which he stole from Mortimer's sister) to determine the duration of duels. He opens the watch and lets it play, telling his opponent, "When you hear the music finish, begin." This plot device allows Leone to focus on the faces of the two dueling men for several minutes with extreme close-ups as they watch each other and listen to the faint melody of the watch. Even with this device linking the extreme close-ups to the real time of the diegetic world, however, something indefinite about the temporality of the moments leading up to the actual shooting prevails. As with most other duel scenes from Leone's other movies, it is impossible to determine whether the crosscutting between the extreme close-ups of the faces of the two duelists, for what always seems an extremely extended period of time is meant to represent actual diegetic time, the perceived deceleration of time from the point of view of one or both of the characters—or whether the gravity of the event occasions a deceleration of time, whatever that would mean. This moment of temporal indeterminacy, much more than the actual shooting and killing, marks the climax of the movie, typically scored with a monumental, operatic piece by Morricone. The film critic Richard T. Jameson wrote of *Once Upon a Time in the West* that it was

[38] As they write, "A language is always embedded in the faces that announce its statements and ballast them in relation to signifiers. Choices are guided by faces, elements are organized around faces: a common grammar is never separable from a facial education" (179).

"an opera in which arias are not sung but stared"(11). There undoubtedly is a certain resemblance and inspiration between Leone's extreme close-up duels and operatic arias in which time and plot is stopped in order to explore a character or an emotion.

The faces of the dueling men at the climax of a Leone movie are as impenetrable as the scene's temporality. Looking for signs of weakness in the opposing face while trying to remain unreadable, the faces appear as stony as the landscapes behind them. As mentioned, the Techniscope film allowed the cinematographers to focus simultaneously on the faces in the extreme foreground and the landscape in the background. Deleuze notes that the close-up of the face makes the background into an any-space-whatever (95-97). The placelessness of the Spaghetti Westerns is thus intensified by the use of close-ups.

It is as if a kind of feedback loop comes into being between the faces, the one pair of eyes watching the other pair watching. The faces of the duelists, the longer the camera dwells on their features, increasingly resemble blank screens rather than signifiers of individual subjectivity. Yet it is from these faces that the action will originate: the eyes will determine when and how to shoot. Deleuze's and Guattari's conception of the face as the origin of any communication, subjectivity, or semiology and as a figure of potentiality seems perfectly suited to explain this dynamic: in the moment of the duel, Leone shows us how subjectivity is forged on the surface of the body, emerging in and with a primitive and deathly semiology of the face.

The suspension of diegetic time in Leone's duels resembles what Deleuze calls the time-image. Deleuze associates the time-image with the new regime of images inaugurated by Ozu, Welles, and neorealism and most prevalent in the *nouvelle vague* movies of Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras. Movement-images, like human perception, only reveal certain aspects of the image; however, if the sensory-motor schema breaks down, a new kind of image may appear. Deleuze writes,

> A cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are intended in perceiving, or rather what is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés. But, if our sensory-motor schemata jam or break, then a different type of image can appear: a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character. (Deleuze 1989, 20).

Leone's close-up, I argue, represents exactly a breakdown of the sensory-motor schema; the viewer expects the two duelists to attempt to shoot each other, but instead the films dwell on the faces and eyes of the two men for a prolonged period of time.[39] Like the lingering shots of inanimate objects in Ozu's films, or the apparent simultaneity of different pasts in the films of Resnais, the duels in Leone's films challenge the viewer's perception of time.

The breakdown of temporality in the time-image creates a proliferation of potential and often incongruous perspectives, evoking different possible pasts and futures, denouncing any notion of a single, transcendent truth. This creates a new, more Nietzschean narrative regime, a "power of the false," as Deleuze writes.[40]

That Leone should choose the final duel in a Western, the moment most closely associated with the movement-image, to slow down and let a time-image erupt, and that he

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[39] De Fornari comapres Leone's close-ups to the style of Marguerite Duras in passing but without evoking Deleuze's notion of the time-image.

[40] "A new status of narration follows from this: narration ceases to be truthful, that is, to claim to be true, and becomes fundamentally falsifying. This is not at all a case of 'each has its own truth', a variability of content. It is a power of the false which replaces and supersedes the form of the true, because it poses the simultaneity of incompossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts […] The truthful man dies, every model of truth collapses, in favour of the new narration. We have not mentioned the author who is essential in this regard: it is Nietzsche, who, under the name of 'will to power', substitutes the power of the false for the form of the true, and resolves the crisis of truth, wanting to settle it once and for all, but, in opposition to Leibniz, in favour of the false and its artistic, creative power." (Deleuze 1989, 131)

manages to do so without conceding any of the excitement normally associated with such a scene, can perhaps help account for the popularity and influence of this stylistic signature move. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, it was exactly this moment in the classical Western that allowed the connection of local conflict to more communal, nationalistic, and even cosmic contexts—the final duel is the moment of the epic. It is, however, in Leone, a moment of subdued potentiality rather than the resolution of the classical Western.

It is not insignificant that this epic moment is closely associated with death. The Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini, who himself played a militant Catholic priest in the Spaghetti Western *Requiescant,* which he allegedly help write in 1967, once told an interviewer:

> Death determines life, I feel that, and I've written it, too, in one of my recent essays [the essay "Observations on a Sequence Shot"], where I compare death to montage. Once life is finished it acquires a sense; up to that point it has not got a sense; its sense is suspended and therefore ambiguous. However, to be sincere I must add that for me death is important only if it is not justified and rationalized by reason. For me death is the maximum of epicness [epicità] and myth. When I'm talking to you about my tendency towards the sacred and the mythic and the epic, I should say that this could only be completely satisfied by the act of death, which seems to me the most mythic and epic act there is. (Stack, 55-56)

This theory of epic and death, which Pasolini connects with montage, is somewhat reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's assertion in his essay "The Storyteller" that "not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff stories are made of—first assumes transmissable form at the moment of his death" (94). Where Pasolini uses the death scenes of, for instance, the eponymous protagonist in *Accatone* or the young boy Ettore in *Mama Roma* to suggest that these subaltern and criminal characters should be conceived as heroic, epic

characters, the moment of death in the classical Western is very different. The *epicità* (to use Pasolini's neologism) of the final duel, and of the moment of death, is reinvested into a specific nationalist epic—in other words, the villain has to die in order that the community and the nation may prosper. It is fitting, then, that Leone's movies, which replace the American, liberal project with a more anarchic and Nietzschean one, should reappropriate the epic instant, not in order to connect it with another specific national or political narrative, and not to give it one specific sense as Pasolini implies, but rather to open it up towards a field of unrealized possibilities. The epic moment in Leone's films is not the moment of death but rather the moment preceding death (i.e. the death of the villain), a moment that is expanded into a time-image of sustained intensity and suspense lasting several minutes. Restivo compares Pasolini's moment of death in his theory and films with the Lacanian *point de capiton*, a point that fixes the meaning of the chain of signifiers, but then adds,

> […O]n another level, we can look at the analogy from "this side" of death, that is, from the point before any final meaning is fixed. In this way, the dimension of contingency is introduced into the picture: for if the individual's life's meaning can be fixed only at death, it is because life is lived in the dimension of freedom and not simply within determinate causal chains." (107)

Leone's epic time-images inhabits this paradoxical space of contingency, freedom, and potentiality on "this side" of death; by focusing on the moment of the duel rather than the moment of death, Leone replaces an older epic of fixed meanings associated with a liberal, nationalist project with a new global epic of possibility.

The plot of Leone's third Spaghetti Western, *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, revolves around the three central characters and their hunt for a treasure of gold worth $200,000. At the beginning of the movie Blondie, the good (Clint Eastwood), and Tuco, the ugly (Eli Wallach),

work together on a scheme: Blondie, a white bounty hunter, captures Tuco, a Mexican bandit who is wanted by the law, turns him over to the authorities to get the reward money, and then frees him. Angel Eyes, the bad (Lee van Cleef), also a bounty hunter, learns about the hidden treasure before the two others. As the film progresses, the three protagonists, who each hold a piece of the key to finding the gold, form tentative alliances with each other, two against one in every possible combination, each character trying to outsmart the other two, until they face each other in the final duel, a Mexican standoff in the cemetery where the gold is buried.

Although Angel Eyes comes close to embodying the classical role of the Western villain, and is accordingly killed in the end, the title of the movie can only be understood as an ironic nod to the classical dualism of good and evil as it is represented in Hollywood Westerns. The reference to the ugly in the title already complicates matters by creating confusion about not only the moral value of ugliness but also as to how moral and ethical systems of value correspond to aesthetics.[41] This confusion of terms and values is one of the most significant themes of the movie, as Leone shows how the values we ascribe to phenomena, whether they be ethical or aesthetic, are in the final instant simply determined by power relations—that the good, the bad, and the ugly only exist as perspectival constructs.

If society and local communities were virtually nonexistent in *A Fistful of Dollars* and only constituted the background to the actions of the main characters in *For a Few Dollars More*, society and the state take on a much more significant and sinister role in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. The movie takes place during the American Civil War. Although the three main characters are completely uninterested in the war's outcome, they must pass through several horrifying military episodes, including imprisonment in an internment-camp and a battle,

[41] The Italian title of the film, Il Buone, Il Brutto, Il Cattivo, has the aesthetic term in the middle, probably because of the alliteration, but the effect is the same.

before they can get to the gold.[42]

The movie emphasizes the inhumanity of the Civil War, implicitly comparing it to the Holocaust and to the senseless battles of the First World War The scenes in the prisoner camp built by the Union Army seem especially illustrative examples of Leone's will to challenge Western conventions. Many classical American Westerns take place after the Civil War and use the epic encounter with the frontier as a way of patching up lingering enmities between former Confederates and Unionists as they join up and fight a common enemy: John Ford's *Stagecoach,* with its final battle against the Apaches, is probably the best instance of this, but such examples are myriad.

About halfway through *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, Blondie and Tuco, who themselves are wearing gray, are picked up and incarcerated after they mistake the dusty blue uniforms of a band of approaching Northern troops for Confederate colors. This simple case of mistaken identity—which could have happened in an *opera buffa*, a *comedia dell'arte* play, or a screwball comedy—lands Blondie and Tuco in a Northern prisoner camp where they encounter Angel Eyes, who is disguised as a Northern officer and in charge of the camp. Angel Eyes uses all the powers at his command to force Tuco and Blondie to give up their knowledge about the hidden treasure.

As Tuco is being tortured in a small wooden cabin inside the camp, a small band of prisoners sing and play what sounds like a melancholy traditional American ballad but is actually an original Morricone composition, "Story of a Soldier" ("La Storia Di un Soldato" in the Italian version). The depiction of malnourished camp prisoners singing and playing seems a clear allusion to representations of the Holocaust, but the scene serves several other

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[42] Leone knew that the movie would be about the Civil War before he even started writing the script. During his preliminary research at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., Leone discovered that there had been a battle in Texas during the Civil War fought over the ownership of a goldmine. Leone also researched the prisoner camps that were built by both sides during the war (see Frayling, 2000. 201-206.)

functions as well. The camera pans slowly across the prisoners of war playing and singing only to end up framing a Northern prison guard overseeing the recital. What first seemed like an impromptu performance and a spontaneous expression of the prisoners' misery is instead a compulsory concert, an instance of forced labor. The motive behind this spectacle soon becomes clear: when the guard hears Tuco's screams from the little shed, he takes the cigarette out of his mouth and wryly asks the orchestra for "more feeling" as if he were a conductor—or a movie director. In response to this command, the band plays more loudly, drowning out the sound of torture. To make things even clearer, one of Blondie's fellow prisoners informs him that Angel Eyes' minion "Wallace will punch your friend as long as the song goes. So many of us have had a session in there."

The meaning behind this scene seems clear enough: not only does the winning side reserve the right to torture its prisoners of war, it also controls the aesthetic representation of the conflict. In this little scene can be seen Leone's critique of the traditional Western's national epic project in a nutshell, the narrative about the spread of democracy and civilization as told by the winners. It seems especially appropriate, then, that Leone focuses on the atrocities of the Union army, not because he has any sympathy for the Confederate cause but because he is interested in deconstructing the specifically liberal American hegemonic position associated with the North. Speaking about the representation of the war, Leone said the following in an interview:

> I had read somewhere that 120,000 people died in Southern camps such as Andersonville. And I was not ignorant of the fact that there were camps in the North. You always get to hear about the shameful behavior of the losers, never the winners. So I decided to show extermination in a Northern camp. This did not please the Americans… The American Civil War is almost a taboo subject, because its reality is

> insane and incredible. But the true history of United States was constructed on violence which neither literature nor the cinema had ever properly shown. As for me, I always tend to defy the official version of events—no doubt because I grew up under Fascism. I had seen first hand how history can be manipulated. So I always question what is propagated. It has become a reflex with me. (Quoted from Frayling, 2000. 205)

Although plenty of American filmic representations of the Civil War exist, Leone is right that the war had never before been represented in the gruesome way it is in *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*. Leone's trenchant critique notwithstanding, the sentimental song still performs the work that any mournful song on a soundtrack would, it lends a certain sorrowful sentimentality to the images of Tuco being hit in the face, the tracking shots of the prisoners, and even of the musicians themselves—who are visibly uncomfortable, continually trying to keep from crying as they are forced to play someone else's version of the soundtrack of their own misery.[43] Even while showing the cynical machinations behind the song, Leone acknowledges and even celebrates the emotional, aesthetic, and explanatory power of the music. It is almost an inverse Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*: the disclosure of the mechanisms behind the illusion does nothing to defamiliarize or alienate the audience. Rather, Leone shows that even with its cynical power relations exposed, the aesthetic representation loses none of its seductive charm.

The three main characters are never really interested in the outcome of the war. It represents nothing more than a obstacle to their goal of finding the gold. Leone uses the war to put the morality of the main characters into perspective, to ask what their cheating, lying, and even killing amount to in a world dominated by immense industrialized massacres such as the American Civil War or any the violent conflicts of the twentieth century that *The Good, The Bad*

[43] Incidentally, this is similar to Paul Celan's famous Holocaust-poem "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue")—which Leone might be alluding to— in which the poem itself can be read as the forced singing and playing of concentration camp inmates.

and The Ugly alludes to. In this, Leone was inspired by the film *Monsieur Verdoux*, directed by Charlie Chaplin after an idea from Orson Welles, in which a murderer of rich widows after the fashion of Bluebeard dismisses his deeds as those of an amateur compared to the modern scientific war machine (See Frayling 2000, 212).

With this critique in mind, it is important to note the changes between *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. Both movies revolve around three central characters, one of whom is portrayed as being more evil than the other two. However, whereas Indio, the villain in Leone's second Spaghetti Western, is portrayed as both Mexican and, through his name, Native American, the villain in the third movie of the dollar-trilogy is Angel Eyes, the character most closely associated with the classical Western and with the Unionist war machine. Tuco, the Mexican bandit, on the other hand, is portrayed as an impoverished peasant who had no choice but to become a criminal. In a crucial scene, Tuco tells his brother who is a priest:

> Where we came from, if one did not want to die of poverty, one became a priest or a bandit! You chose your way, I chose mine. Mine was harder. You talk of our mother and father. You remember when you left to become a priest? I stayed behind! I must have been ten, twelve. I don't remember which, but I stayed. I tried, but it was no good. Now I am going to tell you something. You became a priest because you were... too much of a coward to do what I do!

Blondie and Tuco, the good and the ugly, the two anarchic tricksters who survive and share the treasure at the end despite all their differences, are the two most Italian characters, perhaps representing the north and the south of Italy, respectively, while Angel Eyes, the bad, the most American character, is killed off. With *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly,* Leone had made the full transition from an old American liberal Western to a new Italian anarchic Western, and from

an old national epic to a new global epic.

Spaghetti Westerns are a product of American military and economic supremacy, but they helped challenge American hegemony not just in the cultural sphere but also in the political and economic arenas, deconstructing a hegemonic liberal American discourse of progress by introducing dissenting subaltern perspectives into an established genre. The American Western, like Homeric epics, are closed and contained totalities in which national and political problems related to the progression of American territories, ideas, and influence can be worked through. By contrast, the Spaghetti Westerns, by introducing a global perspective, and by introducing a pause of potentiality within the moment so associated with epic, heroic action—the Western duel—give voice to a growing number of other discourses. The compounding of America and Italy, northern Italy and the *Mezzogiorno*, and the first and the third world within the Spaghetti Westerns entailed that not only did different temporalities exist side by side, but different spatialities did as well. Although *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* seemingly takes place in a very specific time and place, Sergio Leone's recognition of the universality of the Western allowed him to associate this time and space with the American West in the immediate postbellum period (where most classical Westerns take place), the First and the Second World War (as well as other global conflicts America was involved with during the twentieth century), Italy as semi-peripheral territory dominated by an American core, Italy split in half, with southern Italy as a territory dominated by the north, the third world as a non-aligned but increasingly significant character on the world stage, and individuals in general trying to escape a repressive state or global apparatus.

Many more Spaghetti Westerns were made in the late sixties and early seventies. Carlo Lizzani's *Requiescant* from 1967 (with Pasolini in a supporting role) examined the relationship between capitalist exploitation and racism on the one side and, in a Gramscian and Pasolinian

fashion, Catholicism and resistance on the other side. Giulio Petroni's *Tepepa* from 1968 in a manner similar to *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles not coincidentally plays the main villain) investigates the unjustified violence and rapes of social revolts like the Mexican revolution. Corbucci's *The Mercenary* from 1968 and *Compañeros* from 1970 both focus on the relationship between radicalized peasants and professional revolutionaries and on the question of the justification of political violence in general. Tonino Valerii's *The Price of Power* is an allegory of the JFK assassination and alleges that there was a conspiracy behind it. By the early seventies, however, a new tendency had made its entrance. Beginning in 1968, the Spaghetti Western comedy began to dominate the market. These comedies included Gianfranco Parolini's *Sartana* from 1968 and *Sabata* from 1969, and Enzo Barboni's *They Call Me Trinity* from 1970 and *Trinity is Still My Name* from 1971. The latter movie, incredibly, is the highest earning Spaghetti Western within Italy. Yet while hugely successful within Italy, these comedies never made much profit elsewhere; they were, most scholars and critics agree, not as aesthetically or politically interesting as the earlier Spaghetti Western. After their brief success, not many more Italian Westerns were ever made. The *filone*, lasting longer than anybody had anticipated, had finally exhausted its audience.

Despite the genre's eventual waning, the influence of Spaghetti Westerns continues to this day. Sam Peckinpah and other American Western directors were quick to imitate the style and subject matter of Leone and the few other Italian directors that made it across the Atlantic. The emergent directors of the third world were in many cases also inspired by Italian Western directors. From the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha—whose Leone-inspired *O Dragão da Maldade Contra o Santo Guerreiro* (also known as *Antônio das Mortes*) won the prize for best direction at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival—to the Mexican filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowski's, whose *El Topo* from 1970 is something like an avant-garde, psychedelic

Spaghetti Western—to the Jamaican director Perry Henzell and to numerous directors of Hong Kong kung fu films, Indian Curry Westerns, and American Blaxploitation movies, Spaghetti Westerns made their indelible mark on global cinematic production. This happened, I want to suggest, not only because the movies themselves were powerful and important works of art—although they were—but because a conflation of aesthetic, ideological, economic, and political events conspired to place this *filone* from corner of the semi-periphery of the global world-system at the forefront of momentous changes of the late sixties—changes we grapple with today under such designations as neo-liberalism and globalization.

Chapter 2: Robert Smithson and the Great Outdoors

Like the directors of the Spaghetti Westerns, Robert Smithson challenged the hegemonic liberal narrative of global progress through American leadership. Although often seen as purely formalistic and apolitical, Smithson's works and writings should, I argue, be seen as belonging to the global American genealogy and to a tradition of American literature of the environment which challenges prevailing categories by which we think of society, nature, and the individual.

To posterity, Smithson's name will always be associated with the art-form he helped bring into being, namely that of earthworks or land art. The most famous example of land art, and the one most often used in surveys, is Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* from 1970, a 1500 foot long spiral made of black rock, salt crystals, and earth jutting out into the Great Salt Lake at Rozel Point in Utah. *Spiral Jetty*, however, is not only a horizontal sculpture on the shore of the Great Salt Lake in a remote area of Utah, it is also the name of a film that Smithson made about the construction of the earthwork as well as an essay on the subject published in *Artforum*. Despite its renown, very few people have actually seen Smithson's earthwork; not only is it placed in the middle of the desert far away from any human habitation or properly paved roads—let alone cities with art museums—it has also disappeared from sight. Not long after its construction in 1970 the water level of The Great Salt Lake rose and swallowed up the jetty—although it has reappeared on occasion since and is actually currently visible, though threatened by proposed nearby oil drilling.[1] If the Spiral Jetty is still one of the most famous American works of art made in the last fifty years, this is mainly due to representations of it,

[1] For-up-to-date information on the visibility of *The Spiral Jetty*, see the webpage of the Dia Art Foundation, which currently manages Smithson's work: http://www.diacenter.org/sites/main/59.

like photographs and anecdotes about visits to its Site as well as Smithson's own essay and film. As such, Smithson's work exists through this representational context to such an extent that that it does not make sense to think of *Spiral Jetty* as an earthwork but rather as a network or spiral of discourses, which—like the earthwork itself as it is submerged, broken down, and encrusted with salt crystals from the lake—is in a constant state of flux. As Gary Shapiro writes in *Earthwards*, his 1995 study of Smithson, "there is no primary, authentic object (the spiral) to which the film and the essay are merely ancillary" (7).

In his essay on the *Spiral Jetty*, Smithson describes visiting Rozel Point and selecting the Site for his earthwork:

> As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizon only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake remained rock still. The shore of the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral (146).[2]

The spiraling landscape is only one of the many spirals that the earthwork simultaneously springs from and refers to. Later in the essay we learn that even the salt crystals of the Great

[2] All quotes from Smithson's writings and interviews are from his *Collected Writings* unless otherwise indicated.

Salt Lake grow in spirals: "Growth in crystal advances around a dislocation point, in the manner of a screw. The *Spiral Jetty* could be considered one layer within the spiraling crystal lattice, magnified trillions of times" (146). This is only the beginning. Smithson continues:

> This description echoes and reflects Brancusi's sketch of James Joyce as a "spiral ear" because it suggests both a visual and an aural scale, in other words it indicates a sense of scale that resonates in the eye and the ear at the same time. Here is a reinforcement and prolongation of spirals that reverberate up and down space and time (147).

In the film *The Spiral Jetty*, Smithson relates the old myth, which was not dispelled until 1870, that a giant whirlpool existed in the middle of the Great Salt Lake, connecting the lake with the Pacific Ocean more than 500 miles away. Smithson's work also recalls Chris Marker's 1962 science fiction film *La Jetée*. The number of spirals multiplies exponentially towards infinity to the extent that it is hard to even distinguish which part represents the work of art and which part the context. With *Spiral Jetty*, Smithson has created a work of art in which different objects, concepts, and abstractions are brought into contact with each other in a spiraling system without any apparent starting point, where each center becomes a dislocation point gesturing elsewhere. This dynamic structure is always changing and can never be brought to a halt. No view, thought, or analysis of the work can transcend it or even represent it in its totality. Like the growing layer of salt crystals encrusted on the earthwork, the growing discourse about the *Spiral Jetty*—each allusion, reference, or analysis of the work—represents additions to an infinite and unrepresentable world. As Smithson warns: "One seizes the spiral, and the spiral becomes a seizure" (147). This dynamic is an example of what Smithson called his dialectics of Site and Nonsite, [3] which he had explored in earlier works.

As I will show, Smithson's artistic practice, including his writing, should be seen not

[3] Smithson is not always consistent with the spelling and capitalization of Site and Nonsite. I have adopted the most prevalent spelling of the two terms.

only in relation to the aesthetic debates raging around the question of objecthood and presentness in the 1960s but also more broadly as part of the global American genealogy and the new global epic.

"Containing the Lack of its Own Containment": The Site/Nonsite Dialectic

With his Site/Nonsite dialectics, Smithson found a way to critique the prevailing geography of the art world, in which America and in particular New York formed the center. In doing so, the dialectics also worked to destabilize the often hidden national assumption about American Modernism that prevailed in the critical discourse of the 1950s and '60s thereby challenging the liberal American hegemony which we also encountered in the previous chapter.

In March of 1968, Smithson held his second one-man show at the Dwan Gallery in Manhattan. Among his sculptures on display was a piece entitled "A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey" that contained, or pointed to, a very different kind of vanishing point. A hexagonal structure imitated an old airfield of the same shape used for firefighting and other government purposes in the Pine Barrens Plains in southern New Jersey. Within the aluminum structure was placed sand from the airfield, which Smithson had visited with a group of fellow artists and gallerists including the minimal artists Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Morris. On the wall next to the aluminum structure was placed a hexagonal map of the area surrounding the airfield. As Robert Hobbs notes in his study of Smithson, this choice of location was anything but coincidental:

> The land [Smithson] selected is composed of trees that are naturally dwarfed. Other forests can be compared with cities like Manhattan in terms of their height and grandeur; by contrast the Pine Barrens is more like the New Jersey suburbs. Unlike many forests, the Pine Barrens is a retired industrial site. In the eighteenth and

> nineteenth centuries it was distinguished as a site for the production of glass, charcoal, and bog iron. It was also probably important to Smithson that in the Miocene Age the Pine Barrens was a large body of land in the Atlantic Ocean, while the rest of the area, including large parts of New Jersey, was under water. In other words, the Pine Barrens was a "positive" land mass in the "negative" of the ocean. Now the prehistoric island is a "negative," a large, mostly uninhabited land area in populous New Jersey: it is both a Site and a Nonsite. (105)

In this, as in his many later pieces, Smithson created pieces that had two parts or nodes: a Nonsite inside a gallery or museum that contained various forms of representations, from maps to real physical objects from the Site, and a Site, usually situated in an uninhabited area. However, as Hobbs hints in the last quoted sentence, the relationship between Site and Nonsite is more complicated than it might seem at first sight. Smithson conceived of this relationship as a dialectic in which each side of the equation simultaneously constructs, stages, and delimits the other.

As many have noted,[4] Smithson's Sites/Nonsites owed a debt of inspiration to the older artist Tony Smith's anecdote about a car ride on the then unfinished New Jersey turnpike, as told in an interview in the journal *Artforum*. As we will see, this anecdote formed the battleground for a contentious debate in the American art world of the 1960s and set up the terms by which Smithson would challenge the prevailing theoretization of American art. Smith told the story by way of explaining the inspirations that started him on the path towards minimalist sculpture:

> When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get onto the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three

[4] See for instance Hobbs 14.

> students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first, I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality that had not had any expression in art.
>
> The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it (386).

In 1966, the year this anecdote was published, Smith's works formed the centerpiece of the exhibition "Primary Structures" at the Jewish Museum in New York, surrounded by the sculptures of artists he had helped inspire such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, as well as a young Robert Smithson.

Every detail of this anecdote is significant. That Smith was in a new kind of territory is underlined by the empty road of the New Jersey turnpike, a tabula rasa without any markings or signifiers yet attached to it. It is also worth noting that Smith broke the law; he transgressed beyond an established boundary in order to gain his new insight into the nature of art. As we will see, Smith's anecdote itself was perceived as a dangerous transgression against the purity of art. The geographical location of this transgression is also worth noting. When Smith drove down the turnpike, as well as when the story was published, New York City was the center of

the global art world, while New Jersey, where Smith himself was born and raised—as was Smithson—had no independent existence as an artistic scene. Traveling from Manhattan to the marginal space of the Meadowlands was an act of decentering.

The occurrence that Smith describes has since become a well-established, if not clichéd, social and cultural touchstone, referenced in numerous cultural productions from the Bruce Springsteen song "State Trooper" to the opening credits of the HBO television show *The Sopranos*, and experienced by millions, if not billions, of drivers and passengers over the last sixty years, but at the time there was something so revolutionary about this transgressive ride that it helped change America's conception of art. The New Jersey turnpike was built in the postwar boom of the late 1940s and early 50s to ease the traffic created by out-of-state cars on New Jersey's existing roads, and as such it was part of an effort to preserve the Garden State by keeping its regular roads free of interstate traffic. However, as Smith seems acutely aware, the turnpike was part of a new industrial or post-industrial landscape that, more than anything else, came to characterize New Jersey as the United States rose to global economic and military ascendancy. The highway, and in particular the New Jersey turnpike, constitutes an intermediary location, a space of flux between specific places, and while driving on the highway, one occupies an absent time between presents. The state of transport and flux and the relation of the Jersey periphery to the center of New York City became embodied in the turnpike, a structure that in its turn came to symbolize the state itself—a state that has itself in turn worked as a shorthand symbol of the decline of American industrial power with its landfills, ruins, wastelands, and superfund sites. This process happened precisely between the time of Smith's car ride itself in the early fifties and the relation of the anecdote to Wagstaff Jr. in 1966.

Smithson mentioned Smith's anecdote approvingly numerous times, most importantly

in the two articles, "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site" from 1967 and "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" from 1968. However, where Smith attempted to replicate the turnpike experience in the gallery room with sculptures such as his large steel cube *Die,* and minimalists such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd followed Smith in trying to create what Fried would call "theatrical situations" inside the gallery or museum space, Smithson's answer to Smith's challenge was far more radical.

In a sense, like Smith's sculptures, the Nonsites, were attempts to confine experiences within immobile sculptures, but this gesture only represented half of the work of art for Smithson. The Nonsites thematized the necessarily limited nature of the representation of the artist visiting the Site—and of representation more generally. As such, Smithson's sculptures incarnated a critique of the minimalists.[5] Smithson's Nonsites represented the necessarily limited nature of art itself, as Smithson writes toward the end of "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects":

> Yet, if art is art it must have limits. How can one contain this 'oceanic' site? I have developed the Non-Site, which in a physical way contains the disruption of the site. The container is in a sense a fragment itself, something that could be called a three-dimensional map. Without appeal to 'gestalts' or 'anti-form,' it actually exists as a fragment of a greater fragmentation. It is a three-dimensional perspective that has broken away from the whole, while containing the lack of its own containment. There are no mysteries in these vestiges, no traces of an end or a beginning (111).

The Nonsite is a fragment that points to something else, a work that demonstrates its own

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[5] In an interview given in 1973, the year of his death, Smithson looked back at the work of the minimalists and passed the following judgment on their work: "[I]n terms of the general attitude within Minimal art, there's still the attempt to try to create an object that's complete in itself, and non-relational, and self-relational. These specific objects, so called, are isolated and supposed to be viewed in isolation. I think this is true of the readymades as well. There's an acute sense of isolation and disconnectedness with the rest of the complex. They're supposed to exist outside of history, outside of time, outside of names even" (Roth, 84).

incompleteness, and that rejects any totality on the part of the work of art as it exists in the gallery.[6]

If the Site is associated with a particular feeling of openness, and that feeling is what artists such as Smith and Smithson wanted to represent, then the problem becomes how to encapsulate and contain within an individual work of art a subjective experience that occurred in a place removed from the world of galleries and museums. Smith's sculptures functioned like a metaphor for an experience the artist had somewhere outside in the world, and the minimalists followed him in their attempt to create and contain the spectator's experience inside the gallery space.

Smithson, on the other hand, finding this approach too limited, invited his spectators to leave the gallery and visit the Site.

This course of action implies an institutional critique of the art world. Yet however sharp this condemnation, Smithson never fully left the galleries or museums. Rather, he incorporated his critique of the institution into his Site/Nonsite pieces. In a forum with the artists Michael Heizer and Dennis Oppenheim (who had also worked directly with earth and the landscape), Smithson explained the dialectic between the inside of the Nonsite and the outside of the Site in the following way:

> There's a central focus point which is the non-site; the site is the unfocused fringe where your mind loses its boundaries and a sense of the oceanic pervades, as it were. I like the idea of quiet catastrophes taking place… The interesting thing about the site is that, unlike the non-site, it throws you out to the fringes. In other words, there's nothing to grasp onto except the cinders and there's no way of focusing on a particular place. One might even say that the place has absconded or been lost. This is a map that

[6] As Hobbs relates (104), there was a small notice on the wall by "A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey" offering artist-led tours to the Pine Barrens, so the spectator could experience the uncontainable "oceanic" Site.

> will take you somewhere, but when you get there you won't really know where you are. In a sense the non-site is the center of the system, and the site itself is the fringe or the edge. […] That is why I like it, because in a sense the whole site tends to evaporate. The closer you think you're getting to it and the more you circumscribe it, the more it evaporates. It becomes like a mirage and it just disappears. The site is a place where a piece should be but isn't. The piece that should be there is now somewhere else, usually in a room. Actually everything that's of any importance takes place outside the room. But the room reminds us of the limitations of our condition (249-50).

The Nonsite, then, comes to stand for the very impossibility of representing the Site and its feeling of openness.[7] It draws attention to its own inadequacy and decenters the spectator by making her aware that, as Smithson puts it, something important is taking place elsewhere.

The Nonsites allow Smithson to criticize New York as the center of the art world (and art as an institution more broadly) while still being a part of it. Indeed, the Nonsites thematized his own position within the institutional system that constitutes modern art, as well as within New York—and in particular the small, seemingly self-sufficient world comprised of the galleries and museums of downtown Manhattan, Chelsea, SoHo, and Midtown. Smithson continually emphasizes the dialectical relation between Manhattan and its elsewheres, whether it be Passaic, New Jersey (in the article "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic"), Yucatan, Mexico (in "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan"), or the Utahan desert (in the *Spiral Jetty*). This relationship is always focalized through the Site/Nonsite dialectic where the Nonsite of Manhattan becomes the limited but necessary abstraction of its Sites. This move allows Smithson to acknowledge his privileged position by simultaneously recognizing the importance of New York, without which he would not even be able to produce art, and yet

[7] In a conversation with the artist Dennis Wheeler, Smithson emphasizes that the Nonsite is "the abstract equivalent of the site… There is no representational aspect between those two things" (199).

also emphasizing the importance of the peripheral Sites—in effect decentering the center of the art world.

New York was not always the center of the world of fine arts. If the film industry functioned something like a leading indicator of American hegemony, as I argued in the previous chapter—soaring in the 1920s and 30s before the United States had fully assumed its role as center of the economic world-system and deteriorating in the 1950s and 60s as a harbinger of the economic pivot from industry and manufacture to high finance—then the world of fine arts tended more towards the opposite end of the spectrum as a lagging economic indicator. As late as at the end of the Second World War, most eyes in America and the world were turned to Paris as the global cultural center, the only place from which anything new within the world of painting and sculpture could materialize. During and after the war, however, it dawned on a growing number of Americans—artists and critics, as well as politicians and the intelligence community—that the U.S. needed a fine-arts scene that corresponded to its leading positions in other fields. As the publisher Jason Epstein later put it:

> America—and especially New York—had now become the centre of the world politically and financially and, of course, it had become the centre culturally too. Well, what would a great power be without an appropriate art? You couldn't be a great power if you didn't have art to go with it, like Venice without Tintoretto or Florence without Giotto" (Quoted from Saunders, 255).

The rise of Abstract Expressionism came as a welcome solution to this problem. In his book with the slightly misleading title *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, Serge Guilbaut shows how the rise of Abstract Expressionism allowed a number of critics to paint America and in particular New York as the center of the art world.

In the eyes of critics like Clement Greenberg, if not in those of the artists themselves,

Abstract Expressionism had by the end of the 1940s come to symbolize the unfettered exercise of individual freedom closely aligned with the doctrine put forth in *The Vital Center*, the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s manifesto for liberalism (see Guilbaut 189-94). As Guilbaut notes (190), it was exactly by ostensibly depoliticizing itself that the new American art lent itself to a whole range of politicizations. Abstract Expressionism not only marshaled in a new era with New York as the center of the world of fine arts, it was also actually used by the CIA and other intelligence agencies as a weapon in the fight against communist influence in Europe and elsewhere. In her book The *Cultural Cold War* (252-78), Frances Stonor Saunders has shown how politicians, the intelligence community, as well as by critics and gallery owners marketed Abstract Expressionism as the quintessential American art form with Jackson Pollock starring in the role of a ruggedly individualistic cowboy-painter. At the center of this plot was Nelson Rockefeller, president of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, connected to the CIA, and later in the fifties, the special adviser on Cold War strategy to President Eisenhower. Rockefeller, who referred to Abstract Expressionism as "free enterprise painting," organized several traveling exhibitions of American artists who only decades earlier had been active members of leftist organizations in order to convince Europeans of the superiority of the centrist, liberal American cultural model.

This "depoliticized" (and therefore, as Guilbaut reminds us, deeply political) social aesthetic theory—was promulgated, it should be remembered, more by critics and curators than the artists themselves; from it came a novel formalist theory of the history of art in which a progressive, modernist pursuit of newness became confined to strictly formal and inter-generic developments rather than any political, societal, or historical context. The architect and foremost proselytizer of this theory was the critic Clement Greenberg, who helped launch the international careers of Pollock and the other Abstract Expressionists—and

who up until the mid-60s was one of the most, if not the most, influential person within the world of American fine arts.

In his short text "Modernist Painting" from 1961, he laid out his theory of art history as it pertained to painting. According to Greenberg, Modernism starts with Immanuel Kant, who in his philosophy was the first to criticize critique itself: "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (5). Thus, this immanent process of self-criticism within each discipline unfolds gradually, as each discipline comes into its own—a simplified version of Hegel's phenomenology of spirit. Greenberg also implies that because the artist is so immersed in Modernism's immanent self-criticism that it becomes invisible to him, it becomes the responsibility of the critic, who has the distance and abstraction that comes from the synthesizing of several decades of art history, to clearly discern the truth of the art, something the artist is not himself aware of.

It was this aesthetic ideology of inwardness and alienation, detached from any relationship with politics, sociality, and even possible connections and common purposes between arts and artists that Tony Smith transgressed against with his famous car ride. By the time the anecdote was published in the pages of *Artforum* in 1966, the backlash against the Cold War liberal aesthetic of Greenberg and others had been underway for some time. Pop art, minimalism, Fluxus, happenings, conceptual art, performance art, and installation art had arrived on the scene or were just about to emerge.

The old guard, however, did not give up without a fight. For the June 1967 issue of *Artforum*, the young art historian, critic, and Clement Greenberg acolyte Michael Fried wrote an essay entitled "Art and Objecthood" arguing against the kind of art for which Smith had come to stand. Fried argued that what defines minimalism (and many other new art

movements) is its adherence to what he calls "theatre," which is, as he writes, "now the negation of art" (125): it is "at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such—and to the extent that the different arts can be described as modernist, with modernist sensibility as such" (139). This "theatre" or "theatricality" is defined as non-art that relies on a situation that might include the artist himself, the spectator, and other contextual circumstances, whereas true modernist art displays a presentness and instantaneousness. Although Fried's conceptual dichotomy of modernism and theatricality sometimes tends toward the vague and mystical, his distinction between modernism and theatricality is generally clear and useful. Theatrical art relies on the objecthood of its artworks, the fact that the works are objects among others in the world, whereas modernist works transcend this objecthood. As Fried writes at the end of the article:

> I want to call attention to the utter pervasiveness—the virtual universality—of the sensibility or mode of being that I have characterized as corrupted or perverted by theatre. We are all literalists most or all of our lives. Presentness is grace." (147).

One of the main characteristics of theatre, as Fried writes in a paragraph assailing the works of John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, and Susan Sontag, is that it facilitates "the illusion that the barriers between the arts are in the process of crumbling […] and that the arts themselves are at last sliding towards some kind of final, implosive, hugely desirable synthesis" (141). The hyperbole of the claim notwithstanding—not many artists in the 60s actually advocated the kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is being conjured up—Fried is right to note that a dissatisfaction with inherited genre boundaries was at the center of much of the new art in question.

The central example of the new theatricality in Fried's article is Smith's turnpike anecdote. Although Fried admits that Smith's story makes for "compelling reading," he sees it as a catastrophic turn of events in the history of art:

> What seems to have been revealed to Smith that night was the pictorial nature of painting—even, one might say, the conventional nature of art. And this Smith seems to have understood not as laying bare the essences of art, but as announcing its end. In comparison with the unmarked, unlit, all but unstructured turnpike—more precisely, with the turnpike as experienced from within the car, traveling on it—art appears to have struck Smith as almost absurdly small (131).

By invoking Smith and his car ride, then, Smithson was throwing in his lot with the newly politicized adherents of the return to avant-garde practices and theories. By challenging the prevailing notions of American Modernism, as set forth by Greenberg and Fried, Smithson not only opted for a more inclusive conception of art, he also challenged the notion of America and New York as the hegemonic center of an ostensibly apolitical liberal modern art movement of alienated individuals. Freeing himself from the constraints of liberal individualism allowed Smithson to formulate his own novel poetics of place and environment—which is to say, of Site.

"I Cannot Discover This Oceanic Feeling in Myself": Oceanic Sites

It is in Smithson's Sites and in his writings on nature and the environment that the true radical nature of his vision becomes most clear. More than simply decentering the art world, Smithson's Sites open up a space exterior to the work of art as well as to human consciousness. It is this opening up towards the "great outdoors" which marks Smithson's practice as belonging to the global American genealogy: not only does he deconstruct the national myth of the artist as rugged and alienated individualist; he also forges new ways of thinking and representing infinite totalities, making his works part of the tradition of the new global epics as well as harking back to an older tradition of American literature of the environment.

Although much of Smithson's practice focuses on the environment, Smithson had an idiosyncratic view of nature. He mistrusted any reference to the organic in his work and his writing. He criticized what he saw as a pervasive biological metaphor of gradual progression expressed in artistic theory and practice since the Renaissance (and culminating with Greenberg and Fried's writings on Abstract Expressionism) in favor of a conception of art based on entropy and the greater (and nonhuman) timespan of geology.[8] For Smithson, the discourse around modern art too easily coalesces into a simplified Hegelian dialectic of steady and assured evolution.

Smithson's discussion of Sites and Nonsites evinces his devotion to geologic and inorganic metaphors and materials. The Sites are nearly always deserts and postindustrial landscapes without much plant or animal life.[9] The Nonsites, likewise, consisted of geometric forms often inspired by the structures of crystals, which in turn emphasized the shapes and materials of the art gallery rooms. In his early essay "The Crystal Land," Smithson writes about an expedition to rock quarries in Northern New Jersey with Donald Judd, when he started seeing geological structures everywhere:

> Most of the houses are painted white, but many are painted petal pink, frosted mint, buttercup, fudge, rose beige, antique green, Cape Cod brown, lilac, and so on. The highways crisscross through the towns and become man-made geological networks of concrete. In fact, the entire landscape has a mineral presence. From the shiny chrome diners to glass windows of shopping centers, a sense of the crystalline prevails. (8)

What is missing from this description is any reference to human or any other kind of life.

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[8] See for instance Smithson's article "Quasi-Infinites and the Waning of Space," where he writes: "The study of anatomy since the Renaissance lead to a notion of art in terms of biology. Although anatomy is rarely taught in our art schools, the metaphors of anatomical and biological science linger in the minds of some of our most abstract artists.[…] Biological science has since the nineteenth century infused in most people's minds an unconscious faith in 'creative evolution.' An intelligible dissatisfaction with this faith is very much in evidence in the work of certain artists". (35-36)

[9] The very first Site/Nonsite in the Pine Barrens makes an important exception.

Smithson acknowledges that the highways and diners are man-made, but the emphasis is on the materials themselves, as if the arrangement of geologic materials into shopping centers and turnpikes simply represented another form of erosion or desedimentation of materials equivalent to the effects of the convergence of tectonic plates.

This equation of built environments and empty natural settings represents one of Smithson's crowning achievements. The claim that the placelessness of the desert is mirrored by the crystalline structures of diners, art galleries, and airports[10] has only become more compelling since Smithson first made it, as new placeless placescontinue to proliferate everywhere all across the globe. Smithson's writings are full of references to what he referred to as places of entropy, the often-unnoticed spaces we occupy as we travel between one place and another. As he noted in a conversation with the artist Allan Kaprow: "I'm interested for the most part in what's not happening, that area between events which could be called the gap. This gap exists in the blank and void regions or settings that we never look at. A museum devoted to different kinds of emptiness could be developed" (44). Instead of participating in Fried's transcendent grace of presentness, Smithson wanted to use the museum space to examine and even celebrate its own placelessness.

Smithson's use of both the thermodynamic and communicative senses of the concept of entropy to describe his placeless places should also be taken as a critique of the biological metaphors of progress that pervaded the world of art. He makes this point clear in "Entropy and the New Monuments," his first article for *Artforum* from 1966:

> Time as decay or biological evolution is eliminated by many of these artists [that is, the minimalists and, by implication, Smithson himself]; this displacement allows the eye to see time as an infinity of surfaces or structures, or both combined, without the burden

[10] As Reynolds has shown, Smithson came up with the idea for the Site/Nonsites when he was working as an artistic consultant on the construction of an airport (134-63)

> of what Roland Barthes calls the "undifferentiated mass of organic sensation."[…] Problems are unnecessary because problems represent values that create the illusion of purpose. The problem of "form vs. content," for example, leads to illusionistic dialectics that become, at best, formalist reactions against content. Reaction follows action, till finally the artist gets "tired" and settles for a monumental inaction." (11-12)

The focus on the inorganic, on the neglected and placeless places, thus becomes a way out of the dialectic progression of art history. This entropic response to a simplified Hegelian dialectic confronts the artist with the material world, which is also one of entropy: "As the cloying effect of such 'values' wears off, one perceives the 'facts' of the outer edge, the flat surface, the banal, the empty, the cool, blank after blank; in other words, that infinitesimal condition known as entropy" (13). With his placeless Sites, Smithson attempts to break down the biological metaphors that regulate all discourses on art.

Despite Smithson's devotion to the truly longue durée of geologic time, his writing and practice correspond exactly to postwar pivot from industrial to post-industrial production. A few decades or even a few years earlier, the abandoned industrial landscapes of Passaic, Bayonne, or any of the other Sites Smithson found in New Jersey would have been filled with workers and not the geological fossils of an earlier era that Smithson evokes. Smithson is keenly aware of this fact, noting the similarities between contemporary architecture and the new wave of artists that included himself and the minimalists,[11] stating in "Entropy and the New Monuments" that "the slurbs, urban sprawl, and the infinite number of housing developments of the postwar boom have contributed to the architecture of entropy" (13).

Smithson's Site/Nonsite dialectic was an attempt to provide a solution to the problem of containment, of how to express the limitlessness of the entropic Site within a work of art.

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[11] Most notably in the article "Ultramoderne"

The adjective with which Smithson associated the expression of the infinite was that of the "oceanic," a concept whose rich history Smithson was keenly aware of.[12]

Sigmund Freud introduced what he called "the oceanic feeling" in the first pages of his *Civilization and its* Discontents (1929) with an anecdote:

> It is a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, 'oceanic'. This feeling, he adds, is a purely subjective fact, not an article of faith; it brings with it no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious energy which is seized upon by the various Churches and religious systems, directed by them into particular channels, and doubtless also exhausted by them. One may, he thinks, rightly call oneself religious on the grounds of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion.
>
> The views expressed by the friend whom I so much honour, and who himself once praised the magic of illusion in a poem, caused me no small difficulty. I cannot discover this 'oceanic' feeling in myself (11).[13]

Freud's connected the oceanic feeling to an early stage in the development of the ego.[14] In other words, the ego is at first oceanic and at one with the world but then it differentiates itself and becomes distinct. As described by Lacan in his article about the mirror stage, the oceanic

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[12] Discussing Smith's turnpike anecdote (and Michael Fried's response to it) in "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," Smithson writes: "He is talking about a sensation, not the finished work of art; this doesn't imply that he is anti-art. Smith is describing the state of his mind in the 'primary process' of making contact with matter. This process is called by Anton Ehrenzweig 'dedifferentiation', and it involves a suspended question regarding 'limitlessness' (Freud's notion of the 'oceanic') that goes back to *Civilization, and its Discontents*. Michael Fried's shock at Smith's experiences shows that the critic's sense of limit cannot risk the rhythm of dedifferentiation that swings between 'oceanic' fragmentation and strong determinants" (103).

[13] In later editions of the book, Freud added a footnote disclosing that the unnamed friend was in fact the French author, musicologist, peace activist, and Nobel laureate in literature Romain Rolland with whom Freud had corresponded since the early 1920s.

[14] "[O]riginally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it. If we may assume that there are many people in whose mental life this primary ego-feeling has persisted to a greater or less degree, it would exist in them side by side with the narrower and more sharply demarcated ego-feeling of maturity, like a kind of counterpart to it" (15).

represents the pre-mirror stage of the psyche, before the subject's entry into the imaginary and symbolic orders (75-81).[15] However, as Freud admits, the oceanic feeling might persist in some people alongside the differentiated ego as an accessible trace—or fossil—of the earlier stage of oneness with the world. In short, the oceanic might describe what in religious terms is often described as mysticism. With his writings on the oceanic feeling, Freud opened up a path of inquiry into the relationship between psychoanalysis and mystical experiences.[16]

When Smithson mentions the oceanic, however, it is not only with reference to the Freud of *Civilization and its Discontents*, but also with a nod to the theories of the Austrian art historian Anton Ehrenzweig, who attempted to apply Freudian psychoanalytic theories to the study of modern art. In his 1967 *The Hidden Order of Art,* Ehrenzweig argues that artists in general and modern artists in particular proceed by way of a process he terms "dedifferentiation," a breaking down of the boundaries between the self and the world in order to reach an oceanic consciousness:

> As we reach the deepest oceanic levels of dedifferentiation the boundaries between the inside and outside world melt away and we feel engulfed and trapped inside the work of art. The initial stages of dedifferentiation (that are still near the surface level of attention) could still be called preconscious, though the beginning blur and vagueness indicate the lapse of the surface functions. The deepest oceanic experience, however, dissolves space and time itself, which are the very modes by which our reason works. It could not be called preconscious by the widest stretch of the term. (119-120)

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[15] At least in the somewhat simplified form in which Lacan's concept of the mirror stage is usually represented: shortly after the infant recognizes itself, and thereby creates a fictional unity, it looks towards the parent for recognition and approval. If the glance into the mirror marks the entrance to the imaginary order, the look towards the parent is the birth of the big Other and with that the symbolic order. However, as Bruce Fink points out (5-6), complicating this relation of events, every infant already has a place in the symbolic order before even being born, through the acts of naming and other incorporations into language. It would therefore be wrong to see in Lacan's theory any stage of development completely unblemished by the imaginary and symbolic orders. I will return to the relationship between the oceanic and Lacan's concept of the real in the following.

[16] See Parson for a good summary on this tradition.

Ehrenzweig's distinction between the superficial, preconscious state and deeper oceanic feeling is significant because the deepest oceanic feeling does not simply represent a regression to a previous, more primitive stage of consciousness, as in Freud, but rather to another kind of consciousness altogether: a different but equally valid perspective on the world than the differentiated ego's habitual point-of-view. It is also worth noting how Ehrenzweig describes the deepest oceanic feeling as the dissolution of space and time (the pure Kantian intuitions [*Anschauungen*] defined in *Critique of Pure Reason),* in favor of another kind of connection with the world. There is no surprise in the fact that an artist such as Smithson, engaged in a dispute with an aesthetic doctrine based on Kantian categories, such as Greenberg's, found Ehrenzweig's promise of the dissolution of the most fundamental framework of Kantian philosophy appealing. And yet a feeling, however oceanic, is not in itself a work of art. As Smithson saw, Ehrenzweig's theories give rise to a new set of problems concerning the representation or containment of experiences.

We have already noted the possible connection between Smithson's Site/Nonsite dialectic and Lacan's theory of the mirror stage. In Smithson's oeuvre, the creation of the Site/Nonsite functions almost exactly like the mirror stage: the initial oceanic feeling is mirrored in a Nonsite, an abstract representation of the Site and the oceanic feeling that comes to stand in for the thing it represents. In this analogy, then, the creation of the work of art projects a fictitious containment and unity that was not initially part of the oceanic feeling—which is characterized by infinity and limitlessness. The work of art creates a symbolic network, a dialectic, which in turn incorporates or covers everything. However, the creation of the of the Site/Nonsite dialectic does not foreclose the possibility of experiencing the oceanic at the Site—should the spectator choose to travel to the Pine Barrens, Bayonne, Rozel Point, or Mono Lake. In other words, similar to the way in which one can escape the

simplified dialectical and evolutionary progress-narrative history of art based on biological metaphors, one can also break free of the second (Site/Nonsite) dialectic and actually experience the oceanic feeling that supposedly gave rise to the work of art at the Site.

As Parsons argues (134), the oceanic feeling and mystical experience form an important component of Lacan's concepts of *jouissance* and the Real. Indeed, the order of the Real performs a function remarkably similar to Freud's oceanic: it is what exists before the advent of the imaginary and symbolic orders, but also alongside these as an infinite, never completely symbolizable framework. [17] The relationship between the Real and the Symbolic is that between the infinite and finite. Lacan's solution to this problem was to turn to the language of mathematical set theory, the branch of mathematics invented by Georg Cantor in the nineteenth century that expresses different orders of infinity. [18] Lacan's use of set theory to express the infinite Real was later taken up by Alain Badiou. [19]

In Badiou's ontology, events—the radically new—emerge from what he terms sites ("sites" in French), elements on the edge of Being that open up toward the possibility of an event. [20] Similar to Deleuze's time-images discussed in the previous chapters, Badiou's sites are places of potentiality. In Logics of Worlds, Badiou writes of the site that it appears as "the fulminant and entirely unpredictable beginning of a break with the very thing that regulates its appearance (though this break is still devoid of a concept)" (365). A better description of

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[17] Lacan's discussion of mystical experience in his Seminar XX sheds more light on the relations between the oceanic and the Real. For Lacan, the phallus is the signifier that marks the entry into the Symbolic and the (at least partial) foreclosure of the Real. There is however, as Lacan tells us, a "jouissance beyond the phallus" (74), a jouissance that does not rely on the Symbolic. Lacan associates this jouissance with the female position and with mysticism:" There are men who are just as good as women. It happens. And who also feel just fine about it. Despite—I won't say their phallus—despite what encumbers them that goes by that name, they get the idea or sense that there must be a jouissance that is beyond. Those are the ones we call mystics (76).

[18] See for instance the discussion of "the set of signifiers" (694) in the article "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire."

[19] For Badiou's use of set theory to express infinity, see "Infinity: the other, the rule and the Other," the thirteenth mediation of *Being and Event* (142-149). He returns to this fundamental point numerous times; see for instance the chapter "Inexistence of the Whole" in *Logics of Worlds* (109-111).

[20] See *Being and Event* 173-78 and *Logics of Worlds* 355-380.

Smithson's concept of the Site would be hard to find. Precisely like Badiou's site, Smithson's Site represents the possibility—but not the guarantee—of an opening towards the radically new, the outside, through the breakdown of the transcendent logic of the world that governs its appearance.

In his 2006 *After Finitude*, in a language that bears more than a passing resemblance to Smithson's, the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux writes:

> For it could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the great outdoors, the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere (7).

This "Great Outdoors," which Badiou terms "the void," and which relates back to Lacan's order of the Real and Freud's oceanic, is exactly what Smithson attempts to represent with his Site/Nonsites. Meillassoux, like Smithson, frames his inquiry with vast timespans of geological change, asking how we can understand an outside entirely relative to human consciousness and its correlation with the world. With the serendipitous constellation between Smithson's theories and the more recent philosophical concepts of Badiou's site and Meillassoux's Great Outdoors, it seems that contemporary philosophy has finally caught up with Smithson's artistic practice. However, Smithson's work also recalled an reframed an earlier strain of American letters focused on the explanatory power of nature and the environment.

In her study *Fieldworks*, Lytle Shaw writes that "Smithson has become, for recent poets, a precedent on par with Williams and Olson" (4). Shaw's seminal work has done much to place Smithson within the tradition of American poetry, specifically between William Carlos

Williams and Charles Olson (incidentally both writers of epics) and later poets such as Bernadette Mayer, Clark Coolidge, and Barret Watten. While it is not surprising that Smithson's work has chiefly been studied as part of a history of visual art, his writing also places him within a tradition of American writings about the environment that stretches back further than Williams's Paterson and Olson's Gloucester, to the essays of the transcendentalists.

I argue that we should view Smithson's texts as part of an American tradition of writing about the environment that emerges most clearly in the transcendentalist writings of Emerson. In his essay "Nature," Emerson lays out his famous theory of the transparent eyeball:

> Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, — master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty (18-19).

Not only is this one of the first examples of the kind of environmental writing we find in Smithson and the American poets of the twentieth century mentioned by Shaw, [21] it also, I would emphasize, very closely mirrors, conceptually as well as stylistically, Smithson's description of the Site for *Spiral Jetty*. Both Emerson and Smithson portray a quasi-mystic experience that puts them into contact with a literally limitless universe—both convey an aesthetic practice in which the environment expresses itself through the artist.

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[21] As Lawrence Buell writes in his *The Future of Environmental Criticism* "Nature" is "the first canonical work of US literature to unfold a theory of nature with special reference to poetics" (13).

To access and then represent infinity through the confined human subject, reduced to a pure state of perception, and through the necessarily limited work of art or text, becomes the central philosophical and aesthetic concern for both Emerson and Smithson. How does one express something literally infinite in a finite form when one can always go further and include more? In his essay "Circles," Emerson touches on this problematics when he writes that, "Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens" (193). As we will see, this question—how can one contain the limitless outside?— forms the impetus of what we might think of as Smithson's poetics of the Site.

It is not insignificant that Emerson finds this limitlessness in nature.[22] Nature, for Emerson, represents the totality of the universe that the world of human interaction normally conceals. Just as Smithson, with his Site/Nonsites points to a world beyond the Manhattan art scene where the logic of representation breaks down, Emerson uses his experience in nature to deconstruct the all-too-human categories that regulate everyday experience and consciousness. Chief among these regulating ideas is the nation. In her *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet,* Ursula K. Heise argues that environmental writing such as that of Emerson often participates in what she calls "Eco-cosmopolitanism," which by reaching "toward what some environmental writers and philosophers have called the 'more-than-human world'—the realm of nonhuman species, but also that of connectedness with both animate and inanimate networks of influence and

[22] Emerson is, of course, not alone in this. Henry David Thoreau, that other pioneer of American environmental literature is on the same page in *Walden* when he writes: "I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. […]I desire to speak somewhere without bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression" (324, emphasis in original).

exchange" (61) helps forge a global consciousness beyond the nationalism of individual nation states.[23] The same can be said for Smithson.

For Smithson, the Site par excellence, the one example of the environment that he kept going back to, was the desert. An entropic Site that displayed the infinite, placeless qualities he sought to evoke with his works. It is no coincidence that both Sergio Leone and Smithson, like the Christian desert fathers before them, turn towards the desert in their search for the new.[24] Both artists make use of the desert to break down the categories that restrain them. The epic instance in Leone, the one moment that connects the story of the Western to larger worlds, thus resemble Smithson's Nonsites. Each Nonsite is an epic instance that literally opens up a world of possibility.

And yet, privileged the placeless desert is within the practice of Leone and Smithson, it should not lead us to view it as a landscape with intrinsic exceptional qualities, a place where nationalist narratives and Kantian modes of perception somehow magically lose their power. Rather, the desert is simply one place—privileged, perhaps, but not different in kind—that can function as a Site—a frontier between the known and the unknown. The oceanic experience of radical opening towards potentiality might be easier to find in the deserts or the distant past of the Silurian age, but once it is established, it begins to appear everywhere. As Thoreau writes in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*: "The frontiers are not east or west, north or south; but wherever a man fronts a fact, though that fact be a neighbor, there is an unsettled wilderness between him and Canada, between him and the setting sun, or, farther still, between him and it" (323-24). No longer a space of national renewal, the frontier with Thoreau and

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[23] For more on Emerson as a global thinker, see Dimock 23-51.

[24] This comparison is far from coincidental. Smithson was raised as a Roman Catholic and alluded to the mysticism of the desert fathers in several of his paintings from the early sixties. As Reynolds shows (336), he was still reading about the desert fathers when he died.

Smithson becomes an ontological Site of potentiality.

This is the true significance of Smithson's insight, discussed earlier, from his first long article "The Crystal Land," that all of Northern New Jersey with its diners, malls, and highways appears as a giant man-made sedimentation of geological material. New Jersey, however, is hardly the only frontier where the occurrence of a geological perspective can open up the world towards new possibilities. For Smithson, language becomes one such Site of rupture. As he writes in the famous first paragraph of "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects:"

> The earth's surface and the figments of the mind have a way of disintegrating into discrete regions of art. Various agents, both fictional and real, somehow trade places with each other—one cannot avoid muddy thinking when it comes to earth projects, or what I will call "abstract geology." One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallization break apart into deposits of gritty reason. Vast moving faculties occur in this geological miasma, and they move in the most physical way. This movement seems motionless, yet it crushes the landscape of logic under glacial reveries. This slow flowage makes one conscious of the turbidity of thinking. Slump, debris slides, avalanches all take place within the cracking limits of the brain. (100)

The unconscious might be structured like a language but language is structured like geologic sedimentations.[25] This observation is usually taken as a license to read Smithson as a full-fledged deconstructionist: if language is like rocks, then rocks, and everything else must be

[25] Eyers argues that, as in Smithson, for Lacan there is an element of language outside of the Symbolic and closer to the Real. He proposes a distinction between the signifier-in-relation and signifier-in-isolation: "These concepts are intended to condense Lacan's multifarious terms relating to language into their most pertinent, opposing characteristics: the signifier-in-relation designates the signifier as it exists negatively, defined purely by relation to other signifiers and producing meaning as the result of its perpetual displacement along the axes of metaphor and metonymy, while the signifier- in- isolation designates the signifier as Real, isolated in its material element away from the networks of relation that render it conducive to meaning." (38)

like language, and thus there is truly nothing outside of the text. [26] Contrary to this view, I propose that we read what we might call Smithson's philosophy of language as a radical materialism.[27] If it is true that language, and in particular Smithson's writings, can function as Nonsites to his sculptures, this does not forgo the possibility that language can also be a Site, an opening towards the great outdoors. As we saw was the case in the *Spiral Jetty*, the Site and the Nonsite of language infiltrate each other. As Smithson writes in the article "Language to be Looked at and/or Things to be Read," "My sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas—i.e., 'printed matter'" (61) Like a New Jersey quarry, the Utahan desert, or the human brain, language is made up of material and therefore represents a possible outside to consciousness, and a possible Site for the oceanic.[28] It is with this insight in mind we turn towards one final work of Smithson's.

Smithson's piece "STRATA A GEOPHOTOGRAPHIC FICTION" from the fall 1970 issue of the journal *Aspen* is a three-page epic, a reverse history of the earth from the Cretaceous to the Pre-Cambrian period. Each geological period is represented by a photograph of a fossil from that period and by a block of text in all capitals of the same size as the picture. The whole piece appears as a column of text and language, like a drill core sample; the words and the pictures are arranged as material in geological strata. Smithson is here using

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[26] Unsurprisingly, Smithson's practice has invited many comparisons with the philosophy of Derrida and in particular his concept of différance and the critique of the metaphysics of presence. Indeed, such readings of Smithson have been crucial in ascertaining the stakes of his work. However, such readings often overlook exactly how Smithson's dialectics function. While it is true that the Nonsite is a necessary and constitutive supplement to the Site, as writing is to speech according to Derrida, the trace of the Nonsite is not suppressed in what would be a classical metaphysical gesture as described by Derrida (see for instance Of Grammatology or "Différance". In Smithson's discourse on the Site there is always a suggestion, if of not an absolute presence beyond the play of différance, then rather of a potential opening up to a new kind of experience of the material world.

[27] Again, Eyers point to a possible corollary in Lacan's thought: "Where such an aversion to totalization differs from Derridean deconstruction, and other post- deconstructive contemporary philosophies of difference, is in the willingness of Lacan to assert bold theses that have implications for the totality of human experience in a manner that is never reducible to claims about language only." (121)

[28] It is safe to say that Smithson's conception of language has been hugely influential among poets and writers from the late 1960s onward. For more on Smithson's reception history among writers see Perloff, Kotz, and Shaw.

text as material in an even more radical sense than his previous articles, as if the blocks of text were actual material fossilized remains from the prehistoric periods they describe. The piece reads as a journey back in time, reminiscent of geological layers of sedimentation from the surface of the earth and downward, creating the impression of reading the earth itself.[29] The text represents each period in a characteristic Smithsonian manner with an assemblage (or epic catalogue) of descriptions of geological and biological developments and reflections on representing the distant past interspersed with disguised and obvious quotes. The first part of the text denoting the Silurian Period reads as follows:

> SEAWEEDS WITH LIMY SKELETONS. SUBMARINE THROUGHS DEEPEN. STONE-LILIES. BRIGHT COLORED POLYPS SPREAD. NEW MOUNTAIN RANGES APPEAR, THEIR NAMES ARE IMMATERIAL—DULL DESCRIPTIONS IN A BOOK. THESE SILURIAN TERRAINS EXIST BY CONCEALMENT. NOTHING BUT BLAND REFERENCES TO A VAGUE SET OF GEOLOGIC FORMATIONS. THE EARTH DIPS OUT OF SIGHT. ALL THE ACTIVITY IS LOST UNDER THE LIMPID OCEANS. ALL IS SEDIMENTATION AND AIMLESS EFFORT. THE SILURIAN NIGHT CASTS THE NINE FOOT SEA SCORPION INTO TALL DARKNESS, WHERE THEY LIVED MAINLY IN ESTUARIES AND COASTAL LAGOONS. SILENCE, DARKNESS, AND DISMAL PERFECTION. *I CANNOT DISCOVER THIS OCEANIC FEELING IN MYSELF* (FREUD) (76, emphasis in original)

The Silurian period marked the first small appearance of terrestrial life in the form of plants growing near sea shores. In "STRATA," however, since history is presented in reverse, the period is marked as the point when life disappears back down into the oceans and the dry land

[29] As Shapiro notes (161), Smithson seems to be playing with literal meaning of Geology, the logos of earth or Gaia.

appears as pure inorganic material ("The earth dips out of sight. All activity is lost under the limpid oceans"). As always with Smithson, entropy is an important theme. Going back in time does not bring us closer to a fundamental point of origin, but rather reads as a dispersion of our present stage of life into smaller and increasingly cruder forms of life—"all is sedimentation and aimless effort." Just as in a real geologic sample, the Silurian block of text exhibits a mixture of different materials. Smithson's prose switches between what sound like quotes from a geology textbook ("Submarine throughs deepen. Stone-lilies. Bright colored polyps spread.") to what sound like his exasperation about the shortcomings of this method of description ("their names are immaterial—dull descriptions in a book.")—and from what almost reads like a bathetic empathy with Silurian marine life ("the Silurian night casts the nine foot sea scorpion into tall darkness"),[30] back to the textbook prose with which the passage began, without regard to the change of tense ("where they lived mainly in estuaries and coastal lagoons.").

In the middle of these descriptions comes the quote from *Civilization and its Discontents*, well-known to us by now: "*I cannot discover this oceanic feeling in myself (Freud)*". In the context of the rest of the piece, the Freud quote appears like the punch line to a joke. After discussing the difficulty of representing or even accurately understanding this distant era when life withdrew back into the ocean, the text offers us a quote from Freud about the difficulty of recreating the pre-conscious stage of mental development. The conflation of geological pre-history and mental pre-consciousness is of course not unheard of; in fact, it is the very stuff of the pervasive biological metaphors for art history which Smithson tried to abolish. Knowing Smithson's expanded use of Freud's concept, the connection between the oceanic feeling and

[30] Smithson's fragmented prose allows for several equally valid interpretations. Another possible reading of the "Silurian night" is that it represents the unknowability of the distant past, in which case the night is what obscures the accurate knowledge of the sea scorpion.

the Silurian age can also be understood in a different sense. If the oceanic feeling at the Site arises from the exposure to an inorganic landscape that comes to represent an absolute outside, we can understand Smithson's Freud to say that he cannot comprehend the absolute outside, the "great outdoors," of the Silurian age.[31] Paradoxically, not discovering the oceanic within one's conscious self, not being able to grasp and incorporate an inorganic exteriority, exactly expresses the oceanic feeling: the impossibility of exhaustively symbolizing the Real. To know that something is truly outside of oneself is to believe in an absolute outside. By the end of his career, then, Smithson had not only turned Freud's psychological concept of the oceanic feeling into an ontological one but also managed, in his own way, to give Freud fictional access to a feeling he claimed never to have known.

The oceanic Site allows Smithson to highlight a global and all-encompassing process that remains as hidden in the transcendental structures of the nation state as those of the art institution. Operating on the global American frontier, against a nationalist and liberal dogmatism, enmeshed in biological metaphors of assured progress, Smithson's work traced a gradual opening towards the outside of a new global space.

[31] To use Meillassoux's terms, what Smithson's Freud states is that he cannot establish a correlation between himself and the Silurian age. As we saw, it was precisely the inability of correlationism to account for fossils that was the starting point for Meillassoux's inquiry.

Chapter 3: The No Man's Lands of *Gravity's Rainbow*

When Edward Snowden's leaks about the methods of the National Security Agency began to fill the world's newspapers during the summer of 2013, one of the key interpretive frames for discussing whether what the agency did was illegal or immoral, and one of the key subjects the discussion centered around, was the question of the nationality of eavesdropping targets: was the NSA simply spying on foreigners as American intelligence agencies (and those of every other country) had been doing for centuries—albeit on a heretofore unprecedented scale and using the newest technology available—or was it spying on American citizens (or rather "U.S. persons," meaning citizens and permanent residents)? The U.S. government issued stern assurances that this was not the case was followed by new revelations undermining nearly every guarantee and as of this day the actual facts of the eavesdropping program are still in dispute. What was clear from the start, however, was that when it came to the new eavesdropping technologies, determining whether a target was a U.S. person or not was no easy matter. As Barton Gellman and Laura Poitras wrote in June of 2013 in one of the very first articles to discuss NSA's so-called PRISM program:

> The Obama administration points to ongoing safeguards in the form of 'extensive procedures, specifically approved by the court, to ensure that only non-U.S. persons outside the U.S. are targeted, and that minimize the acquisition, retention and dissemination of incidentally acquired information about U.S. persons.'
>
> And it is true that the PRISM program is not a dragnet, exactly. From inside a company's data stream the NSA is capable of pulling out anything it likes, but under current rules the agency does not try to collect it all.
>
> Analysts who use the system from a Web portal at Fort Meade, Md., key in

> 'selectors,' or search terms, that are designed to produce at least 51 percent confidence in a target's 'foreignness.' That is not a very stringent test. Training materials obtained by The Post instruct new analysts to make quarterly reports of any accidental collection of U.S. content, but add that 'it's nothing to worry about.' (n.p.)

The idea that a target's foreignness (or at least the confidence with which automatic search engines can establish it) can be measured in percent evokes an image of nationhood (and of personhood) that is far from common sense and everyday discourse—as if each person, as far as the NSA is concerned, is made up of so many data points, a simple majority of which determines nationality and other aspects of a person's identity. Whether the 51-percent rule is a fiction set up for the PRISM program to comply with the letter of the law,[1] the interpenetration of subjectivity and nationality by the language of big data remains a noteworthy development.

As I will argue in this chapter, however, the intersection of technology, subjectivity, and nationality under the aegis of the national security apparatus has roots back at least to the time when the first early versions of what would be called computer technology was developed during the Second World War as well as the development of network technologies in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, the technological integration of the world that makes NSA's eavesdropping practices possible at all are closely related to the economic and financial integration of the world under the auspices of the American-led process of globalization that this study tracks. No novel has traced this melange of factors more meticulously or, as it turned out, prophetically than Thomas Pynchon's 1973 novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. Published in the year

[1] Unsurprisingly, we do not currently, and will perhaps never, have a complete understanding of how the NSA conducts its operations. According to the NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake, one NSA algorithm called ThinThread, developed by himself to track foreign enemies, was replaced with another program named Trailblazer with less strict security measures for determining the target's nationality around the September 11 attacks (cf Mayer 46-57). Both programs allegedly are forerunners of the PRISM-program that Snowden disclosed to the world in 2013.

that saw the abandonment of the international gold standard, the novel simultaneously looks back to the beginning of the American empire as well as ahead to the neoliberal financialization of the globe as it traces the hidden history of American power in a computerized and financialized world that is slowly turning out to be exactly what Pynchon told us it was going to be. Therefore, in order to understand the historical currents that led up to Snowden's revelations as well as the emergent global American totality they allow us to catch a glimpse of, we must now turn to *Gravity's Rainbow*, and more specifically, to a hotel room in Southern France in April of 1945.

As Tyrone Slothrop lies sleeping in a hotel room on the Rue Rossini in the city of Nice, he is woken up by the loud sound of knocking. Slothrop, an American lieutenant working for the Allied intelligence agency ACHTUNG (Allied Clearing House, Technical Units, Northern Germany), has recently fled Monaco and a wide range of British and American intelligence agencies that are, for reasons at this point not wholly clear to him, following him. Slothrop represents the closest thing Thomas Pynchon's epic and labyrinthine novel has to a protagonist—itself a category that the novel will problematize during its course—and his ostentatious escape from Monaco will later turn out to be part of the very scheme he believed he was evading by absconding to Nice. However, as he lies in his bed in the old part of Nice, he does not know that yet:

> Just before dawn knocking comes very loud, hard as steel. Slothrop has the sense this time to keep quiet.
>
> "Come on, open up."
>
> "MPs, open up."
>
> American voices, country voices, high-pitched and without mercy. He lies freezing, wondering if the bedsprings will give him away. For possibly the first time he is hearing

> America as it must sound to a non-American. Later he will recall that what surprised him most was the fanaticism, the reliance not just on flat force but on the *rightness* of what they planned to do… he'd been told long ago to expect this sort of thing from Nazis, and especially from Japs-*we* were the ones who always played fair-but this pair outside the door now are as demoralizing as a close-up of John Wayne (the angle emphasizing how slanted his eyes are, funny you never noticed before) screaming "BANZAI!" (256, Pynchon's emphasis).

As it turns out, the military policemen are not there for Slothrop, but for an escaped American soldier and mental patient named Hopper in another room who flees when he hears the sound of knocking leaving Slothrop safe for the time being. Although Slothrop for a moment believes that the officers are looking for him, it is not clear whether the MPs knock on Slothrop's or on Hopper's door, but in any event the case of mistaken identity is quickly resolved and Hopper flees the scene followed by the MPs never to reappear in the pages of the novel. Yet this seemingly insignificant moment marks an important point in *Gravity's Rainbow,* the point when Slothrop realizes he is in some way no longer an American.

On the face of it, the incident represents a textbook Althusserian interpellation; Slothrop hears the shout of the policemen and assumes they are addressing him.[2] That the MPs were actually addressing someone else and that they never even know of Slothrop's existence does not change the fact that Slothrop turned around, as Althusser would have it,

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[2]Althusser's famous definition of how ideology intepellates its subjects from the essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" goes as follows: "I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing : 'Hey, you there !' Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why ? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed' (and not someone else)."(174).

and became a subject to the policemen's authority. However, there is more going on in this scene than interpellation. In the MPs voices, Slothrop hears "America as it must sound to a non-American." Nothing in the MPs approach seems to warrant this. Although on foreign soil, the MPs are policing the American armed forces; when they knock on the door they are shouting in English, expecting to be understood; and Hopper, their intended target turns out to be an American soldier. For all intents and purposes, the MPs are part of what Althusser would call a state apparatus, they are conducting an inter-American operation, yet their interpellation, in Slothrop's ears, turns him into a foreigner—subject to American authority perhaps but not a member of the community the state designates.

Slothrop's own paranoid projections clearly contribute to his experience (paranoia, as we will see, plays an integral part in *Gravity's Rainbow*): a soldier at war, he has left the place where he was supposed to be. Although not technically a deserter at this point, since he was on furlough when he left Monaco the day before, he does not plan to return to active service and the shout of the MPs perhaps to some echo his own fear of getting caught. Rather than a simple Althusserian hailing, Slothrop is caught in between technologies of domination of others and technologies of the self (Foucault 1988, 18)—the contact zone between these two sets of technologies is what Michel Foucault calls governmentality (Ibid. 19).[3]

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[3]Foucault discussed governmentality in *Secuity, Territory, Population*, his lectures from 1977-78 (see especially 87-135), but by the time of his lecture at the University of Vermont in 1982 he had come to define the concept in terms of relations between technologies. This is his original definition of the concept from the 1977-78 lecture series: "By this word "governmentality" I mean three things. First, by "governmentality" I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. Second, by "governmentality" I understand the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power – sovereignty, discipline, and so on – of the type of power that we can call "government" and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (appareils) on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (savoirs). Finally, by "governmentality" I think we should understand the process, or rather, the

As the narrator makes clear, what more than anything else creates Slothrop's impression of being a non-American is the narrow-minded dedication he detects in the voices, a trait he closely associates with racist, propagandistic American representation of German and ("especially") Japanese soldiers. It is not so much the point that these stereotypes are exaggerated or false that seems to astound Slothrop as much as the perceived breakdown of a representational system that holds that American soldiers are the fair-playing, un-fanatical opposites of their enemies. This conflation of opposites into an indiscernible sameness where inside and outside, John Wayne and the yellow peril, can no longer be differentiated does not concern the state or state apparatuses but rather the nation, the particular set of stories a people tell about themselves.[4]

Questions of technology haunt this minor breakdown of nationalism, as well as *Gravity's Rainbow* as a whole.[5] Indeed technology, broadly understood, constitutes one of the main themes of *Gravity's Rainbow* as the relay between subjects and other, larger forces; it is in and with technology that subjectivities are forged, controlled, and subverted.

"[H]earing America as it must sound to a non-American," Slothrop seems to begin to realize that the image Americans project to themselves does not correspond to the way the rest of the world sees them. Although the inclusion of the word "must" in the sentence indicates that Slothrop is still an imaginative leap from truly being on the outside of America, he is almost there as the next paragraph suggests:

It dawns on Slothrop, literally, through the yellowbrown window shade, that this is his

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result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually "governmentalized" (108-9).

[4]The distinction between nation and state was first explored by Ernest Renan in his 1882 essay "What is a Nation?," for the most influential analysis of nation as a set of narratives, see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities.*

[5] In the interview "Space, Knowledge, and Power" Foucault defines technology, or rather the Greek concept techne forom which his concept of technology derives, as "a practical rationality governed by a conscious goal" (364).

> first day Outside. His first free morning. He doesn't have to go back. Free? What's free? He falls asleep at last. A little before noon a young woman lets herself in with a passkey and leaves him the papers. He is now an English war correspondent named Ian Scuffling. (256)

To underscore the connection between nationalism and subjectivity, Slothrop undergoes a conversion immediately following his epiphany. First into a vaguely defined, and apparently sleep-inducing freedom, then he acquires a fake identity as (or as the narrator has it "he is now") a British journalist. This only represents the first of many changes of identity for Slothrop, who through the course of the novel will assume characters of among others the comic book hero Rocketman, the German actor Max Schlepzig, and the 10th century Teutonic Pig-deity Plechazunga. The way in which this change of character plays out, however, points to a recurring pattern in the novel: the short break between one system of signification (or technology) and the next. This dynamic not only appears in the gaps between different sets of technologies but also in the zones of indetermination where different technologies seem to be fighting for domination. This pattern does not limit itself to subjectivities but appear on every level of the narrative from the smallest physical object to the largest transcendental framework. As exemplified by the ultra-nationalist John Wayne in Slothrop's imagination, the no-man's land that this chapter maps is not simply pervaded by the absence of technological forces but rather of exaggerated versions of all the technologies vying for domination. More than anything else, this pattern applies to the Zone, the denationalized space left in the middle of Continental Europe in the wake of Nazi Germany's defeat within which most of the action of *Gravity's Rainbow* takes place—a space that is simultaneously empty of political or technological sovereignty and, because of this, a battlefield where different forces compete to come out on top. All of *Gravity's Rainbow* can be said to take place in this no-man's land, this placeless space,

in which the normally invisible forces that determine the order of things and people are for a moment if not completely inoperative then at least slowed down or sped up in order to render them much more visible than usual.

Gravity's Rainbow has rarely been viewed as a global epic. Despite its distinctively global setting, which spans postwar Europe, the United States, Southwest Africa, Argentina, Kyrgyzstan, and many other locations, the novel has for the most part been read from within an exclusively American literary tradition, a descendant of such works as Melville's *Moby Dick* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.[6] While not renouncing this heritage, this chapter argues that *Gravity's Rainbow,* both its ancestry and its effects, constitute a much more promiscuous and global text—a global epic about the range and the limits of American influence in the twentieth century and beyond. Similar to the other works dealt with in this study, *Gravity's Rainbow* is a global American epic, a text that attempts to represent the world as an open totality through a critical investigation of, on the one hand, American power in shaping this totality and, on the other hand, of possible alternatives.

This claim is closely connected to the dynamic of the no man's land mentioned above. As mentioned, the gap between two nationalized subjectivities in which Slothrop falls asleep represents an example of a large number—almost a system—of gaps and fissures in which, I argue, Pynchon's text works to counter the forces of historical inevitability at work in American and world history. Written during the upheavals of the late sixties and early seventies (itself perhaps such a historical no man's land) and dealing with events that supposedly transpired during another moment of transition, *Gravity's Rainbow* explores the no man's land of minute ruptures of scientific, technological, cultural, and political discourses that make up the history of the world as we have grown accustomed to it. In its encyclopedic

[6] For a discussion of the similarities between *Moby-Dick* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Buell's *The Dream of the Great American Novel* 427-30.

circumscription of various fields of knowledge, from rocket science to chemical engineering, Pynchon's novel attempts to found a placeless site from which the past, present, and future of global American hegemony can be viewed.

"Counterfeit Movement": Social Control and Cinematic Technology

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the world of film and movies assumes a central position. When Slothrop confronts his own nationalism, the first image that enters his head is that of John Wayne, the quintessential American hero known for his many Western roles. Cinema, as we will see, both in itself and as a synecdoche for other political, cultural, and scientific forces of social control, play a crucial part in the novel. The novel abounds with references to specific movies; German expressionist films and Hollywood musicals, comedies, westerns, and horror films from the 1920s, 30s, and early 40s among them. More than this, several characters in the novel are engaged in making movies of their own, from the exiled German film director cum black marketeer Gerhardt von Göll to the former actress Margareta Erdmann and the Nazi engineers at Peenemünde who use movie cameras to analyze the flight of their rockets. The presence of cinematic language in *Gravity's Rainbow* seems to be spreading exponentially among its characters as the novel progresses. Indeed, as *Gravity's Rainbow* ends, Pynchon lets slip that perhaps the whole novel itself is best understood as film; a movie shown at Los Angeles' Orpheus Theater (managed by the conspicuously Nixonian Richard M. Zchlubb) at some point in the early 1970s: "The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent. The film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out. It was difficult even for us, old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?) to tell which before the darkness swept in" (760). As Berresem suggests, film becomes the main medium through which *Gravity Rainbow* represents

its own textuality.[7]

The inclusion of a self-reflexive level is not surprising in a novel, whose author in some scholars opinion has if not invented then at least incarnated literary postmodernism (McHale 97). However, as Berresem notes, this self-reflection is not simply used to show the artificiality of the text, to "jolt" the reader out of the fictional experience, but rather to establish the fictionality (or, Berresem has it, "general artificiality") of all representation, whether fictional, historiographical, or scientific. These abundant and proliferating fictions—influencing both the readers of the novel as well as the characters in it—should not be understood simply as falsehoods but rather, as I will show, as something like framing devices, simultaneously deciphering and modifying the universe. Indeed, this connection between interpretation and transformation is central to *Gravity's Rainbow,* in which there seems to be no such thing as an impartial representation, each perspective altering its object in crucial ways. Similar to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, precision and coherence on one level of discourse is counterbalanced with indeterminacy on other levels.[8] This, as we shall see, means that fictions, whether they stem from the world of film, science, or the nation-state, can be used as a means of coercion or conditioning. Film, then, as the paradigmatic form of fiction in *Gravity's Rainbow*, becomes one of the central metaphors and analogies of social control. In assigning this importance to film, Pynchon recalls Henri Bergson's treatment of the medium as part of

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[7]"[T]he use of film as apparatus opens up the possibility of an indirect self-reflexivity. Rather than calling attention to the writing itself, which is the usual literary device used to jolt the reader from the textual, fictional universe into an extratextual, authorial position, the cinematic reference calls attention to the "text as film." Whereas the presence of a camera in a film points directly toward film as medium and to its artificiality, the presence—even if indirect—of a camera in a text disguised as film points to a more general artificiality realized within the filmic aspect of the novel without touching the dissimulated text itself" (160).

[8]Pynchon has the "V-man" Wimpe from IG Farben mention this principle in a discussion with the Soviet Captain Tchitcherine about the merits of different synthetic opiates, in a flashback to Tchitcherine's time working in Kyrgyzstan: "It appears we can't have one property without the other, any more than a particle physicist can specify positon without suffering an uncertainty as to the particle's velocity—" (348). For a thorough discussion of Pynchon's use of the uncertainty principle in *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Tabbi 104-26.

the philosopher's theories of movement and duration, which in turn form the basis for Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of cinema.

In the longest episode of *Gravity's Rainbow,*[9] episode 11 of part 3, Pynchon follows the life of the German chemical engineer Franz Pökler from the late 1920s until the end of the war. Detached and apolitical, Pökler joins the amateur group Verein für Raumschiffarht (Society for Spaceship-travel) that attracts the interest of the German army and eventually forms the core of the Nazi rocket program. His wife Leni having left him years before taking their daughter Ilse with her, Pökler eventually finds himself working on the V2 rocket (or the A4 as the Germans call it) at the Rocket facility at Peenemünde. To ensure his continued loyalty, Pökler's superior Weissmann—one of the main villains of *Gravity's Rainbow* who also goes by the name of Blicero—allows Pökler to spend one week per year at the amusement park Zwölfkinder with his daughter Ilse, who, it turns out, have been imprisoned in a Nazi "reeducation camp" along with her mother. Seeing his daughter only once a year has a strange effect on Pökler:

> So it has gone for six years since. A daughter a year, each one about a year older, each time taking up nearly from scratch. The only continuity has been her name, and Zwölfkinder, and Pökler's love—love something like the persistence of vision, for They have used it to create for him the moving image of a daughter, flashing him only these summertime frames of her, leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child… what would the time scale matter, a 24th of a second or a year (no more, the engineer thought, than in a wind-tunnel, or an oscilloscope whose turning drum you could speed or slow at will…)? (422)

Not sure that the girl is his daughter, or that it is even the same girl from one year to another,

[9]*Gravity's Rainbow* is divided into four parts, each of which is divided into episodes.

Pökler's likens his experience to the illusion of movement in the perception of a person watching a movie at 24 frames per second. He spends most of the year in the darkness between two frames, as it were, working hard on weapons of mass destruction in anticipation of next summer's visit from Ilse. Although aware that he is being controlled by means of this device, Pökler is powerless to resist the scheme, responding to the manipulation as dependably as one of his own machines.

This incident, however, is not the first time that Pökler has been exposed to the coercive power of film, the ominous power of which permeates the whole episode. The novel's preceding episode ends with a description of Slothrop and the actor Margareta Erdmann having sadomasochistic sex in the summer of 1945 in a torture chamber on an abandoned movie set where the director Gerhardt von Göll shot a scene from the movie *Alpdrücken* (nightmares) in the late twenties. During the filming of that scene—in which a grand inquisitor played by Max Schlepzig (which happens to be the name on Slothrop's forged identity papers) rapes Erdsmann's character—Erdsmann and Schlepzig's daughter Bianca was conceived. The episode devoted to Pökler's story opens with a corresponding analepsis of Pökler and Leni having sex one night in the late 1920s, conceiving their daughter Ilse, an intercourse that takes place as Pökler returns from watching *Alpdrücken* at a movie theater:

> He had come out of the Ufa theatre on the Friedrichstrasse that night with an erection, thinking like everybody else only about getting home, fucking somebody, fucking her into some submission... God, Erdmann was beautiful. How many other men, shuffling out again into depression Berlin, carried the same image back from Alpdrücken to some drab fat excuse for a bride? How many shadow-children would be fathered on Erdmann that night? (397).

Similar in effect to the Pavlovian schemes of Dr. Pointsmann which we will discuss below,

Pynchon suggests von Göll's film conditions a whole generation of German men to share and act on certain desires — almost like the wave of suicides that followed Goethe's Young Werther. Coerced by the movie, Pökler and the other male movie-goers in turn force their wives and lovers to submit to them, participating in a hidden hierarchy and fathering "shadow-children" that are as much offspring of the German culture industry as of their biological parents. Pynchon's main source for information on German prewar cinema was Siegfried Kracauer's study *From Caligari to Hitler* (see Weisenburger 77) and Pynchon's understanding of the role of cinema in Germany closely mirrors Kracauer, who in his introduction writes,

> It is my contention that through an analysis of the German films deep psychological dispositions predominant in Germany from 1918 to 1933 can be exposed—dispositions which influenced the course of events during the time and which will have to be reckoned with in the post-Hitler era (li).

If Pynchon can be seen as echoing certain analyses of popular culture put forth by the Frankfurt School,[10] there are, as we shall see, also other and more positive aspects to Pynchon's treatment of film.

Much like in Adorno and Horkheimer conception, the world of film and popular culture in *Gravity's Rainbow* is only one aspect of a larger movement in Western thought and scientific developments. If Adorno and Horkheimer see the crucial development in the enlightenment's instrumentalization of reason,[11] Pynchon's critical moment when science began its troubling imitation of life seems to have been Leibniz's and Newton's invention of

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[10]In addition to Kracauer, Pynchon's treatment of film at times recall Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*. For more on Pynchon and Adorno, see Thomas

[11]This thesis underlies the entirety of *Dialectoc of Enlightenment* and is perhaps best expressed when Adorno and Horkheimer writes, "Thought is reified as an autonomous, automatic process, aping the machine it has itself produced, so that it can finally be replaced by the machine" (19). Pynchon, as we shall see, could not agree more.

modern calculus in the late seventeenth century. As Pynchon writes in a later episode:

> Three hundred years ago mathematicians were learning to break the cannonball's rise and fall into stairsteps of range and height, Δx and Δy, allowing them to grow smaller and smaller, approaching zero as armies of eternally shrinking midgets galloped upstairs and down again, the patter of their diminishing feet growing finer, smoothing into continuous sound. This analytic legacy has been handed down intact—it brought the technicians of Peenemünde to peer at the Askania films of rocket flights, frame by frame, Δx by Δy, flightless themselves… film and calculus, both pornographies of flight. (567)

For the German rocket scientists, film and calculus, working in tandem, represents a modeled approximation of the flight of the rocket, an abbreviated distortion of the real thing.[12] Pökler and most of the other engineers started working on rocket in the hopes of developing a technology that would allow humans to travel in space. As was the case with calculus three centuries prior, the new technique is quickly co-opted by the military-industrial complex. This practical co-optation mirrors the conceptual co-optation of reality by calculus.[13]

Noting the same correspondence between film and calculus, Bergson in *Creative Evolution* argues that what science and the cinema describe and represent is something like empty, abstract time and movement (365-66). Modern science only gives a provisional, static account of the actual, dynamic laws of the world, in other words, and even worse, it

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[12]Pynchon's interest in mathematics does not limit itself to calculus. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, there are also references to the set theory of Gödel and the statistical analysis of Poisson. In his later novel *Against the Day*, most of the labyrinthine plots revolve around the revolutions within the fields of mathematics from the late 19th century through the end of the First World War.

[13]It is worth noting here that by the end of the novel, Weissmann's lover Gottfried will experience what the engineers could not: nestled inside the fabled Rocket 00000, he is launched from the Lüneburger Heide in an obscure ritual. One interpretation of this highly overdetermined event could be that Gottfried fulfills the fantasy of everybody working on the German rocket program, experiencing real flight instead of the derived pornography.

understands time not as part of whatever action it describes but as independent from it. Bergson compares this false, abstract movement with the movement produced by film.[14] This is exactly what Pynchon means by "pornography;" film and calculus approximate movement by giving a static, scientific, fictional account of it, as in this description of the German rocket engineers:

> During flights the camera photographed the needles swinging on the gauges. After the flight of the film was recovered, and the data played back. Engineers sat around looking at movies of dials. Meantime Henkels were also dropping iron models of the Rocket from 20,000 feet. The fall was photographed by Askania cinetheodolite rigs on the ground. In the daily rushes you would watch the frames at around 3,00 feet, where the model broke through the speed of sound. There has been this strange connection between the German mind and the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement, for at least two centuries—since Leibniz, in the process of inventing calculus, used the same approach to break up the trajectories of cannonballs through the air. And now Pökler was about to be given proof that these techniques had been extended past images on film, to human lives (406-7).

The interconnections between calculus and film and its maturation into a means of social control that Pynchon describes in this passage are informative. In Pynchon's telling, Leibniz's calculus was already a kind of film, an arrested visualization of movement broken down into successive frames. Moreover, exactly as is the case for the Nazi engineers, the prime purpose of this amalgamation of film and calculus is war and destruction; making sure that cannonballs and rockets hit their intended goal. For all the scientific and technological advances between

[14]Specifically, Bergson writes: "The process then consists in extracting from all the movements peculiar to all the figures an impersonal movement abstract and simple, *movement in general*, so to speak: we put this into the apparatus, and we reconstitute the individuality of each particular movement by combining this nameless movement with the personal attitudes. Such is the contrivance of the cinematograph." (332, emphasis in original)

Leibniz and the Nazi rocket engineers, Pynchon suggests, we are no closer to the actual movement of the flying object. After the flight of each rocket, the scientists are watching film of the rocket's instruments, removed (at least) three times from the actual movement in their temporally delayed perception of a film of gauges measuring the flight.[15] And yet despite all of these removals from and pornographies of the real thing, the process works. The engineers manages to construct a rocket precise enough to hit London just as Leibniz advanced 17th century ballistics with his theoretical models.

The process Pynchon describes by way of film and calculus is at once one of the most frightening aspects of the theory of social control we see in *Gravity's Rainbow* and a possible starting point for a subversive practice, a counterforce: the nebulous forces behind the social control (which Pynchon sometimes refers to as "them") are effective but they work by reducing their objects—or subjects—to counterfeits, to what Deleuze describes as clichés of real human beings.[16] However, if "they" work by way of reduction, that means that there is a underlying space—which for the time being we might think of as Real in the Lacanian sense, on the far side of any representation—which "they" cannot (yet) reach. The inaccessibility of this space is directly correlated with the difficulty of representing it, they are two sides of the same coin since any kind of representation for Pynchon seems to imply almost instantaneous co-optation or even transcendence. By the end of this chapter, we will see Pynchon's solution to this problem, how he turns transcendence on its head in a radical gesture of immanence towards all of those passed over by governmental technologies.

Pynchon's formulation of this exterior (or perhaps underlying or even transcendent) space is, I argue, central to the intervention of *Gravity's Rainbow* can be said to make in not only

[15]As we will see in the following, Pynchon does not view the processes that led to and sustained Nazi Germany as completely separated from their American or global counterparts As Cowart convincingly argues, for Pynchon "Germany distills all that is best and worst in the social and intellectual life of the West" (78).

[16] See my earlier discussion of Deleuze's time-image.

American literature but also in what we might think of as other confined fictions such as nationalism, historiography, scientific discourses, and even representation more broadly.[17] Ultimately, I want to show how Pynchon's critique of representation points toward a new global space beyond the discourses and arguments even the scholarly discussion of *Gravity's Rainbow* itself is so often embroiled in.

Contrary to Bergson, in Deleuze's reading, cinema cannot be reduced to the individual images but should rather be understood as being closer to what Bergson describes as real movement.[18] As discussed earlier, when the clichés of the movement-images break down, another kind of image appears. These time-images are cinematic images that instead of subordinating time to movement—thereby making the passing of time in the diegetic world of the film a consequence of the characters' actions—reverse the relationship and thus create a more direct image of time.[19] The time-image breaks down the old devices of framing, human consciousness among them, as the clichés they are.

On the surface, Pynchon's conception of cinema seems closer to Bergson than Deleuze: films are dangerous abstractions, part of a long history of scientific approximation of reality that works to control subjects. However, as we will see, Pynchon's does show us glimpses of a breakdown of these clichés of control and point us toward an outside. This becomes important since, as we have seen, the language of cinema in *Gravity's Rainbow* is an ever-present meta-language used by both characters and narrator to discuss a wide range of subjects. Where Bergson views cinema and certain scientific laws merely as a bad alternative to

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[17]Michael Bérubé (246) argues that the Pynchon's pornographies point negatively to a "Real" unity that was never more than imaginary to begin with. Contrary to this, I argue it would be more helpful to see Pynchon's "Real" outside as being of the order of what Quentin Meillassoux, also partly inspired by Lacan, calls "The Great Outdoors" (7) of all representation. See pp ## for my discussion of Meillassoux.

[18]See Deleuze's *Cinema 1,* 2-3.

[19]As Deleuze writes in Cinema 2 in a discussion of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*: "Here time became out of joint and reversed its dependent relation to movement; temporality showed itself as it really was for the first time, but in the form of a coexistence of large regions to be explored" (105).

more dynamic representations of the world, Pynchon goes further in focusing on the repressive qualities inherent in these technological conceptions of the world, specifically their reduction of human beings to pliable subjects and the world to a closed totality. What we might think of as the time-image's insurrection from within the world of cinema itself will become a crucial theoretical tool for theorizing the world that *Gravity's Rainbow* projects, where no readily available alternative seems to exist. The time-images in *Gravity's Rainbow* are the spaces in-between different systems of control and abstractions, the no man's lands introduced above, where the logics of domination break down for a moment.

As an example of such a cinematic time-image in *Gravity's Rainbow* could be the young Argentinian anarchist's Felipe's, conspicuously Smithsonian, meditation on rocks and cinema:

> But Felipe's particular rock embodies also an intellectual system, for he believes (as do M. F. Beal and others) in a form of mineral consciousness not too much different from that of plants and animals, except for the time scale. Rock's time scale is a lot more stretched out. "We're talking frames per century," Felipe like everybody else here lately has been using a bit of movie language, "per millennium!" Colossal. But Felipe has come to see, as those who are not Sentient Rocksters seldom do, that history as it's been laid on the world is only a fraction, an outward-and-visible fraction. That we must also look to the untold, to the silence around us, to the passage of the next rock we notice-to its aeons of history under the long and female persistence of water and air (who'll be there, once or twice per century, to trip the shutter?), down to the lowland where your paths, human and mineral, are most likely to cross… (612-13).[20]

Here the opening up of new perspectives beyond the human and towards the mineral is aided by cinema. In order to understand the time frame (and, Felipe insists, thereby the

[20]M. F. Beal is a novelist and political activist whom Pynchon probably knew from their time together at Cornell in the late 1950s. The allusion is to her short story "Gold" (cf. Weisenburger, 316)

consciousness) of the mineral world, a kind of time-lapse film where a second of film would amount to hundreds or even thousands of years—even if it is only a thought experiment and Felipe has not yet worked out all of the technical details (such as who will operate the camera a couple of times ever century). To see other examples of these time-images that result from breakdown in technologies of control, we will have to turn to other technological domains.

"You Never Did the Kenosha Kid": Jokes and Linguistic Technology

As is the case with other processes of abstraction, translation, or encoding in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the linguistic sphere is just as much a site for exploitation and conditioning as the spheres of mathematics, science, and the cinema. Pynchon discusses this power of words to dominate their object even to the point of evisceration in the flashback episodes dealing with the Soviet agent Tchitcherine's attempt to establish a new alphabet for the Kirghiz people on the central Asian steppes in the 1930s, an encoding process that spell doom for the language's practitioners as Tchitcherine realizes while listening to a Kirghiz couple singing:

> The boy and girl go on battling with their voices—and Tchitcherine understands, apruptly, that soon someone will come out and begin to write some of these down in the New Turkish Alphabet he helped frame…and this is how they will be lost. (357)

However, if *Gravity's Rainbow* treats language as one in a line of oppressive technologies, Pynchon also goes to great lengths to show the liberatory aspects of the use of language, chiefly through his use of jokes to the point at which it must be characterized as one of Pynchon's most emblematic stylistic traits. The pages of the novel are littered with jokes, puns, and word-games: a law firm is called "Salitieri, Poore, Nash, De Brutus, and Short" (591) (a pun on Hobbes's famous description of human life in the state of nature as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short); a group of followers of the *Book of Changes* is described thus:

"devotees of the I Ching who have a favorite hexagram tattooed on each toe, who can never stay in one place for long can you guess why? Because they always have I Ching feet!" (746); and finally the sentence "For De Mille, young fur-henchmen can't be rowing!" (559) (a play on the title of the jazz song "Fifty Million Frenchmen Can't be Wrong" by Sophie Tucker) uttered by the American industrialist Clayton "Bloody" Chiclitz after a long setup that, as Weisenberger notes, amounts to "an entire narrative digression about illicit trading in furs, oarsmen in boats, fur henchmen, and De Mille—all of it in order to launch this pun." (292)

More often than not involving characters, entities, and events that do not reappear, the jokes and puns of *Gravity's Rainbow* do not advance the plot or deepen the reader's sense of the characters but rather halt the action of one of the myriad of plots in order to perform their minute language games. Pynchon's jokes raise the question of their integration into the novel as a whole.

Discussing jokes' reliance on and deviation from what Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics* called éndoxa, that is, the opinions, beliefs, and linguistic customs shared by a community, Paolo Virno writes:

> The joke utilizes, by handfuls, the *éndoxa*: with the goal, however, of corroding them from within. Its point of honor lies in illustrating the questionable nature of the opinions lying beneath discourses and actions. In order to hit its target, the joke pushes one single belief to the limit, to the point of extracting absurd and ridiculous consequences from it. Or it maliciously places in contrast two fundamental principles, each of which, if considered separately, seemed incontrovertible. The joke is a rhetorical syllogism that refutes the same éndoxa from which it got its start. Or, better yet: it is a performative example of how the grammar of a form of life can be transformed (94, emphasis in original).

This rather precisely describes the effect of Pynchon's jokes on the reader of *Gravity's Rainbow*. If we take éndoxa to mean the implied contract that a historical novel about the Second World War—even one as sprawling as *Gravity's Rainbow*—can be said to establish with the reader, the jokes disrupt the flow of reading, at least for an instant bringing up questions of whether the novel as a whole, encompassing war, genocide, and forces of mass manufactured obediance, is simply a means for Pynchon to crack jokes, a repository for set-ups that make the punchlines that much more shocking and thus effective.

Virno's claim that jokes tear the social fabric of which it is part point to a possible solution to this problem: Pynchon's jokes uses language to critique itself. As such, the jokes exemplify the dynamic of the no man's land that I have been tracking through the different registers of the novel, they mirror the thematic concerns of *Gravity's Rainbow* on a formal level. Pynchon's jokes and puns suggest the shortcomings of descriptive discourse and accentuate the material fissures in even the language used to deconstruct (other kinds of) social control. The jokes do this not so much by breaking off and showing a gap between different regimes, as is the case with other governmentality technologies in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Rather, as Virno points out, jokes pushes one or several rules to absurd limits, thereby showing the arbitrariness of the rule, the éndoxa, to begin with.

To substantiate this claim, I suggest we look at one of the most famous episodes of *Gravity's Rainbow*: Episode 10 of the novel's first part in which Slothrop is voluntarily interrogated by the British psychological operations intelligence service PISCES (Psychological Intelligence Schemes for Expediting Surrender) about American race relations while being injected with the supposed truth serum Sodium Amytal.[21] During the course of is hallucinations in this episode, Slothrop travels down the toilet of the Roseland Ballroom,

[21] For a discussion of the role race plays in *Gravity's Rainbow* see Witzling 143-178.

where a young Malcolm X works as a shoeshine boy, later to find himself in what appears to be the setting of a Western movie. Framing these visions, however, is a kind of sustained meditation on the phrase "You never did the Kenosha Kid" which arguably show the method behind Pynchon's puns and jokes better than any other passage of the novel.

The origins of the mysterious sentence, "You never did the Kenosha Kid,"(which could be scanned as a metrically irregular trimeter couplet) is not revealed in the text. The narrator notes, in medias res after more than a page of punning on the phrase:

> These changes on the text "You never did the Kenosha Kid" are occupying Slothrop's awareness as the doctor leans in out of the white overhead to wake him and begin the session. The needle slips without pain in the vein just outboard of the hollow of the in the crook of his elbow: 10% Sodium Amytal, one cc at a time, as needed (61).

As Weisenburger writes, the origins of the sentence have for decades been "one of the outstanding enigmas" of *Gravity's Rainbow,* until it was discovered that the Kenosha Kid was an almost forgotten pulp fiction hero of the 1920's, 30s, and 40s, appearing in such publications as *Western Rangers* (51). While this theory is certainly plausible, placing Kenosha Kid next to Rocketman and other arcane characters out of popular culture that populate the pages of Pynchon's novel, it still does not account for how Slothrop comes to think of the sentence, or what significance, if any, it has in the larger framework of the novel. I will return to this point by the end of this chapter, suffice it for now to say that the sentence for one reason or another occupies Slothrop's mind and he is going through the different permutations of possible meaning of the six words.

The episode begins with a numbered list of six different dramatized settings, each affording its own context and meaning of the phrase:

(1) a letter: "Dear sir: did I ever bother you, *ever*, for anything, in your life? Yours truly,

Lt. Tyrone Slothrop […] Dear Mr. Slothrop: You never did. [signed:] The Kenosha Kid" (60, Pynchon's emphasis);

(2) a conversation about dances: "Aw, I did all them old-fashioned dances, I did the 'Charleston,' a-and the 'Big Apple,' too! […] Bet you never did the "Kenosha,' kid!" (60);

(3) an interaction at a corporation or an agency: "Well, he has been avoiding me […] You! Never did the Kenosha Kid think for one instance that *you*…" (60-61, Pynchon's emphasis);

(4) a mock-epic rewriting of a Genesis narrative: "And at the end of the mighty day in which he gave us in fiery letters across the sky all the words we'd ever need, words we enjoy today, and fill our dictionaries with, the meek voice of little Tyrone Slothrop, celebrated ever after in tradition and song, ventured to filter upward to the Kid's attention: "You never did 'the,' Kenosha Kid!" (61);

(5) an alliterative allegation of deceptiveness: "Maybe you did fool the Philadelphia, rag the Rochester, josh the Joliet. But you never did the Kenosha kid." (61); and

(6) a fragmented description of an obscure religious ceremony: "(The day of the Ascent and sacrifice. A nation-wide observance. Fats searing, blood dripping and burning to a salty brown ...) You did the Charlottesville shoat, check, the Forest Hills foal, check. (Fading now ...) The Laredo lamb, check. Oh-oh. Wait. What's this, Slothrop? You never did the Kenosha kid." (61).

In addition to these six iterations, the list contains two sub-examples (which Pynchon pedantically enumerates as 2.1 and 3.1) exemplifying minor variations on the theme. Moreover, after having followed Slothrop down the toilet and into a Western setting, the chapter ends with the following surrealist dialog:

"Slothrop: Where is he? Why didn't he show? Who are you?

> Voice: The Kid got busted. And you know me, Slothrop. Remember? I'm Never.
>
> Slothrop (peering): You, Never? (A pause.) *Did* the Kenosha Kid?" (71, Pynchon's emphasis)[22]

With this linguistic meditation, Pynchon shows how the meaning of even a fairly simple sentence can change dramatically depending on the context. Even every single word can mean very different thing. The word "kid," for instance, changes from part of a moniker—as in the name of John Wayne's character the Ringo Kid from the John Ford movie *Stagecoach*—(in examples (1), (7), and possibly (3) and (4)); an appellation of a younger or less experienced conversation partner (in example (2)); a young goat (in example (6)); and even the verb to kid (in example (5)). Similarly the deliberately vague transitive and intransitive verb 'did' in turn denote such different actions as to bother (1), to dance (2), to think (3), to mention as part of an imagined divine speech act (4), to swindle (5), to sacrifice (6), and to be killed (7). Similar points could be made about the four remaining words in the phrase and when all the combinations between the different shades of meaning of each word is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that only Pynchon's imagination limits the permutations of meaning in the short sentence and that the list, as it appears on the pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*, is far from exhaustive. Pynchon pushes the grammatic rules to their limits, exactly as Virno describes, contrasting the different principles governing the way we read sentences.

This dynamic plays out on the level of sentences and even individual words in the jokes and on a larger scale in Pynchon's imitations of literary genres from the spy novel to the comic book. Having seen how this works, we now turn to the intersection of information technology and history as it plays out in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

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[22]In the following, I will refer to this example as (7) although Pynchon does not number it.

"The Only Real Medium of Exchange": History and Information Technology

Cinema, calculus, and language are all presented as technologies of governmentality in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Important as they all are, however, none of these modes of domination originate in the period *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts, they are all older technologies that continue to reign, albeit sometimes in slightly modified form, as the world moves into what would come to be known as the Second World War. However, the war also saw the rise of entirely new technologies that would come to define the post-war era, most notably computers and information technology. Pynchon is acutely aware of the significance of this historical event. Indeed, as I will argue in this section, it is one of the key factors that allow us to read *Gravity's Rainbow* as the genealogy of both Pynchon's and our present moment. The development of information technology to Pynchon represents one of the most crucial historical transformations in the last century and one that we are still grappling with.[23]

Semyavin, a Russian black marketeer in Zürich , explains the significance of this historical sea change to Slothrop:

> Life was simple before the first war. You wouldn't remember. Drugs, sex, luxury items. Currency in those days was no more than a sideline, and the term 'industrial espionage' was unknown. But I've seen it change - oh, how it's changed. The German Inflation, that should've been my clue right there, zeros strung end to end from here to Berlin. I would have stern talks with myself. 'Semyavin, it's only a temporary lapse away from reality. A small aberration, nothing to worry about. Act as you always have - strength of character, good mental health. Courage, Semyavin! Soon all will be back to normal.' But do you know what? […] Information. What's wrong with dope and women? Is it any wonder the world's gone insane, with information come to be the only real

[23]Pynchon returns to the question of information technology in his later novels *Inherent Vice* (see especially 53, 195, 258) and in particular *Bleeding Edge* which I will discuss briefly in the following.

> medium of exchange? […] It'll get easier. Someday it'll all be done by machine. Information machines. You are the wave of the future. (258)

This is one of a few scattered hints throughout the novel to the actual machines for processing information—computers—that were being developed by the American army.[24] As is clear from this passage, however, actually existing computers are only part of the picture for Pynchon, they are the signs of a more general historical process of dematerialization by which, as Semyavin tells us, "information come[s] to be the only real medium of exchange." The references to this historical shift are much more numerous and constitute one of the main thematic concerns of the novel. No place is this clearer than in the discussion between Dr. Edward W. A. Pointsman and Roger Mexico.

Pointsman is one of the prime embodiments of social control on in *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Slothrop find out, there are many and eerie parallels between Nazi Germany one the one hand and America and Great Britain on the other hand. A pavlovian scientist, Pointsman, although nowhere near the top of "they's" hierarchy, tries to control and condition everyone around him, from Slothrop to his own superior Brigadier Pudding. Although a physiologist like his idol Ivan Pavlov, Pointsman perceives the human body and brain not only in mathematical terms but within a binary framework closely resembling the process of digitalization that would take off in the postwar period—but as we will see, in other ways crucially divorced from the conception of subjects inherent in information technology. In Pointsman's conception, human subjects are empty vacuums to be conditioned; this is true

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[24]In a self-referential passage, the narrator suggests that one day computers might help make sense of all the threads of the novel (possibly foreseeing the vast amounts of internet sites—Pynchon-wiki chief among—dedicated to *Gravity's Rainbow:* "Alas, the state of the art by 1945 was nowhere near adequate to that kind of data retrieval. Even if it had been, Bland, or his successors and assigns, could've bought programmers by the truckload to come in and make sure all the information fed out was harmless. Those like Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity" (582)

even of himself.[25] Every human sensation—whether it is love, patriotism, or sexual proclivities—is ultimately a response to some external stimuli. Any response could be carefully conditioned by a Pavlovian scientist like Pointsman or it could be the result of arbitrary factors, but ultimately it is fully intelligible as a part of a finite set of responses that, if mapped out, would allow the Pavlovian physician to predict any future response. As such, Pointsman's conception of the subject parallels the one we saw in Deleuze's discussion of the movement-image: the human consciousness is nothing but a framing device, a way station between perception and action.

Although not explicitly associated with calculus, Pointsman's binary worldview ostensibly shares many characteristics with the other "pornographies" of the world we have seen so far. Like calculus, Pointsman's digital conception is a potential infinity, an approximation of a presumably infinite set (in this case, every conceivable reaction by an animal or a human) by way of a finite number of elements (the synapses of the brain, each of which can either be on or off). As is true of the other processes we have seen, Pointsman's method works; he can condition animals and human to react in predictable way to stimuli. But the success of this method is not based on its accurate conception of the brain so much as its reduction of the brain to fit a certain model; like calculus and film, the Pavlovian method works by diminishing its subject to fit a preconceived model.

Roger Mexico, on the other hand, is the young statistician who, although he at times collaborates with Pointsman, represents a very different scientific point of view. In a passage from the novel's first part focalized through Pointsman, Pynchon contrasts Pointman's method with Mexico's:

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[25]As the narrator writes in a section addressed to Pointsman in the second person, dealing with his sexual obsession with young children, "You impress them with your gentleness. You've never quite decided if they can see through to your vacuum" (50).

> If ever the Antipointsman existed, Roger Mexico is the man. Not so much, the doctor admits, for the psychical research. The young statistician is devoted to number and to method, not table-rapping or wishful thinking. But in the domain of zero to one, not-something to something, Pointsman can only possess the zero and the one. He cannot, like Mexico, survive anyplace in between. Like his master I. P. Pavlov before him, he imagines the cortex of the brain as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements. Some are always in bright excitation, others darkly inhibited. The contours, bright and dark, keep changing. But each point is allowed only the two states: waking or sleep. One or zero. "Summation," "transition," "irradiation," "concentration," "reciprocal induction"—all Pavlovian brain-mechanics—assumes the presence of these bi-stable points. But to Mexico belongs the domain between zero and one—the middle Pointsman has excluded from his persuasion—the probabilities. A chance of 0.37 that, by the time he stops his count, a given square on his map will have suffered only one hit, 0.17 that it will suffer two…(55)

The differences between these two conceptions are palpable. Hilariously, and somewhat hyperbolically, Pointsmann cannot even make sense of Mexico's probabilities, all of them between one and zero, of a German bomb hitting a given sector of London. If Pointsman follows Pavlov, Mexico's intellectual forebear is the French statistician Siméon Denis Poisson, whose equation Mexico uses to map the distribution of German bombs throughout London—as well as the curiously similar map of Slothrop's sexual encounters. The Poisson distribution helps explain the probabilities of a bomb hitting any given sector of London from a bird's eye view but does not predict where the next bomb will fall. A fact that leads Mexico's girlfriend Jessica Swanlake to interject the following pointed question (falling on completely deaf ears) against Mexico's method: "Why is your equation only for angels, Roger? Why can't

we do something down here? Couldn't there be an equation for us too, something to help us find a safer place?" (54, Pynchon's emphasis).[26]

In order to understand the stakes of the difference between Pointsman's and Mexico's conception of the world, we can map each of them on to Foucault's spectrum of governmentality as the contact zone between technologies of domination and technologies of the self. Where Pointsman's pavlovianism clearly falls closer to the domination side of the spectrum—and can thus, within the general framework of Foucault's Nietzschean histiography, be seen to belong to a historical period prior to our contemporary moment, one in which states sought to influence populations through what Foucault calls police-science—Mexico's statistical approach more clearly represent the technologies of the self and a later historical moment.

In "Postscript on the Societies of Control," one of his last published articles, Deleuze argues along Foucauldian lines that the Second World War marks the boundary between what he calls disciplinary societies and the new society of control.[27] Pointsman clearly belong to a disciplinary society—his Pavlovian schemes as they are described by Pynchon appear as almost parodic approximations (avant la lettre) of Foucault's disciplinary technologies—and as such he should, according to the periodization suggested by Deleuze, belong to the old guard. Despite all his power, Pointsman is portrayed as man on the way out. He ends the novel in a subordinate position passed over by history.[28]

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[26]Jessica's question creates an association between Mexico's method and the obsession with angels and angelic perspectives—canalized through readings of the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, chiefly his *Duino Elegies*—that haunts several Nazi officers, and most notably Weissman/Blicero in *Gravity's Rainbow*. For more on the importance of Rilke in *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Haynes.

[27]As he writes, "But in turn the disciplines underwent a crisis to the benefit of new forces that were gradually instituted and which accelerated after World War II: a disciplinary society was what we already no longer were, what we had ceased to be"(3).

[28]"With Pointsman it's only habit, retro-scientism: a last look back at the door to Stockholm, closing behind him forever. The entries began to fall off, and presently stopped. He signed reports, he supervised. He traveled to

Although Mexico is portrayed as less menacing than Pointsman—indeed, by the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* he will be a founding member of the so-called Counterforce—Pointsman's critique of the young statistician is not without merit.[29] If Pointsman embodies disciplinary society, then Mexico incarnates what Deleuze calls the society of control, the new regime of power under which people are not as much defined as individuals members of a population but rather, as Deleuze writes, as '"dividuals,' and masses, samples, data, markets, or '*banks*' (5, Deleuze's emphasis).[30] We will return to Pointsman's claim about the end of history below. Here let us note that one of the elegant rooms of history that Mexico's statistical approach devaluates is that of human subjectivity. Where Pointsman sees human consciousness as an empty, yet privileged receptable for disciplinay conditionings—indeed, human consciousness is in a sense the target of all of Pointsman's endeavours—subjectivity has no special value for Mexico; it is simply one of several possible 'division' of a world he can subject to his angelic poisson-equations. It does not seem to be Pynchon's point that Pointsman's regime is better or worse than Mexico's, but rather that World War II (or, perhaps more precisely, the whole period described by *Gravity's Rainbow)* marks the no man's land between two regimes.[31]

If, as I argue, Mexico's angelic-statistical worldview lead to Deleuze and Foucault's society of control, then we have in Mexico's methods the germ of what will, more than sixty

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other parts of England, later to other countries, to scout for fresh talent. In the faces of Mossmoon and the others, at odd moments, he could detect a reflex he'd never allowed himself to dream of: the tolerance of men in power for one who never Made His Move, or made it wrong" (752).

[29]As Ursula K. Heise notes about the Pointsman/Mexico dichotomy that the scholars who argue that we should choose Mexico over Pointsman in order to escape the binary worldview of the latter are themselves falling into a binary trap: "[O]ne must be cautious of identifying Pynchon's or the narrator's view too hastily with either one of the two philosophies." (Heisse 188).

[30]Earlier in the text, Deleuze distinguisehes the two regimes thus: "In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything—the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation (5).

[31]As Deluze similarly cautions his readers that, "There is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it's within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another. […] There is no need to fear or hope but only to look for new weapons" (4).

years later, become the world and language of big data in which the NSA can tell its analyst only to look for targets who are at 51 percent foreign. When Slothrop hears America as it most sound to a non-American, therefore, he is already hearing the angelic voice of big data, as it pertains to the national security apparatus. However, we still need to examine exactly how Mexico's methods affect subjectivity and nationality beyond making both into data points.

In their book *Big Data: A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work, and Think, Viktor* Mayer-Schönberger and Kenneth Cukier argue that the mathematical and technological innovations have created a new world in which not only huge amounts of data can be calculated automatically but also that the computer models can themselves come up with hypotheses or proxies to explain correlation within the data set:

> We now have so much data available and so much computing power that we don't have to laboriously pick one proxy or a small handful of them and examine them one by one. Sophisticated computational analysis can now identify the optimal proxy […] In place of the hypothesis-driven approach, we can use a data-driven one. Our results may be less biased and more accurate, and we will almost certainly get them faster" (55-56).

These methods (with the Poisson-equation playing a big role in mapping out correlations) have led to so-called predictive policing (158-62), in which "potential" criminals are targeted before they "actually" committed a crime. It is a short distance from these methods of policing to the practices of the NSA. Exactly as Deleuze predicted, whole populations are now treated as dividuals, as banks of data points. Moreover, all this data is not subjected to human analysis but rather to the automatic proxyfication described above, completely jettisoning questions of how or why any given phenomenon exists. As Chris Anderson put it in his essay, provocatively entitled "The End of Theory," in the tech-magazine *Wired*:

> Google's founding philosophy is that we don't know why this page is better than that one: If the statistics of incoming links say it is, that's good enough. No semantic or causal analysis is required. That's why Google can translate languages without actually "knowing" them (given equal corpus data, Google can translate Klingon into Farsi as easily as it can translate French into German). And why it can match ads to content without any knowledge or assumptions about the ads or the content. […] This is a world where massive amounts of data and applied mathematics replace every other tool that might be brought to bear. Out with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to sociology. Forget taxonomy, ontology, and psychology. Who knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it, and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity. With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves.(n.p)

Roger Mexico could not have said it better. And Jessica Swanlake formulated one of the most trenchant critiques: it is an equation for angels. The pragmatism running through Anderson's piece ("Who know why people do what they do? The point is they do it") elides the fact that the question of why is exactly what animates ontology, psychology, and all the other disciplines he wants to do away with. The numbers speaking for themselves might work if all one is trying to do is sell ad-space on the internet but there are other endeavors beyond commerce that these disciplines might be good for.[32] It is exactly because these disciplines are more than

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[32] As Nick Couldry, one of the most trenchant critics of the (implicit) philosophy of big data writes: "Combine all this and mystify it through the myth of big data - and you risk replacing older ways of talking about the social world that can still be related to social actors with myriad data-strings that lack any elements that connect with how individuals, with recognisable sets of human aims and capabilities, make sense of what they do. And so, since hermeneutics (and the exchange of signs) is the basis of social life, in installing the Myth of Big Data into our working practices for generating and attributing knowledge, we risk unraveling the social itself, or at least the languages of social description on which not just sociology, but also justice and politics, have relied. We risk building a social landscape peopled by what the 19th century Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol called 'dead souls': human entities that have financial value (in his novel, if you remember, as mortgageable assets; in our new world, as unwitting data producers), but that are not alive, not at least in the sense we know human beings to be alive." (11)

completely instrumentalized handmaidens to security-capital-industrial complex obsessed with short-term solutions that they are more valuable than ever.[33]

Treating every subject like a proxy, as part of an equation, Mexico's method is another one of *Gravity's Rainbow's* pornographies. It treats human beings as clichés of themselves. The effects of this historical transformation on individual human beings are already beginning to show themselves in the Zone, as Pynchon's narrator tells us:

> Ghosts used to be either likenesses of the dead or wraiths of the living. But here in the Zone categories have been blurred badly. The status of the name you miss, love, and search for now has grown ambiguous and remote, but this is even more than the bureaucracy of mass absence—some still live, some have died, but many, many have forgotten which they are. Their likenesses will not serve. Down here are only wrappings left in the light, in the dark: images of the Uncertainty. . . . (303)

If the Second World war marks the beginning of the society of control, where people are ghostly likenesses of themselves (or "dead souls" as Couldry puts it), we need to take a closer look at exactly how Pynchon's represent this historical rupture. Nobody is more aware of the new regime than Pointsman who sees his own place in history erode as a consequence of Mexico's new methods, as evinced in this meditation, ripe with generational anxiety:

> How can Mexico play, so at ease, with these symbols of randomness and fright? Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware—perhaps—that in his play he wrecks the elegant rooms of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico's whole *generation* have turned out like this? Will Postwar be nothing but "events," newly created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history? (56, Pynchon's

[33] There is a parallel between Big Data as described here and the neoliberal economic regime that followed in the wake of the abandonment of the gold standard, the defining feature of which, as Foucault argues in his *The Birth of Biopolitics* (215-315) is to apply economic models to all of life's aspects—or stated differently, to make reduce life to a series of data points.

emphasis)

The society of control is on the one hand defined by a weakening of the links between data points[34] And on the other hand by the absolute permanence of the individual data points—everything that has ever happened is forever stored for future analysis.[35] In a sense, this is the perspective of the rocket itself, a completely dehumanized and transcendent perspective. If the society of control "wrecks the elegant rooms of history" and "threatens the idea of cause and effect," it is not simply through the exchange of regime of governmentality for another. There is a sense in which the historical transformation taking place in the period depicted by *Gravity's Rainbow,* influenced by scientific and technological advances in chemical engineering, rocket science, and information technology, exposes certain historical conditions that had hitherto been hidden. As the ghost of the assassinated German industrialist and statesman Walter Rathenau says during a spiritualist séance:

> All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic. Useful to you, gentlemen, but no longer so to us here. If you want the truth—I know I presume—you must look into the technology of these matters. Even into the hearts of certain molecules—it is they after all which dictate temperatures, pressures, rates of flow, costs, profits, the shapes of towers. . . . (167).

Representing a true angelic perspective, Rathenau corroborates Mexico's methods: cause and effect, as it is usually conceived, tell us very little about how and why change actually occurs,

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[34]The convergence of this particular aspect could perhaps said to be the open-source deep web project DeepArcher that Pynchon describes in Bleeding Edge: "What remailers do is pass data packets on from one node to the next with only enough information to tell each link in the chain where the next one is, no more. DeepArcher goes a step further and forgets where it's been, immediately, forever. […] Kind of like a Markov chain, where the transition matrix keeps resetting itself" (78).

[35]"No keystroke left behind" (105) as Pynchon has one of his characters say in *Bleeding Edge*, simultaneously mocking George W. Bush's education policy and, avant la lettre, the methods of the NSA.

rather, history is subject to a range of inhuman forces that are not all visible.[36] Human interaction with these nonhuman forces represents one of the principal themes of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and the novel as a whole maps out how the World War itself can be seen as an example of a clash of different forces much more than an outcome of political disagreements between human beings. As Enzian, a colonel in the Schwarzkommando, the German platoon of African troops hunting Rocket 0000, thinks to himself:

> [I]f what the IG built on this site were not at all the final shape of it, but only an arrangement of fetishes, come-ons to call down special tools in the form of 8th AF bombers yes the "Allied" planes all would have been, ultimately, IG-built, by way of Director Krupp, through his English interlocks—the bombing was the exact industrial process of conversion, each release of energy placed exactly in space and time, each shockwave plotted in advance to bring *precisely tonight's wreck* into being thus decoding the Text, thus coding, recoding, redecoding the holy Text. . . If it is in working order, what is it meant to do? The engineers who built it as a refinery never knew there were any further steps to be taken. Their design was "finalized," and they could forget it. (520-21)

In this theater of war, information becomes privileged—not only as a medium of exchange, but at the same time as the true object of the war and as the key to decoding the historical processes that lead to it—and human beings appear as pawns in a game they do not even

[36]Discussing the chemical engineering that led to the creation of the V2-rocket, Heise makes a similar point about how Pynchon conceives of cause and effect: "Once science has discovered the possibility of changing the face of the globe as well as the metabolism of individual organisms through molecular manipulations that are able to create entirely new materials and substances, no nation or individual will remain unaffected. […] Once crucial historical events take place at the scale of atoms, man and molecule enter into a complex dynamic that cannot be defined in terms of conventional causality" (195).

understand.[37] Although Pynchon is fiercely critical of these historical development, his solution is not to turn back the clock to older forms of domination and likely erroneous notions of cause and effect, but rather to look for new weapons, as Deleuze puts it, and those weapons are not wanting in a time of radical historical change as that of the Second World War is full of inconsistencies, ruptures, and otherwise concealed troves of information for those who want to establish an ethical counterforce. The global surveillance state is not the only thing emerging in *Gravity's Rainbow* but also another kind of vision which allows for a heretofore unprecedented potential for global solidarity and participation. The reader gets a glimpse of this vision in a description of a strangely internationalized Christmas mass performed by a preacher of African descent:

> From palmy Kingston, the intricate needs of the Anglo-American Empire (1939-1945) had brought him to this cold fieldmouse church, nearly in earshot of a northern sea he'd hardly glimpsed in crossing, to a compline service, a program tonight of plainsong in English, forays now and then into polyphony: Thomas Tallis, Henry Purcell, even a German macaronic from the fifteenth century, attributed to Heinrich Suso […]These are not heresies so much as imperial outcomes, necessary as the black man's presence, from acts of minor surrealism—which, taken in the mass, are an act of suicide, but which in its pathology, in its dreamless version of the real, the Empire commits by the thousands every day, completely unaware of what it's doing. . . .(129, Pynchon's emphasis)

Not heresies, perhaps, but these imperial unawares are the starting point and building blocks

[37]As the media theorist Friedrich Kitler notes about *Gravity's Rainbow*: "But if the war was literally a theater of war and its body count a simulacrum that concealed the competition of diverse technologies for their own or our future, everything takes place as if in media that, from the drama to the computer, only process information. Competition among and priority disputes between technologies have always amounted to competition over information about them" (159).

for Pynchon's critique of the society of control and all its adherent technologies, a critique that functions within the diegetic world of the novel as well as extratextually, between the novel and its reader.[38] In order to see the full force of this critique, however, we must turn from time to space and enter the stage where most of *Gravity's Rainbow* takes place: the Zone.

"Limitless Hope and Danger": The Zone and Territorial Technologies

The Zone, the land that the Nazi German state used to control, constitutes the scene of the majority of *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Slothrop leaves Nice with his new identity as a British war correspondent, traveling through Switzerland towards what used to be the Third Reich, he begins to get a sense of the kind of space he is about to inhabit:

> [N]ever a clear sense of nationality anywhere, nor even of belligerent sides, only the War, a single damaged landscape, in which "neutral Switzerland" is a rather stuffy convention, observed but with as much sarcasm as "liberated France" or "totalitarian Germany," "Fascist Spain," and others…
>
> The War has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image. The track runs in different networks now. What appears to be destruction is really the shaping of railroad spaces to other purposes, intentions he can only, riding through it for the first time, begin to feel the leading edges of…(257)

If the many instances of the figure of the no man's land found throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* all related a specific dynamic, this actual no man's land where Germany used to be must be at the center of the analysis. The spatial aspects of the no man's land—which I have so far described

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[38] Shawn Smith is on the same page when he writes, "Thus the force that thwarts narrative stability, and which is prefigured in the novel's poetics, is a way of "explaining" historical perception—or, perhaps more accurately, the difficulties of perceiving "real" connections, and hence lessons, of the causes of World War II and the Cold War. Pynchon's "film" suggests that we, its "audience," have surrendered any control over, or responsibility for, the history we witness. GR is his warning to us to take back this control before it is too late" (95).

in cinematic, linguistic, technological, and historiographical terms—conjoin all the different strands of the dynamic into one conceptual figure to the extent that we might think of the Zone as the originator of all the other components of the theory.

Nevertheless, the Zone functions in much the same way as the other aspects we have discussed above. It is at the same time a fissure between different regimes and a space wherein different forces vie for domination, and as such, a space where the normally hidden historical currents, naturalized forces, and alternative options become visible. In the quote above, it is clear that nationality, conventionally understood, is one of the first victims in the Zone, as the war blur any distinctions between different nations to the point where the mention of a given country becomes a sarcastic denotation (in quotes) of how things used to be. In other words, nationality appears to Slothrop as what Deleuze called a cliché of the real thing, as a small and increasingly insignificant part of something larger whole that nevertheless purports to represent the whole. Nationality, of course, is not completely gone and will make a comeback, hinted at in *Gravity's Rainbow*, after the war, but as we shall see, the cliché of nationality, as it appears to Slothrop when he is traveling through Switzerland in the spring of 1945, can tell us a lot about what nationality and nations have come to mean in the era of globalization.[39]

One of the earliest of many theoreticians of the Zone is the Argentinian anarchist

[39]Sascha Pöhlmann argues that all of Pynchon's novels should be read as an effort to imagine a postnational space. While I find much to agree with in her analyses, her narrow focus on nationalism as by far the most important controlling force in *Gravity's Rainbow* (277-361)arguably misses the subtle interplay of nationalism, technology, and capitalism that I track in this study. Paul Giles, in his study of Pynchon as a transnational novelist, writes, "It is also to suggest how his novels choreograph what Benedict Anderson called the "grammar of nationalism" within a global framework, where national identity has evolved into something distinct from the legal boundaries of the nation-state. For Anderson, national identity itself has increasingly become an imaginative rather than a social or administrative phenomenon, a fiction preserved in a "long-distance" way, either through the geographical distance of exile or the historical distance of retrospective memory" (236). I largely agree with this assessment though Giles refusal to read *Gravity's Rainbow* as a global novel and instead focus on the transnational relations between America and Britain within it—as when he puzzlingly and erroneously claims that "Gravity's Rainbow takes place mainly in London during the final months of the Second World War, in 1944 and 1945" (226)—limits the scope of his analysis.

Francisco Squalidozzi, who Slothrop meets in a cafe in Zürich. His meditation on the spatiality of the Zone, coming as it does immediately before Slothrop travels across the Swiss border into what is left after the Thousand Year Reich has collapsed, stand as one of the main accounts of spatiality to Pynchon's novel as a whole:

> "In ordinary times," he wants to explain, "the center always wins. Its power grows with time, and that can't be reversed, not by ordinary means. Decentralizing, back toward anarchism, needs extraordinary times… this War-this incredible War-just for the moment has wiped out the proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for a thousand years. Wiped it clean. *Opened it*."
>
> "Sure. For how long?"
>
> "It won't last. Of course not. But for a few months… perhaps there'll be peace by the autumn-*discúlpeme*, the spring, I still haven't got used to your hemisphere-for a moment of spring, perhaps…"
>
> "Yeah but-what're you gonna do, take over land and try to hold it? They'll run you right off, podner."
>
> "No. Taking land is building more fences. We want to leave it open. We want it to grow, to change. In the openness of the German Zone, our hope is limitless." Then, as if struck on the forehead, a sudden fast glance, not at the door, but up at the ceiling-"So is our danger." (264-65, Pynchon's emphasis)

Squalidozzi's narrative should be familiar to us by now: a continuously more regulated world, subject to the disciplinary forces of the technologies of governmentality, give way, however briefly, to another world where at least the possibility of an alternative exists. An autumn moving towards winter turns out to be a moment of spring, as Squallidozzi's seasonal mistake underline. This brief statement perhaps best explains *Gravity's Rainbow* as a whole, as well as the

dynamic of the no man's land that I have been tracking: a brief moment of spring with limitless hope and danger. Similar to Badiou's and Smithson's notion of a Site, it is, as Squalidozzi avers, the rarest of coincidences, which is why he, and countless other people from all over the world, have traveled to the Zone to be part of it.

At the simplest political level, what has happened in Germany is an interim following the toppling of a sovereign regime which controlled a specific territory. Historically, of course, Germany, after the fall of the Nazi regime, was fairly quickly divided into four different zones controlled by Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States, respectively. However, in the world of *Gravity's Rainbow*, this division, although it is acknowledged several times, does very little to actually divide up the land in any recognizable way, it does not in any substantial way manage to close the openness of the zone. As the hot air balloon captain Schnorp explains to Slothrop as they are flying from the Mittelwerke rocket factory near Nordhausen towards Berlin, looking down on the Zone: "There are no zones. […] No zones but the Zone" (333). As such, the Zone is a space that suddenly ceased being a territory—it is for a brief moment no longer subject to the technology of territoriality. That territory should be understood as a technology of governmentality along Foucauldian lines is exactly Stuart Elden's claim in his study the *Birth of Territory*.[40] The Zone thus acquires its characteristic openness through a temporary reprieve of the normally concealed governmental technology of territoriality. It has been, in the most literal sense of the words, deterritorialized.

Deterritorialization is of course one of the central concepts of Deleuze and Guattari's

[40] Elden explains his thesis thus: "Territory should be understood as a political technology, or perhaps better as a bundle of political technologies. Territory is not simply land, in the political-economic sense of rights of use, appropriation, and possession attached to a place; nor is it a narrowly political-strategic question that is closer to a notion of terrain. Territory comprises techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain. Measure and control—the technical and the legal—need to be thought alongside land and terrain. What is crucial in this designation is the attempt to keep the question of territory open. Understanding territory as a political technology is not to define territory once and for all; rather, it is to indicate the issues at stake in grasping how it was understood in different historical and geographical contexts" (322-23).

philosophy. In *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* they describe deterritorialization as one of the essential qualities of capitalism (although its own existence is not bound to capitalism, capitalism cannot function without it), a force that destabilizes and decodes rigid structures into flows of capital and other kinds of energy. Not merely used to describe spatiality, deterritorialization is an isomorphism for other domains, it functions something like a metaphor for capitalism's ability to melt everything solid into air, as Marx had it. In Deleuze and Guattari's telling, however, deterritorialization, in the case of capitalism, is always followed by a reterritorialization, a solidification of new ossified structures.[41] As such, Pynchon may be said to literalize Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor with his Zone—or he might, if there was any indication that he had read the work which was published in France the year before the *Gravity's Rainbow* came out.[42] The similarities between Deleuze and Guattari's concept and Pynchon's Zone are quite remarkable: not only does the Zone conform to the dehierarchized, anarchic—and, in terms from *A Thousand Plateaus*, rhizomatic—space that Deleuze and Guattari are describing in their works, it is also represents a brief respite before the structure returns and the reterritorialization starts to take place. Moreover, as we shall see, it is international capitalism more than anything else that gave rise to the Zone in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

The Second World War, indeed both world wars, are represented in *Gravity's Rainbow* as being closer related to the a particular stage in the world-wide expansion of capitalism than to

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[41] The references to this proces are myriad in the two works but one example could be this definition from *Anti-Oedipus*: "The famous personalization of power is like a territoriality that accompanies the deterritorialization of the machine as its other side. If it is true that the function of the modern State is the regulation of the decoded, deterritorialized flows, one of the principal aspects of this function consists in reterritorializing, so as to prevent the decoded flows from breaking loose at all the edges of the social axiomatic. One sometimes has the impression that the flows of capital would willingly dispatch themselves to the moon if the capitalist State were not there to bring them back to earth. For example: deterritorialization of the flows of financing, but reterritorialization of purchasing power and the means of payment (the role of the central banks" (258).

[42]I am not the first to remark on the similarities between Pynchon's novels and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, Mattesich's study represents a thouroughly deleuzeguattarian reading of Pynchon's oeuvre, see in particular 133-207. Incidentally, Pynchon himself references the (fictional) "indispensable *Italian Wedding Fake Book*, by Deleuze and Guattari" (97, Pynchon's emphasis) in his later novel *Vineland*.

the political differences between nation-states. We have already seen how the war could be conceived as theater—as a stage where different technologies vie for power behind what is ostensibly a political conflict. These technologies, however, do not simply exist divorced from everything, rather they are closely allied with particular business interests, with cartels of firms that at this very historical moment are undergoing a transformation into what would later be called multinational corporations but at the time appears as transnational cartels of firms on both sides of the war. This stage of capitalism, Pynchon suggests, is not characterized by the free competition of Adam Smith but rather by cartels, by corporations conglomerating corporations that each have something like a market monopoly.[43] One of the early developers of this system was none other than Walther Rathenau, the murdered German industrialist and politician, whom we last saw pontificating about cause and effect from beyond the grave.[44]

The war, then, can be seen as a clearing away of the obstacles in the way of this new phase of capitalism, a deterritorialization the purpose of which is to stimulate the reterritorialization of a new globalized economy. As such, the Zone is the space where the maximum amount of deterritorialization is present and thus where the forces of capitalism can be viewed in their extremes. No one sees this better than the Soviet intelligence agent Tchitcherine who towards the novels end understands that he has been a pawn in the game of a depersonalized worldwide military-industrial complex , just like everyone else:

Are there arrangements Stalin won't admit . . . doesn't even know about? Oh, a State

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[43]As he writes, "A market needed no longer be run by the Invisible Hand, but now could *create itself*— its own logic, momentum, style, from *inside*. Putting the control inside was ratifying what de facto had happened—that you had dispensed with God. But you had taken on a greater, and more harmful, illusion. The illusion of control" (30, Pynchon's emphasis).

[44] "Rathenau—according to the histories—was prophet and architect of the cartelized state. […] young Walter was more than another industrial heir—he was a philosopher with a vision of the postwar State. He saw the war in progress as a world revolution, out of which would rise neither Red communism nor an unhindered Right, but a rational structure in which Business would be the true, the rightful authority—a structure based, not surprisingly, on the one he'd engineered in Germany for fighting the World War" (164-65).

> begins to take form in the stateless German night, a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul. IG Raketen. Circus-bright, poster reds and yellows, rings beyond counting, all going at once. […] He will never get further than the edge of this meta-cartel which has made itself known tonight, this Rocketstate whose borders he cannot cross. . . . (566)

If the war is simply a theater, put on by the forces of technology and capitalism, where does this leave the nation-states? *Gravity's Rainbow* does not simply represent nations as unsubstantive fictions behind which the real action can occur. The force of nation-states will, as every reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* knows, reassert itself in the Zone in two new German states that will close the opened space of the Zone once and for all. And even more importantly for our present purposes is the question of the status of the American nation state, the subject which started our inquiry.

The Second World War represents the moment in history when the United States ascends to the role as dominant world power militarily, politically, economically and culturally,[45] taking its turn, as it were, in the westward course of Empire.[46] If American during most of *Gravity's Rainbow* is part of the short lived Anglo-American Empire, it is gearing up to take the mantle from the British Empire and emerge as the one true global superpower by the end of the 1940s. This would make the Zone part of America's frontier, as Turner has

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[45]As Arrighi writes, "the international setting in 1940 was not all that new since the great powers of the interstate system were in the midst of yet another military confrontation which, except for its unprecedented scale, ferocity, and destructiveness, reproduced a recurrent pattern of the capitalist world-economy. Soon, however, this confrontation was translated into the establishment of a new world order, centered on and organized by the United States, which differed in key respecys from the defunct British world order and became the foundation of a new enlarged reproduction of the capitalist world-economy" (283).

[46]As Pynchon acknowledges in the following section: "This is the kind of sunset you hardly see any more, a 19th-century wilderness sunset, a few of which got set down, approximated, on canvas, landscapes of the American West by artists nobody ever heard of, when the land was still free and the eye innocent, and the presence of the Creator much more direct. … of course Empire took its way westward, what other way was there but into those virgin sunsets to penetrate and to foul?" (214).

described, the space where America meets its outside and through which it grows to an ever bigger empire. Of course, the Zone is to the east of America, not west as the traditional frontier line as well as the more general westward course of empire, which if nothing else should tell us that Pynchon does not uncritically accept the idea that America is an empire in the same way Rome or even Great Britain was it. The United States is an empire in the time of globalized capitalism, apart from a brief period, it does not have colonies around the world, rather it is at the center of the global flows of capital. As mentioned, the year *Gravity's Rainbow* came out was the year when the United States abandoned the gold standard and freed the currencies, as it were; the year American currency finally and perhaps definitively unmoored itself from the value of gold and started to flow freely. Pynchon's point seems to be that America, rather than the subjective agency behind its purported empire, is the facilitator for yet another nonhuman force, that of international capitalism.

"The Fork in the Road America Never Took": Preterition and Kenosis

If the assemblage of technology and capitalism decenter individual human beings as authors of their own fate—or rather, show that this was never the case—can there be said to be any positive side to the vision of the world incarnated by *Gravity's Rainbow*? One positive aspect lies in the novels' meditation on religion, although as I will argue, that positive aspect itself is not religious. Preterition is the Puritan doctrine that God elected a few people to be saved while passing over the rest of humanity. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon uses this concept and the dichotomy of the elect and the preterite to point to a political an ethical way response to the historical situation described in the novel. Slothrop's ancestor William Slothrop, an early Puritan settler in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, wrote the tract *On Preterition*, we are told, arguing that the preterite, that is, those passed over, were just as holy as the elect. As the ghost

of William Slothrop explains to his ancestor Tyrone:

> "That's what Jesus meant," whispers the ghost of Slothrop's first American ancestor William, "venturing out on the Sea of Galilee. He saw it from the lemming point of view. Without the millions who had plunged and drowned, there could have been no miracle. The successful loner was only the other part of it: the last piece to the jigsaw puzzle, whose shape had already been created by the Preterite, like the last blank space on the table" (554).

Pynchon expands the concept of preterition past its theological sense. The distinction between preterite and elect overlaps with the governmental technologies operating behind history and allows Pynchon both to show his sympathy with the preterite, but also show the inherent difficulties in siding with those who have been passed over without employing overarching, transcendent concepts—after all, if even language is a potential technology of domination or election, how do you represent the preterite? If the preterite in Gravity's Rainbow is everybody that has been passed over by history, or who has in some way been disenfranchised, it is harder to determine who precisely comprise the elect. Though several people claim to be elect, it is ultimately as elusive a designation as the "They" that Slothrop and the counterforce keep referring to. There are certainly people who are closer to power than others, but ultimately They and the elect—like the V2 Rocket or the Rilkean angels that are continuously evoked by Weissmann/Blicero—appear to be an inhuman force. As the Jesuit Priest Father Rapier states it: "It is possible that They will not die. That it is now within the state of Their art to go on forever—though we, of course, will keep dying as we always have"' (539). Ultimately, the construction of the Raketenstadt means that everyone is passed over.

Slothrop himself as the novel's protagonist is central to this problematic. As a historical novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* tells the story of a period through the life of one man. For all

the secondary characters, there is no doubt—at least three fourths of the way through the novel—that *Gravity's Rainbow* is the story of Tyrone Slothrop, he is the character Pynchon elected to tell his story through. It is in that light, I believe, that the final dispersal of Slothrop should be seen

Towards the end of the novel, Slothrop disappears or shatters into numerous fragments. As Pynchon writes:

> At last, lying one afternoon spread-eagled at his ease in the sun, at the edge of one of the ancient Plague towns he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection where the judges have come to set up a gibbet for a common criminal who is to be hanged at noon[...] (625).[47]

This dispersal has been foreshadowed in the action. Indeed, it may be said to have started one morning in April when MPs knocked on Slothrop's hotel room door and his subjectivity started to unravel. After that he acquired the identity of a British war corresondent and then in quick succession, as already mentioned, Rocketman, Max Schlepzig, and Plechazunga. This scattering of the subject is even tied to and explained by a scientific law known as "Mondaugen's Law":

> "Temporal bandwidth" is the width of your present, your now. It is the familiar " Δt" considered as a dependent variable. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. But the narrower your sense

[47] Later, we hear something of what has happened after this dispersal: "(Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering. There's supposed to be a last photograph of him on the only record album ever put out by The Fool, an English rock group—seven musicians posed, in the arrogant style of the early Stones, near an old rocket-bomb site, out in the East End, or South of the River. It is spring, and French thyme blossoms in amazing white lacework across the cape of green that now hides and softens the true shape of the old rubble. There is no way to tell which of the faces is Slothrop's: the only printed credit that might apply to him is "Harmonica, kazoo—a friend." But knowing his Tarot, we would expect to look among the Humility, among the gray and preterite souls, to look for him adrift in the hostile light of the sky, the darkness of the sea. . . .)" (742).

> of Now, the more tenuous you are. It may get to where you're having trouble remembering what you were doing five minutes ago, or even-as Slothrop now-what you're doing *here*, at the base of this colossal curved embankment… (509)

However foretold, the disappearance of the novel's main character still comes as a shock to the reader because, I argue, it represents a heretofore unprecedented radical choice of those passed over by the governmental technologies of domination. As many have noted, there are Christian echoes in Slothrop's dispersal. Not only does he become a crossroad, he disappears so that others may come to the fore. What I want to suggest, however, is that Pynchon is much more aware of the Christological dimensions of Slothrop's dispersal than has previously been noted. In Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:7), the apostle writes that Christ "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men," as the King James Bible puts it. The *New International Bible* renders the first part of the verse as "he made himself nothing." "Make of no reputation" and "made nothing" are translation of the Greek verb ἐκένωσεν (ekénōsen) which literally means to empty out. In other words, Jesus emptied himself out into the world. Paul's phrase gave rise to the theological concept of kenosis, the emptying out of God into the world. As such, Kenosis is the opposite of transcendence, it is the nearing of the transcendent to earth.[48] That exactly describes Slothrop's dispersal, cementing his Christlike status, but also alluding to an earlier passage in the novel that I have already discussed: "You never did the Kenosha Kid." Slothrop is the Kenosha Kid, I would like to suggest, his Kenosis is what allows Gravity's Rainbow to turn

[48]As Riessen writes about Emmanuel Levinas use of the concept: "Traditionally kenosis expresses the descent or approach of the Transcendent to earth. Transcendence (or the Infinite, or God) is no longer a lofty and elevated idea that prefers to remain by itself and can only be understood by itself. This is the representation of God in the philosophy of Aristotle, which greatly influenced the Western philosophical tradition as a whole up to the philosophy of Hegel. A kenotic representation of God's relationship to reality opens up a different perspective: transcendence can relate to reality by a descent or humiliation that is not contrary to God's transcendence, but rather an articulation of it (180).

itself completely over to the preterite world it has itself passed over.

Even if Slothrop's dispersal started with the questioning of his identity as an American. His nationalism is one of the last things that remains with Slothrop, as the narrator writes immeditale before Slothrop becomes a crossroad, "He's been changing, sure, changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose-but the one ghost-feather his fingers always brush by is America. Poor asshole, he can't let her go" (623). America is there until the end, after everything it still exists as a promise of something better, as itself an open zone which might lead to freedom and recognition for all preterite souls. William Slothrop had it right, *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests, America could have been the space, just as the Zone could have been, where the forces of governmentality and technology was finally overcome. I will give the last words of this chapter to the narrator's assesment of William Slothrop's place in history:

> Could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from? Suppose the Slothrop-ite heresy had had the time to consolidate and prosper? Might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot? It seems to Tyrone Slothrop that there might be a route back—maybe that anarchist he met in Zurich was right, maybe for a little while all the fences are down, one road as good as another, the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up. . . . (556).

Chapter 4: Jamaica Kincaid and the New Global Epic

> If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see. If you come by aeroplane, you will land at the V.C. Bird International Airport. Vere Cornwall (V.C) Bird is the prime minister of Antigua. You may be the sort of tourist who would wonder why a Prime Minister would want an airport named after him—why not a school, why not a hospital, why not some great public monument? You are a tourist and you have not yet seen a school in Antigua, you have not yet seen the hospital in Antigua, you have not yet seen a public monument in Antigua. As your plane descends to land, you might say, What a beautiful island Antigua is—more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen, and they were very beautiful, in their way, but they were much too green, much too lush with vegetation, which indicated to you, the tourist, that they got quite a bit of rainfall, and rain is the very thing that you, just now, do not want, for you are thinking of the hard and cold and dark and long days you spent working in North America (or, worse, Europe), earning some money so that you could stay in this place (Antigua) where the sun always shines and where the climate is deliciously hot and dry for the four to ten days you are going to be staying there[.] (3-4)

Thus starts Jamaica Kincaid's genre-defying book *A Small Place* from 1988, written after the author's first visit back to the island in the eastern Caribbean on the border between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, where she was born and grew up, and which she left for a job as an au pair in Scarsdale, New York, just before her fifteenth birthday in 1965.[1] During the time span between Kincaid's departure and her return, she attended photography school, changed her name from her birth name Elaine Potter Richardson to Jamaica Kincaid, became

[1] Kincaid's background is recounted in Edwards, 1-9 and many other places. As we will see, Kincaid's personal life and her writing are sometimes irrecoverably intertwined.

a staff writer at *The New Yorker Magazine* where she for many years contributed to the "Talk of the Town" column as well as her own gardening column, and she published the two commercially successful and critically acclaimed books of fiction *At the Bottom of the River* and *Annie John*. During the same period, in Kincaid's absence, Antigua went from being a British colony to an associate state of the British Commonwealth in 1968 to, finally, in 1981 an independent nation state.

A Small Place, Kincaid's third book, did not meet with the same immediate success that had welcomed her two previous publications, *At the Bottom of the River* and *Annie John*. The editor of the *New Yorker*, Robert Gotlieb, refused to publish Kincaid's new piece in the magazine because he found it too angry and bitter; after its publication as a book several reviewers of the book agreed with that assessment. For example, the New Statesman and Society wrote that Kincaid "loses control of her material, and inexplicably descends into a snivelling attack on the sins of the nasty—and long departed—colonial power."[2] Although much recent scholarship has lauded *A Small Place* for its sophisticated rhetorical techniques and its cogent analysis of the situation facing a small place like Antigua in the contemporary global economy, it is still possible to find scholarly dismissals of the work on the grounds that Kincaid's private feelings blind her to the true emancipatory nature of globalization.[3] *A Small Place* has also raised hackles beyond the book review pages of first world newspapers. Her castigation of the Antiguan ruling class and government provoked a sharp reaction back home. The government of Prime Minister V.C. Bird banned *A Small Place* and banned Jamaica Kincaid: she was told that she would not be allowed to return to Antigua again, that any plane

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[2] Cited from Edwards, 8, who also cites more positive reviews, among others, one written by Salman Rushdie.
[3] See for instance Maria Boletsi's article "A Place of her own: Negotiating Boundaries in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* and *My Garden (Book)*" in which the author writes about *A Small Place* that "[t]he realization that that Antigua is but a chessboard for colonial powers makes the narrator too angry to celebrate mobility and the alleged liberating potential of the dissolution of boundaries within our cosmopolitan world." (234).

with her on board would not be allowed to land in V.C. Bird International Airport.

That *A Small Place* caused so much animosity from Antigua to New York should alert us to the fact that Kincaid's text was not simply an angry screed from the global periphery towards the center, as some first-world reviewers had it. Rather, as will become clear, Kincaid's text is multidirectional: it constantly changes its rhetorical position of enunciation. None of its characters—whether the old imperial colonialist, the clueless contemporary tourist, the new Antiguan elite, the subaltern Antiguan, or even Kincaid's narrator herself—escape blame. This multidirectionality allows us to glimpse the contours of a unified global space as they are refracted through a small place like Antigua, and it is this aspiration that marks this text, despite its small size, as an example of a contemporary global American epic.[4]

This multidirectionality allows us to glimpse the contours of a new global space as they are refracted through a small place like Antigua. Kincaid engages the dialectic of periphery and center only to look for a passage to an absolute outside, a global exteriority that has yet to be fully conceived, and it is this aspiration that marks this short text as belonging of the new genre of global epics.[5] Like Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, and Edouard Glissant's *The Indes*, Kincaid's text uses the transnational space of the Caribbean as a point of departure for a worldwide epic.[6] Unlike these twentieth century

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[4] For a helpful listing of the different generic categories under which *A Small Place* has been classed, see Covi 63-64.

[5] In his article "Narratives of Traversal: Jamaica Kincaid and the erasure of the Postcolonial Subject," Paul Giles argues that Kincaid in *A Small Place* as well as her other works moves beyond a certain postcolonial critique toward a critique of globalization in which, as he puts it, "it is no longer so easy to partition the world in terms of discrete social and political zones, to disentangle the oppressor from the oppressed." (375). While I agree with the assessment of *A Small Place* as a global text, I believe that Giles passes over many of the formal, rhetorical, and philosophical nuances that makes the book's global perspective so original in order to make his more general point.

[6] The only critic, to my knowledge, who has compared *A Small Place* to an epic is Tim Hector—the then leader of the Antiguan ACLM party who were in opposition to V.C. Bird's government— who in his essay about Kincaid's text in the small Antiguan weekly *Outlet*, writes: "In what category does *A Small Place* belong is it Essay, or is it travelogue, or both? [sic] In my view neither would do, though both are adequate. In my personal pantheon, A

poems, however, *A Small Place* is an epic of indirection, a miniaturized map of the world we live in now, painted with irony and anger. Kincaid enters into the dialectic of periphery and center only to look for a way out to an absolute outside, a global exteriority that has yet to be fully conceived but of which we can glimpse the contours as they are refracted through a small place like Antigua.

In the first part of *A Small Place*, Kincaid follows the tourist from North America ("or, worse, Europe"[4]), whom we have already met, as he gets off the plane in V.C. Bird International Airport, finds a taxi and rides to his hotel by the beach. Throughout this part of the narrative, Kincaid addresses the tourist in the second person, calling him "you." In effect, she equates the reader of the text with what quickly becomes apparent is a particularly ignorant first world individual. Via Kincaid's use of this second person apostrophe, the reader is forced to occupy the uncomfortable position of a bungling and unwitting tourist, having no choice but to accept the identity that Kincaid foists on him or her. (This uncomfortable interpellation of the reader might help explain some of the enmity Kincaid's work was met with in the first world press.)

Through her address to the fictional tourist, Kincaid shows how the spectacle of an exotic tourist paradise like Antigua is produced and staged, and how the surface must continually be maintained so as not to show any cracks or break down altogether. She describes the tourist, standing in his hotel room immediately after arriving, looking out at the beach:

> You see yourself taking a walk on that beach, you see yourself meeting new people (only they are new in a very limited way, they are people just like you). You see yourself

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Small Place, takes its place as the prose equivalent of Aime Cesaire's super poem Chaier d'un retour au mon pays natal [sic]. Kincaid's statement of a return to her native country, addressed primarily to Antiguans, has universal significance precisely because of its lyrical particularity and the breadth of its vision" (7).

> eating some delicious, locally grown food. You see yourself, you see yourself… You must not wonder what exactly happened to the contents of your lavatory when you flushed it. You must not wonder where your bath water went when you pulled out the stopper. You must not wonder what happened when you brushed your teeth. Oh, it might all end up in the water you are thinking of taking a swim in; the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water, for you see, in Antigua there is no proper sewage-disposal system. But the Caribbean Sea is very big and the Atlantic Ocean even bigger; it would amaze even you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up (13-14).

The analogy between the tourist's excrement and the bodies of African slaves, both examples of extraneous waste of the global economy, underlines one of the main arguments of *A Small Place*: that a continuity can be discerned between the slavery and colonialism of Antigua's past and its predicament as a small place in the periphery of the globalized economic world-system during the present age. Kincaid argues that this continuity, and thereby the injustices of the global economic system then as now, is occluded in most of the discourse available to both the tourist and the native Antiguan, a fact that makes it hard to see any connections between individuals and the larger totalities in which they participate. Antigua is, and has always been, a place in the global periphery, victim, as Kincaid writes, to "every bad idea that flits across the mind of the world" (57)—from slavery to offshore banking.

Kincaid's narrator continually tells the tourist what he "must not" contemplate in order to keep the illusion of the exotic vacation destination intact. There is something pedantic in Kincaid's syntax of meticulous repetition, as if she is speaking to a child or as if she wants to make absolutely sure that her points get across. The effect of passages such as the one quoted here, however, is exactly the opposite of what the narrator is ostensibly trying to say. By

incessantly repeating what the tourist must not think about, Kincaid only draws more attention to those topics that could ruin the tourist's experience. As Suzanne Gauch writes in her article "*A Small Place*: Some Perspectives on the Ordinary," the continual use of the word "must" "resonates as a kind of sarcastic imperative, an *insistence* that the tourist block out any notion of Antiguans' everyday lives, one that re-qualifies the tourist's unconsciousness as entirely conscious." (912).

"No Tongue": Language and Irony

The second part of *A Small Place* concentrates on colonialism and its aftermath. As in the book's first part, the text perpetually focuses on what hides behind the surface of phenomena. After describing how Queen Victoria's birthday was celebrated every year as a national holiday in Antigua when she was growing up, Kincaid writes,

> I cannot tell you how angry it makes me to hear people from North America tell me how much they love England, how beautiful England is, with its traditions. All they see is some frumpy, wrinkled-up person passing by in a carriage waving at a crowd. But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worse and most painful of all, no tongue (31).

This short meditation on the invisible residues of colonialism generates a further elucidation of what Kincaid tells us is the worst absence of all: that of language. In a parenthetical sentence—a parenthesis that notably never gets closed—Kincaid writes:

> (For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak the crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean?

> For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me. […] But nothing can erase my rage—not an apology, not a large sum of money, not the death of the criminal—for this wrong can never be made right, and only the impossible can make me still[.] (31-32)

This dilemma is not new but rather a well-known trope, almost a commonplace, of post-colonial literature and theory: if the language of the colonizers helps occlude the racism and exploitation of imperialism, how is it possible to use this language to undertake a critique of neo-colonial power and oppression?[7] Because the English language at the same time makes up the scene of the crime and the means of the cover-up which Kincaid in *A Small Place* attempts to expose, no straightforward description of the state of affairs will accomplish her goal. Kincaid's critique succeeds in accurately describing the global implications of Antigua's situation by continually emphasizing the ideological complicities and shortcomings of the language she makes use of, and by pushing that language towards its limits of signification, by making it mean something different, sometimes the exact opposite, from what it says.

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[7] It would be hard to find an example of post-colonial theory that does not in one way or another touch on the problems of expression and representation in a post-colonial moment and setting. For one of the most influential articulations of this dilemma within post-colonial theory, see Gayatri Spivak's article "Can the Subaltern Speak," in which the author examines the problem of subaltern self-expression in a deconstructionist critique of the Subaltern Studies Group. Another locus classicus for this discussion is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind*. Within post-colonial literature, and in particular Anglo-Caribbean literature, the end of Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa," to which Kincaid might even be alluding herself, is one of the most cited examples: "I who am poisoned by the blood of both,/Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?/I who have cursed/The drunken officer of British rule, how choose/Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?/Betray them both, or give back what they give?/How can I face such slaughter and be cool?/How can I turn from Africa and live?" (18).

Making language mean the opposite of what is actually said is the ancient Roman rhetorician Quintilian's initial definition of irony[8] and Kincaid does seem to use this rhetorical trope in many and varied ways.[9] When she commences her parenthetical meditation on language quoted earlier with the quotidian phrase, "isn't it odd," what seems like an understatement actually serves to underscores the point. It is emphatically not the case that the theft of any language by which the crimes of slavery, colonialism, and economic exploitation could be adequately expressed only warrants a passing acknowledgment in a parenthetical observation. Another example of this rhetorical approach comes earlier in the book when Kincaid writes the following sentence:

> When you sit down to eat your delicious meal, it's better that you don't know that most of what you are eating came off a plane from Miami. And before it got on a plane in Miami, who knows where it came from? A good guess is that it came from a place like Antigua first, where it was grown dirt-cheap, went to Miami, and came back. There is a world of something in this, but I can't go into it right now (14).

Here, Kincaid draws attention to the very interconnectedness ("a world of something") that she claims to disavow ("I can't go into it right now"). She is not actually suggesting that the oppressive economic conditions that produce the misery of a small place like Antigua is an

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[8] See Book IX, Chapter II, ¶45 of Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* in which he writes that the trope "expresses something different than what it means." (165). As we will see, Quintilian later complicates this concept as well as the notion that irony should only be considered a trope.

[9] I follow Spivak in her con conviction, as expressed in "Reading with Stuart Hall in "Pure" Literary Terms" (her analysis of Kincaid's novel *Lucy* from 1990) that "rhetorically sensitive approaches to literature enhance rather than detract from the political" (351). This statement seems particularly true given Kincaid's textual praxis, whether the use of parataxis in *Lucy*, which Spivak traces in her article, or her use of irony in *A Small Place*. Given the polemical nature of *A Small Place,* it is no surprise that several studies of the text's relationship to rhetoric have already been undertaken. Both Carillo and Weber use *A Small Place* to illustrate their rhetorical theories whereas Riedner examines how Kincaid counters an imperial hegemonic rhetoric with what she terms a "rhetoric of rage" (178). Apart from these most other studies of Kincaid's book mentions rhetoric in some way or other. However, no sustained study of Kincaid's use of irony in *A Small Place* exists.

insignificant tangent rather than the main theme of the book. Rather, she shows how the supposedly authentic food the tourist eats on his visit to Antigua is as much part of the globalized circulation of commodities, capital, and people as the tourist himself.[10] We saw another example of this above when Kincaid's narrator was telling the tourist what he "must not" think about. The figure of speech by which a speaker draws attention to something by claiming to pass it over is called paralipsis or occultatio, which is a sub-category of irony. By using irony to cast doubt on what she sees as the inherent ideology of the English language, Kincaid also questions prevailing judgment of what constitutes important paths of enquiry, what deserves our attention.

The most trenchant parts of Kincaid's argument often crop up in the periphery, the tangents and parentheses, the small places, we might even say, of her own text. This simple but effective way of turning what is still the language of the colonizers against itself, by not spelling out the problem but only hinting at it negatively, evokes much larger questions than the fate of one small Caribbean island. Kincaid's concern is not simply the problems facing Antigua as a newly postcolonialized nation state, it is also the forces that created and continue to create Antigua and the other small places of the world in the first place. Kincaid's text about Antigua, therefore, also necessarily becomes a text about the world which created this small place, and thus, an epic. As we have seen, Hegel and Lukacs argued that the circumscription of the world that characterized the epic becomes increasingly harder to envision with the emergence of modernity; and yet, through the negative evocation that irony allows, Kincaid has found a way to conjure up a whole world in the space of less than a hundred pages. Throughout *A Small Place*, in Kincaid's ironic description, every local detail conjures up "a world of something." In

[10] For more on the trade imbalance brought on by export driven economies in the Caribbean as it relates to *A Small Place,* see Houston 102-104.

that way, irony becomes one of several possible modalities of the contemporary global American epic. In the same way that the seemingly self-sustaining and liberated small island of Antigua is actually increasingly connected to and dependent on the rest of the global economy, the short book *A Small Place* is an epic, an ironic but precise map of the world or a portrait of the world in a concave mirror.

In *A Small Place,* irony takes on a particular spatial quality. In a way, this is nothing new. Irony along with other tropes and figures of speech were already spatialized in Classical rhetoric. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Topics* discuss the category of topoi, topos being the Greek word for place, the root of the English word topic. It has been speculated that the word topos was used to designate rhetorical tropes on account of a mnemonic technique wherein each site on a walk around Athens was made to represent a different figure of speech.[11] Cicero continued and expanded this tradition of spatializing rhetoric, conceptualizing topics as what he termed the seat of an argument, the place from which it sets out.[12]

If a topic is the seat of an argument, the place from which it sets out, then different kinds of arguments can be drawn and visualized so as to make it easier for the student of rhetoric to remember all the different kinds of tropes and this is precisely what happened both in classical Rome and later in the many treatises on rhetoric for public and scholarly consumption written in the Renaissance. Remnants of this visualized system of rhetoric in English include not only the word topic itself, describing the issue of a speech or text, but also expression such as commonplace, which in its original meaning designated a topic on which

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[11] For a discussion of the use and history of the category of the topoi, see Christoff Rapp's article on Aristotle's Rhetoric in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

[12] In ¶ II of his *Topica* or *Treatise on Topics*, Cicero writes: "As therefore the discovery of those things which are hidden is easy, if the place where they are hidden is pointed out and clearly marked; so, when we wish to examine any argument, we ought to know the topics,--for so they are called by Aristotle, being, as it were, seats from which arguments are derived. Therefore we may give as a definition, that a topic is the seat of an argument, and that an argument is a reason which causes men to believe a thing which would otherwise be doubtful" (460).

everybody could agree.

When it comes to irony, the trope with which we are dealing presently, the visualization of rhetoric yields an image where one place is traded for another, as Wayne C. Booth summarizes the classical rhetorical position on irony:

> The reader is asked simply to move from one platform, on which the speaker pretends to stand, to another one, on which he really stands—one that is somehow "opposite," across the street, as it were. But perhaps the implied intellectual motion is really "downward," "going beneath the surface" to something solider or more profound; we rip up a rotten platform and probe to a solid one (34-35).[13]

Irony, then, can be visualized as a rhetorical situation in which a speaker pretends to be speaking from one place but actually speaks from another. Kincaid's use of irony radicalizes—indeed, globalizes—this spatial metaphor. Her use of different rhetorical positions implies actual spatial locations in the world. Each rhetorical position, whether that of the native Antiguan or the tourist, represents its own spatial perspective. On the one hand, as we have already seen, the tourist is criticized mercilessly from the perspective of the native Antiguans. On the other hand, though, later in the text, Kincaid reverses this position, criticizing the native from the perspective of the exiled cosmopolitan author, writing sentences like the following:

> I look at this place (Antigua), I look at these people (Antiguans), and I cannot tell whether I was brought up by, and so came from, children, eternal innocents, or artists who have not yet found eminence in a world too stupid to understand, or lunatics who have made their own lunatic asylum, or an exquisite combination of all three (57).

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[13] Booth goes on to discard this model in favor of his own much more complex model of the complete reconstruction of a covert argument on the basis of an unacceptable (and therefor ironic) overt conclusion as a more useful visual metaphor for irony.

There is no mistaking the rhetorical distance between the local people and the narrator, closely mirroring, it seems safe to assume, the mixed feelings of the Kincaid herself after more than twenty years' absence from the island on which she was born.

We can begin to approach the problem of the central rhetorical position and especially how it was constructed by way of Kincaid's return to the library in St. John's that she discussed in the paragraph quoted above:

> Oh, you might be saying to yourself, Why is she so undone at what has becomes of the library, why does she think that it is a good example of corruption, of things gone bad? But if you saw the old library, situated as it was, in a big, old wooden building painted a shade of yellow that is beautiful to people like me, with its wide veranda, its big, always open windows, its rows and rows of shelves filled with books, its beautiful wooden tables and chairs for sitting and reading, if you could hear the sound of its quietness (for the quiet in the library was a sound in itself), the smell of the sea (which was a stone's throw away), the heat of the sun (no building could protect us from that), the beauty of us sitting there like communicants at an altar, taking in, again and again, the fairy tale of how we met you, your right to do the things you did, how beautiful you were, are, and always will be; if you could see all of that in just one glimpse, you would see why my heart would break at the dung heap that now passes for a library in Antigua. (42-43).

At the outset of this quote we might mistake Kincaid's attitude towards the old library for one of unchecked nostalgia for her own childhood as well as for colonial times—or both, since, as previously mentioned, Kincaid's childhood coincided with the last years of Antugua's period as a British colony. However, the idyllic image of Antiguan schoolchildren sitting and reading instantaneously gives way to a reminder of what exactly Caribbean colonial subjects would

have been reading in a government library in the 1950s and 60s: instances of exactly the kind of hegemonic discourse that *A Small Place* means to counter, the kinds of texts that make a fairy tale out of imperialism and glorifies the colonizers as it absolves them of any wrongdoing. This compromised nostalgia helps to illustrate Kincaid's complex positioning throughout *A Small Place*: we cannot simply read the longing for the colonial library as an instance of unredeemed alienated colonial consciousness—there really was something beautiful about the library as it existed then, Kincaid maintains, and its destruction remains a tragedy and a scandal—but on the other hand, we should not forget the indoctrination that took place there in this building that along with the school houses, the churches, and the government buildings spread the gospel of imperialism to the local population of people descended from slaves.[14]

As elsewhere in *A Small Place*, we should not take Kincaid's reproaches to the Antiguans at face value. Kincaid's native, like her tourist, comes across as an exaggerated stereotype. Each of Kincaid's arguments originates in a specific place, whether it be that of a native Antiguan of African origin, a supposedly enlightened Westerner, or an exiled writer living in the metropolis back home for a visit. Each place of enunciation has its problems and limitations that in turn are embodied, highlighted and demonstrated by the narrator. This is not to suggest that Kincaid tries to establish any kind of moral, political, or epistemological equivalency between these perspectives.[15] But no one voice from one place possesses the

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[14] The library also plays a central part in Kincaid's first novel *Annie John*.

[15] In his *Prose of the World*, Saikat Majumdar discusses this aspect of *A Small Place* in slightly different terms, arguing that it is the structural relation between the native and the tourist—and thus also of their individual perspectives—rather than the features of any particular place that characterize their affective responses to each other. Majumdar writes: "The disempowerment of banality and boredom revolves around the structure of this relation rather than directly around the spatial polarity of the metropolis and the periphery. Banality and boredom here are not so much definitive characteristics of a particular place or the lives contained there—the privileged tourist, after all, derives pleasure from the very same place—as they are a reminder of the natives' inability to escape from them." (33). While I agree with Majumdar's assessment, my claim is that rather than the endpoint of an analysis of Kincaid's text, as I will show in the following, this multiperspectival structure can serve as a starting point for a conception of the global space.

perfect perspective from which to look at a small place like Antigua.[16]

How is *A Small Place*, then, more than a patchwork of different arguments each coming from its own place, of different ironies that all undermine each other? [17] To be sure, Kincaid's use of irony as a trope that deconstructs every category and distinction the text itself brings forth, has an affinity with différance as Derrida conceives it. In "The Concept of Irony," Paul de Man argues that this is the proper understanding of irony (164-65): a trope that deconstructs the text it is part of in an infinite regress of meaning. Thus, a de Manian reading of *A Small Place* would emphasize how *A Small Place* deconstructs the very language and system of metaphysics that Kincaid has involuntarily inherited from her former colonial overlords. Such a reading would not be without its critical potential. However, it would be merely that: critical, trapped inside the system it purports to deconstruct.

There is another way to understand irony, however, and one that is more suited to Kincaid's method. In *On the Concept of Irony*, Søren Kierkegaard writes: "Irony as the negative is the way; not the truth but the way" (348).[18] Irony, for Kierkegaard, more than a mere rhetorical figure, represents a mode of existence, a way of being, which precedes the appearance of something new in the world. It is not itself the truth but it clears the way for the truth. As Kierkegaard writes,

> Irony is the beginning but no more than the beginning; it is and it is not; its polemic is a beginning that is just as much a conclusion, for the annihilation of the previous development is as much its conclusion as it is the beginning of the new development, since this annihilation is only possible because the new principle is already present as

[16] Gauch is on the same page when she writes "[…] the narrator not only points out the flaws in the way in which the readers look at Antigua and Antiguans, she also interrogates the authority of her own look, never establishing any correct way of looking." (912). As I will argue in the following, Kincaid's approach amounts to more than the deconstruction of a universalist point of view, that Gauch seems to be suggesting.

[17] This seems to be Boletsi's argument. See in particular pp. 231-237.

[18] All translations from Danish are my own.

possibility. (227-28)

In other words, given the right historical conditions, irony is the first destructive moment in the development of something new. For Kierkegaard, irony represents the pure negative that overthrows the existing world in favor of the emergence of something radically groundbreaking—just as Socrates' ironic questions to his fellow Athenians paved the way for the birth of philosophy.[19] Kierkegaard would agree with de Man that Kincaid is mocking the English language as well as neoliberal economic discourse. However, at the same time, *A Small Place* is also gesturing at something new, something we cannot yet see, but which I argue we can call the global epic aspect of Kincaid's work, as represented through the singularities of a particular small place.

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"Governed by Corrupt Men": Antigua and Globalization

Since its "discovery" by Columbus in 1493 on his second voyage (when he named the island after an icon from Seville's cathedral), Antigua has become a product of the world market rather than a place distinguished by its own characteristics. Unlike European colonies in Asia and Africa, and to some extent Latin America, the native inhabitants of Antigua and the other Caribbean islands were almost completely exterminated in the decades and centuries after the initial colonization. Antigua's location in the Eastern Caribbean Sea meant that it was one of

[19] Although Kierkegaard's conception of irony was an original one, he refashioned and commented upon earlier meditations on the concept by Friedrich von Schlegel and Hegel. For a good discussion of irony in German and Danish idealism and its relation to de Manian irony, see Roy. (It should be noted, however, that in this otherwise lucid assessment of the history of irony, Roy credits Schlegel with irony's transformation from a strictly rhetorical concept to a philosophical and existential category (107). Roy is right to point out that Schlegel's fragmentary meditations on irony and especially his 1797 statement that irony is a "permanent parabasis," marks the beginning of a philosophical engagement with the concept of irony unprecedented in the history of philosophy. However, although the understanding of the definition of irony can be said to expand from Schlegel's *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, from which the parabasis-fragment is taken, through Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, to Kierkegaard's doctoral dissertation *On the Concept of Irony*, irony was never solely an exclusively rhetorical concept that was later made to play other roles. As Quintillian writes in Book IX, chapter II, ¶ 46 of his Institutes of Oratory, irony is both a trope and a figure (165).

the first islands to be reached by ship from the Old World; this placement, more than any natural resources or local features, gave rise to the island's strategic significance as an English colony.[20]

The British Empire's exploitation of Antigua as a node in a burgeoning global economy, and of Antiguan slaves as commodities within that economy, was, as Kincaid argues, hidden under the veneer of English culture. As Kincaid writes, the colonial power deliberately refashioned its colonies in its own image:

> And so all this fuss over empire—what went wrong here, what went wrong there—always makes me quite crazy, for I can say to them what went wrong: they should never have left their home, their precious England, a place they loved so much, a place they had to leave but could never forget. And so everywhere they went they turned it into England; and everybody they met they turned English. But no place could ever really be England, and nobody who did not look exactly like them would ever be English, so you can imagine the destruction of people and land that came from that (24).

A Small Place, and several other of Kincaid's texts, are full of examples of this cultural and religious assimilation and its effects on the local population. In *My Garden (Book)*, her 1999 essay on gardening, Kincaid recounts how she never knew the names of the local plants in Antigua:

> This ignorance of the botany of the place I am from (and am of) really only reflects the fact that when I lived there, I was of the conquered class and living in a conquered place; a principle of this condition is that nothing about you is of any interest unless the conqueror deems it so. For instance, there was a botanical garden not far from where I

[20] For a thorough economic history of Antigua during mercantilism see Henry 11-38.

> lived, and in it were plants from various parts of the then British Empire, places that had the same climate as my own; but as I remember, none of the plants were native to Antigua (120).

Thus, the British Empire attempted to create a uniform global culture in which every local peculiarity was purged. This went far beyond the refusal to include local plants in the botanical gardens and school curricula: the introduction of crops like sugar and tobacco actually changed the local ecosystem.

Despite its post-colonial political independence, Kincaid claims, Antigua still occupies the same peripheral place in the world—economically as well as culturally—it always has. The new nation state of Antigua and Barbuda keeps reproducing the same conditions as the old empire: the totality of Antigua's economy is as determined by and dependent upon the center of the world-system today as it ever was. (Henry 99-168). Whether that center is an imperial power like Great Britain in the nineteenth century or an economic hegemonic power like the United States today, most of the economic surplus produced in Antigua keeps flowing towards that center. Kincaid notes the cultural ramifications of this westward course of empire in her observations on contemporary teenagers in Antigua: "how familiar they were with the rubbish of North America—compared to the young people of my generation, who were familiar with the rubbish of England[.]" (44).

It is of course true that the United States is not a colonial power, just as it is true that Antiguans of African descent are no longer slaves. However, it is Kincaid's point that the ostensible liberty of the global free market, at least for a peripheral and dependent place like Antigua, in reality conceals one set route with no possibility of deviation: complying with the directives of the core economies of the world. As Kincaid writes about contemporary Antiguans:

> The word "emancipation" is used so frequently, it is as if it, emancipation, were a contemporary occurrence, something everybody is familiar with. And perhaps there is something in that, for an institution that is often celebrated in Antigua is the Hotel Training School, a school that teaches Antiguans how to be good servants, how to be a good nobody, which is what a servant is. In Antigua, people cannot see a relationship between their obsession with slavery and emancipation and their celebration of the Hotel Training School (graduation ceremonies are broadcast on radio and television); people cannot see a relationship between their obsession with slavery and emancipation and the fact that they are governed by corrupt men, or that these corrupt men have given their country away to corrupt foreigners. (54-56).

Unconsciously mimicking their ancestors, Kincaid suggests, contemporary Afro-Caribbeans' highest aspiration is to work as servants for rich people of European descent. That connection to the past, however, remains hidden in the discourse of individual liberty, democracy, and free markets, the "fairy tales" of colonialism and neo-liberalism as Kincaid calls them elsewhere (42).

Henry's 1985 study of the development of Antigua's economy from colonialism to postcolonialism largely supports Kincaid's analyses. While emancipation itself, in Henry's reading, was the result of a sea change in the global economy—the struggle between mercantilism and industrial capitalism—that eventually abolished the planter class (39-46), the change in the individual Afro-Caribbean Antiguan's life was inconsiderable. The transition from slavery to freedom did not bring with it an abundance of possibilities for the former

slaves to choose from, but rather a continuation of their exploitation under the guise of free choice.[21]

Moreover, as is clear from the quoted paragraph, Kincaid sees a parallel to emancipation in Antigua's final liberation from Great Britain and formation as an independent nation state. Just as was the case for emancipation, it is not hard to see economic motivations behind Britain's consent for Antigua to declare independence. During mercantilism Britain and other colonial powers could protect the peripheral agricultural industries, such as Antigua's sugar industry, from competition from other markets by essentially producing sugar under a state monopoly: merchants in Britain were only allowed to buy sugar harvested in British colonies and planters in Antigua were only allowed to sell to British merchants. With the liberalization of the sugar market, prizes and thus profits diminished, leaving Britain with little economic reason to maintain former colonies. By 1983, when Antigua declared independence, it had been many years since the island made a profit for its colonial power. This is not to suggest that the countries of the core of the world system is not making money on Antigua anymore, but rather that in today's world Antigua need not be a colony in order for this profit to be extracted, indeed it is better if it is not.

The tourist industry as it exists currently in Antigua, is, as Henry writes (127) largely owned and operated, at least in the top managerial positions, by foreigners. The Antiguan tourist industry, rather than a national industry managed by locals and attempting to profit

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[21] As Henry writes," The Antiguan planters were confident that emancipation would leave them with an adequate supply of labor. Thus, they did not resort to large-scale importation of indentured labor from India as planters in other islands did. The chief reason for this was that there was little unoccupied land in Antigua that the former slaves could cultivate, so the majority remained entirely dependent on estate labor. […] [The newly written post-emancipation Contract Act] left the ex-slaves very dissatisfied with their newly won status of wage laborer, for their condition had not really changed that much. They still occupied their old slave huts. As in slavery, work began at sunrise and ended at sunset. No matter how hard they worked a wage increase was not to be had, nor would it change their position of tenants who owned neither house nor land." (49-50)

from Antigua's natural resources, was from the start a product of core-processes, responding to a demand in the richest part of the world-system, exactly like the production of sugar in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.[22]

The environmental toll that tourism takes on the small island, combined with the flow of capital out of the country towards companies and individuals in the United States and Europe, should indicate that this industry, despite appearances, resembles a classic peripheral process. Almost like agriculture or the exploitation of natural resources, the tourist industry in Antigua siphons off wealth until the point, maybe not too far into the future, where the environment is so damaged that Antigua ceases to hold any attraction as a tourist destination.

Not only does the profits from the most lucrative industry flow out of the country, the tourists, to a large extent, do not even facilitate growth in local production. As Kincaid emphasizes in a quote we have already looked at, even if Antigua could grow or produce all or some of its own food supply, these food products would in all likelihood be exported to somewhere in the center of the global economy, and then in turn moved to another small place, after the proper tariffs and tolls were paid, making it economically inviable for that place to produce its own food. As Kincaid describes it, food and other resources has to circulate through the center in order to be valued, as if food that has not yet entered the global market was somehow not edible. The practice of importing most of the input of the tourist industry, Henry relates, was instituted in order "to make the tourist feel at home" (127), even as he thinks he is consuming locally grown products. This practice is in many ways a continuation of the colonial custom of exporting any agricultural products to the colonial power and importing

[22] As Henry writes: "[Service industries like tourism] are the economic possibilities that central capital now finds attractive in the are, just as it was once attracted to its agricultural possibilities. In territories like Antigua where there are no natural resources, the service function has become the primary interest. Consequently the tourist industry rest on a peripheral function that was created be central capital itself. This peripheral function provides this industry with its major institutional underpinnings and sources of external support." (122)

any necessary resources from the core territories, instead of attempting to create a self-sustaining food economy in which the colony supports itself, thereby intensifying the dependence on the core countries.

The reference to food imports does not constitute the only hint in *A Small Place* that we would be wrong to read Kincaid's arguments as a defense of the local against the global. The local, at least as it appears to the tourist, is a simulacrum, created and maintained by the same global forces that colonized small islands like Antigua in the first place.

The European powers that created a colony of a small well-placed island were also responsible for the importation of thousands of African slaves; human beings who, exactly like the island itself, and the commodities extracted from it, were treated as objects, as commodities, as Kincaid points out:

> Do you know why people like me are shy about being capitalists? Well, it's because we, for as long as we have known you, were capital, like bales of cotton and sacks of sugar, and you were the commanding, cruel capitalists, and the memory of this is so strong, the experience so recent, that we can't quite bring ourselves to embrace this idea that you think so much of (36-37).

In his book *In the Break*, Frank Moten examines this very question in his juxtaposition of Marx's reflections on use-value and exchange value from *Capital, vol. 1* and Frederick Douglass's description of the sound of his aunt Hester being beaten from the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Marx posits the notion of a speaking commodity, addressing its won use-value and exchange value, only to rule it out as an impossibility "invoked," as Moten writes, "only to militate against mystifying notions of the commodity's essential value." (5-6). However, as Douglass is well aware, a certain class of commodities actually can speak (as well as scream, moan, and sing), namely the people who were treated as

commodities, or as Kincaid has it, as capital, namely slaves of African descent. The combination of Douglass and Marx allows Moten to posit a specific kind of performance, embodied in the radical black tradition, where the Western notion of subjectivity as possession of oneself and one's objects is jettisoned in favor of a radical performance of blackness that is closer related to Adorno's concept, from the *Negative Dialectics*, of the resistance of the object (cf. 256). Kincaid's unease at embodying the role of the capitalist, the possessor of mute objects, can be seen as related to the tradition of black performance, from Amiri Baraka to Eric Dolphy, that Moten examines in his book. Kincaid's refusal, or at least momentary hesitation, to assume the capitalist subject position is not only closely related to her descendance from slaves, as she herself emphasizes, but also to a tradition of Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean performance through the use of the voice and of improvisation, at least for the duration of the song or text, refuses to be pinned down to any given identity and seeks to open up new possibilities. Kincaid's use of irony, analyzed in the previous section, is but one expression of this improvisational play with subject positions and their corresponding places of enunciation.

Since its independence, like so many other nations of the global south, Antigua has been forced to borrow money through the International Monetary Fund, and thus forced to live up to the demands that the IMF put on debtor states, especially during the 1980s and 90s, including the privatization of the public sector and a halt to the construction of any public works.[23] This is the reason Antigua is lacking basic public infrastructure like a sewage disposal system. In his book *Globalization and its Discontents*, the Nobel-prize winning economist and

[23] My research in the IMF archives painted a picture of an agency that, after lending money to the new nation state of Antigua, urged the Bird government to (as one representative memo has it), "curb […] current government expenditure, especially wages, through actions such as reforming the civil service and exercising restraint on public salaries" and adding that "Privatization of public utilities and other public holdings also could help to improve public finances."

former senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank Joseph Stiglitz writes about how negotiations between the IMF and client countries usually take place:

> The standard IMF procedure before visiting a client country is to write a draft report first. The visit is only intended to fine-tune the report and its recommendations, and to catch any glaring mistakes. In practice, the draft report is often what is known as boilerplate, with whole paragraphs being borrowed from the report of one country and inserted into another. Word processors make this easier. A perhaps apocryphal story has it that on one occasion a word processor failed to do a "search and replace," and the name of the country from which a report had been borrowed almost in its entirety was left in a document that was circulated. It is hard to know whether this was a one-off occurrence, done under time pressure, but the alleged foulup confirmed in the minds of many the image of "one-size-fits-all" reports (47-48).

Just like England, when it was an imperial power, the agencies in charge of managing the global flows of capital attempt to remake the small places of the world in their own image, from the kinds of trees in the botanical gardens to arrangement of the local economies. Indeed, the standardization described in *A Small Place* would be the same whether it was about Antigua or another place in the Global South—which helps explain how the text of *A Small Place* could be used to illustrate the negotiations between the IMF and Jamaica in the 2001 documentary *Life and Debt*.

In their book *The Making of Global American Capitalism* Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin argue that the global economic system from the Second World War onward amounted to a de facto loosely structured American empire.[24] The economic and legal framework established

[24] Panitch and Gindin refer to this argument throughout their book, see for instance p. 6: "In the passage from

towards the end of the war that was maintained and expanded upon in the remaining decades of the twentieth century dramatically favored the United States at the expense of the rest of the world. This should not, however, be understood in a simple sense of what Marx calls primitive accumulation, but rather as an economic structure that allowed the world economy to grow but to the benefit of the United States. As Panitch and Gindin writes (11-12), rather than securing exclusive rights to natural resources, US economic, military, and legal policies (at times under the guise of international agencies such as the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, or GATT which later became the WTO) were designed to keep the flows of global capital, not simply US capital, flowing. The Marshall Plan allowed the Western European economies to grow in order for Europe to become a strong, semi-peripheral trading partner to America while acting as a bulwark against communism is perhaps the best example of this strategy.

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid recounts how most Antiguan government officials not only are corrupt but are also legal residents of the United States, flying to America when they need to go to the hospital (8, 68). In short, the independence of Antigua as a sovereign nation state did not occasion any more self-determination for the little island than before. Instead, the new nation state's elite, like the elite planter class during colonialism, cooperates with the core nations to maintain Antigua as a peripheral territory. In a situation in which a dominant, transnational power imposes uniform economic policies on the small places of the world, it is tempting to subscribe to one of the most prevalent views of globalization, namely that it represents a totalizing force that homogenizes the world, bypassing the sovereignty of nation states to the benefit of an international upper class. However, as Saskia Sassen argues in

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Britain's only partially informal empire to the predominantly informal American empire, something much more distinctive had emerged than Pax America replacing Pax Brittanica. The American state, in the process of supporting the export of capital and the expansion of multinational corporations, increasingly took responsibility for creating the political and jurudical conditions for the general extension and reproduction of capitalism internationally."

Territory Authority Rights (3-6), globalization and nation states should not be seen as adversaries, but rather, in many instances, as allies working in tandem to implement the new globalized economy. The nation state, far from protecting its citizens against the harmful policies of interstate agencies, can be an active player in the implementation of these policies. Indeed, as seems to be the case in Antigua, the state is used as a means to hide the fact that ordinary Antiguan citizens are not in charge of their own destiny.

As we have seen, the notion that the Antiguan tourist industry represents anything like a 'native' industry, simply exploiting and marketing local resources should be complicated to reflect the fact that the industry to a large extent produces a specific simulacral image of Antigua rather than simply marketing what is already there and the fact of Antigua's providential placement a couple of hours flight from the large market represented by the eastern United States. The other industries, however, that have been attempted to be launched since the declaration of independence are, if possible, even closer related to, and determined by, the core of the economic world-system.

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid writes,

> In the middle of High Street was the Barclays Bank. The Barclay brothers, who started Barclays Bank, were slave traders. That is how they made their money. When the English outlawed the slave trade, the Barclay brothers went into banking. It made them even richer. It's possible that when they saw how rich banking made them, they gave themselves a good beating for opposing an end to slave trading (for surely they would have opposed that), but then again, they may have been visionaries and agitated for an end to slavery, for look at how rich they became with their banks borrowing from (through their savings) the descendants of the slaves and then lending it back to them. But people just a little older than I am can recite the name of and the day the first

black person was hired as a cashier at this very same Barclays Bank in Antigua (25-26). In 2012, 24 years after the publication of *A Small Place*, Barclays Bank was fined more than $450 million for manipulating the Libor (London Interbank Offered Rate), a rate that underpins worldwide derivatives markets, in what has been known as the Libor Scandal. (Protess and Scott). According to professor of Finance at MIT, Andrew Lo, the scandal "dwarfs by orders of magnitude any financial scams in the history of markets." (O'Toole). Rather than exaggerate the continuity between the crimes of colonialism and the new economic crimes of globalization, Kincaid can, if anything, be said to dramatically underestimate the culpability of financial institutions like the Barclays Bank. More important to Antigua is Stanford International Bank, a subsidiary of Stanford Financial Group, an offshore bank based in Antigua and led by the financier Allen Stanford. When Stanford was arrested and prosecuted for running a Ponzi Scheme trough his Antiguan bank in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, it was a strong blow to the already frail Antiguan economy (Krauss, Creswell, and Savage).

Despite all this, the most recent OECD report on Antigua and Barbuda is prefaced by a short text by L. Errol Cort, the Antiguan Minister of Finance and Economy, wherein he states that: "[t]he Government of Antigua and Barbuda considers foreign direct investment to be an important component for successful economic growth strategies. In the past two years, we have taken a number of initiatives to create an enabling environment conducive to attracting foreign direct investment." Coinciding with the IMF demands, the opening up of national markets for foreign direct investment (FDI) guarantees the free flow of capital from the richer core nations through the poorer countries but not necessarily these countries' own economic development.[25]

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[25] See Panitch and Gilpin 111-17 and throughout on how the United States have aggressively sought to open up

As we have already seen, the tourist industry is one example of this practice, owned and managed to a large extent by non-Antiguans, and only minimally benefiting the local population. However, there are numerous other examples including offshore banks (offshore to the United States, that is), internet casinos, and companies that copy software in what would be considered illegal ways had it been done in the United States. However, as we saw in the previous chapter about the Spaghetti Westerns, the laxer legal standards in the periphery and semi-periphery does not necessarily represent an opportunity for these countries to make a profit, although it does function like that in certain circumstances, but rather opportunities for the core countries to benefit from the inequalities in the economic world-system. Although it may seem like Antigua is benefiting from hosting online casinos for American customers, a practice that is currently illegal within the United States, the reality is not only that these companies are owned and operated by Americans but also that the very existence of the industry is determined by the United States and its laws: Antigua is incorporated into the American economy as an externalized interiority, a state of exception that is outside the laws but inside the powers of the core-country, not unlike the way another Caribbean site, that of the camp of Guantanamo Bay functions. This reliance on what might be termed the holes of U.S. legislation also renders Antigua's situation singularly precarious. As the arrest of Alan Stanford showed, the instance U.S. officials decide to impose the law on their offshore territories, the whole economies of these territories can be affected. Conversely, should American politicians decide to change their internal laws, and legalize online gambling for instance, the Antiguan economy would also likely be prone to collapse.

If globalization has brought a host of new problems to a place such as Antigua, it has also helped make the economic forces to which the small place has been subject since the rise

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channels of FDI all around the world in order to grow its own economy and maintain global economic dominance.

of the capitalist world-system more visible and as such, created a new ontological horizon. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between fear and anxiety. Where fear is terror of something specific, anxiety is a universal terror of the world itself. Fears can be addressed through the community. Indeed, the modern nation state, as Hobbes knew well, can largely be seen as a way of alleviating the fears of a people, fears that it brings into being. Anxiety, on the other hand, is not so easily addressed; it is a private matter between each individual and the world. Because of this, for Heidegger, anxiety is the prerequisite of human freedom and an authentic life exposed to being as such.[26] Only through anxiety can we come to terms with what it means to be free. In *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno argues that with the emergence of globalization, fear and anxiety can no longer be so easily distinguished. He writes:

> If the substantial communities once hid or muffled our relationship with the world, then their dissolution now clarifies this relationship for us: the loss of one's job, or the change which alters the features of the functions of labor, or the loneliness of metropolitan life—all these aspects of our relationship with the world assume many of the traits which formerly belonged to the kind of terror one feels outside the walls of the community. We would need to find a new term here, different from "fear" or "anxiety," a term which would take the fusion of these two terms into account (33). [27]

[26] See ¶ 40 in which Heidegger calls anxiety ("angst") a "distinctive way in which Dasein is disclosed." Heidegger acknowledges his debt to Kierkegaard, from whose book *The Concept of Anxiety*, he borrows the concept (see note iv., 492). Kierkegaard, like Heidegger, sees anxiety as an affect with potentially ontological significance: "[…] anxiety is the reality of freedom as the possibility of possibility" (38). As such, in the Kierkegaard's philosophy, anxiety is related to irony in that both represent openings towards new ontological perspectives. On the relation between irony and anxiety in Kierkegaard, see Bøggild 249-52.

[27] Translation slightly modified to reflect the usual English translation of the German and Danish term "angst" (or "angest") as "anxiety" rather than "anguish."

If formerly most people were coddled by communities like the nation state, the anxiety of globalization exposes us all to the world. As Virno puts it, this fact is still "muffled": the many relations that connect each place to the rest of the globe are not all visible but rather hidden behind the communal "fairy tales" that alleviate our fears. If we could hypothetically manage to make all these relations visible, a new ontological horizon would come into view, and with that, the possibility of another kind of world.[28] If economic globalization operates as a simultaneously standardizing and compartmentalizing force, then the task of the writer of the new global epic is to reveal (or "un-muffle") the ubiquitous relations and project a more inclusive and open totality that would allow for any local singularity.

"An Exact Account, A Complete Account": *A Small Place* as a Global Epic

So where do we find this global epic aspect of Kincaid's text? What are all the different spatial ironies gesturing towards? To answer these questions, I suggest that we look to one of the most often quoted paragraphs of *A Small Place*, a paragraph which perhaps gave the text its title:

> The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account, of themselves. The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account of events (small though they may be). This cannot be held against them; an exact account, a complete account, of anything, anywhere, is not possible. (The hour in the day, the day of the year some ships set sail is a small, small detail in any picture, any story; but the picture itself, the story itself depend on things that can never, ever be

[28] For other versions of this argument, see for instance Derrida's discussion of what he calls "mondialisation" from Negotiations, (372-86), Jean-Luc Nancy's discussion of "world-forming" (an English translation of "mondialisation") throughout his The Creation of the World, and Spivak's discussion of "Planetarity" from Death of a Discipline (71-102). As Nancy notes (33-40) his (and, I would argue Derrida's and Spivak's) conception of a dialectical response to globalization owes more than a debt of inspiration to Marx's early writings on the world market.

> pinned down.) The people in a small place can have no interest in the exact, or in completeness, for that would demand a careful weighing, careful consideration, careful judging, careful questioning. It would demand the invention of a silence, inside of which these things could be done. (53-54).

This passage has often been read as Kincaid's judgment of native Antiguans' intellectual laziness and of their insufficient carefulness, as if all the Antiguans (like the tourists) needed was a better understanding of time, of events, and of cause and effect, in order to understand their world.[29] However, Kincaid makes very clear that such a complete account would be hard to write not just for people in a small place but for anybody. An account of anything that both identifies every minute detail precisely (which is to say, exact) and maps out every single connection and association (which is to say, complete) is quite literally impossible, as Kincaid does not hesitate to tell us. We can pin down the time at which a ship sets departs—perhaps the ship that took Columbus to the Caribbean or the ship that took Kincaid herself, when she was named Elaine Potter Richardson, from Antigua to America—but to understand such events in their entirety, what lead to them and what they in turn caused, is a story that can never be told in its totality. A complete and exact account of a single act that through a description of all of its consequences circumscribes a whole world, as we have seen, is how Aristotle defines the unified totality of the epic. Rather than a censure of Antiguans, then, the passage should be read as Kincaid's assessment of a prospective global totality.

The only place such a story could be told, Kincaid tells us, is inside a silence, a pause in the incessant flow of events that would allow us enough time to finally see the world as it is. This silence, we understand, which has yet to be invented, would establish a place where any kind of totality or world could be conceived and then mapped out, where laws of cause and

[29] See, for instance, Ferguson, 95.

effect could be invented, where history could be formulated. Kincaid emphasizes that this silence (and any truly complete account) is impossible. The accounts that we are already in possession of, the "fairy tales" comprised of enlightenment progress narratives and neoliberal discourses of economic individualism, do not silence her, even if hapless tourists and patriotic natives still believe in them. Kincaid's silence is a limit towards which she can move, but which she will never reach. "Only the impossible can make me still," Kincaid writes, but that does not discourage her in her search for that impossible silence, that complete and exact account that would abolish any need to keep speaking out, and keep writing, and keep looking for new relations and the foundations for a new, global epic. Indeed, we might even read her use of the word "impossible" as another ironic gesture; an indication of how such an epic gesture appears from within a neoliberal, compartmentalizing discourse, rather than a simple description.

Kincaid's new global epic (as well as, Glissant's, as we shall see shortly) exemplifies a paradox that has haunted the epic all through modernity: that it represents simultaneously a prophecy and a model of a new genre to come; simultaneously a poetics for the emerging genre and an example of it. As John Whittier-Ferguson notes (212-214), this paradox is perhaps best embodied in the title of what is arguably the first modern epic: Wordworth's *Prelude*. On the one hand, the title and Wordsworth's meta-poetical ruminations throughout implies that this is merely an overture for a more truly epic poem to come; on the other hand, Wordsworth's poem is precisely a new kind of epic, discussed and emulated as such by subsequent theorists and epoists.

In order to connect the threads from the previous sections and show how *A Small Place* typifies the new global epic, and particularly how Kincaid's use of irony evokes a new global space, a short consideration of another important Caribbean voice will prove helpful. In his theoretical writings, the Martinican writer Édouard Glissant has, perhaps more than anybody

else, thought what a new kind of epic, contemporary with the economic, social, and political realities of today's world would like. These reflections prove remarkably similar to what I have been arguing represents Kincaid's vision of a new global epic while providing resonance and contrast to Kincaid's texts and, at times, serving to fill in some of the blank spots in Kincaid's implicit poetics of the new epic. In *Poetic Intention* Glissant writes,

> Our necessity today: to affirm, not one community *facing another*, but in *relation to another*. In other words, the irruption of historical consciousness overturned the ancient scemae: once, Tragedy gathered the epic gesture, it unveiled its consciousness to a people, which *epos* had sung raw. Tragedy-consciousness was the *represented* echo of the *epos*-gesture. Today, it is the affirmation of these peoples (the struggle to snatch the right to gesture and to parlance) that is tragic; it is freedom—the new, imposed, consensual relation—that will carry the epic. Modern Tragedy would sing the freedoms of men; modern Epos their commuted accord. Epos was once "concrete," where Tragedy could exceed, be "abstract," "universal"; today Tragedy would be concrete, the struggle of peoples signals the obscure, bound, delivering forces, and it is Epos that, as if from the most distant of planets, will be able to circulate through the human vow to bind, to relate. Tragedy is of men and of the land; Epos will soon be of the One (again, the One, while awaiting further fracture and diversification), interplanetary (190-91).

Where for the Ancient Greeks, Glissant argues, epics supplied the material for the more serious and important genre of tragedies (a hierarchy of genres we have already seen in Aristotle's *Poetics*), today it is the tragedy and tragedies of the world's peoples that must be put into relation with each other, in an epic gesture that will span the globe. In our world, tragedy comprises the world's familiar deplorable political realities but rather than simply representing

these atrocities, the writer (or we might add, the producer, the director, or the artist) of the contemporary epics must use these tragedies as the material for a new epic of Relation. The new epic then is not the representation of a people through the heroic and violent deeds of one of its heroes but rather the interconnection between different peoples in an opening towards new possibilities.[30] Already here the connection to Kincaid should be clear. In focusing on the hidden connections or relations, Glissant advocates a new kind of global epic that contribute to our understanding of the emerging contemporary and future world. As he writes in *Poetic intention*, "[t]he epic is Problematic; its theme is of the future, its advent (its realized truth) can only open onto an unsuspected diffraction." (194). It is hard not to hear an echo in this in Badiou's theory of the event as the unexpected and unforeseeable opening in Being, the local appearance of a universal truth.

As mentioned, a host of more or less traditional epic poems (at least when compared to *A Small Place*) have been written from and about the Caribbean throughout the twentieth century by authors such as Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, and Glissant himself; a development that should alert us to the fact that the Caribbean can be seen as something like a privileged space for new global epics. The reason for this, Glissant writes, is that the Caribbean, more than most places in the world, represents Relation, the connections between things as parts of an open totality.[31] The calamitous history of the region, where most of the indigenous population (Caribs and Arawaks) have been extinguished and where the majority of the

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[30] As Glissant writes in *Poetic Intention*: "The epic is in each of us. It is no longer an extreme moment, where the fist falls and seals a destiny. The epic wells out of us, for this that we are, each a part, this threatened whole. The world binds its parities. […] The epic is born of us, because it will be up to us to exceed from all parts. The epic is today neither scramble nor swarm of consciousness in a people, but a perspective tendered to communal and tragic divinations. The epic, once aggregate, once solitude, today is open league, and frank and foolish prognostication." (192)

[31] As he writes in *Poetics of Relation*: "The Caribbean, as far as I'm concerned, may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly, one of the explosive regions where it seems to be gathering strengths." (35)

current population has been disconnected from their pre-history through kidnapping and subsequent slavery, paradoxically renders the Caribbean into one of the places in the world where Relation becomes most visible. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid is on the same page when she observes that she cannot choose to speak in another language than English, which is to say that her language has become obliterated, and that she no longer cares about what her ancestors did before encountering Europeans, as discussed above. Glissant turns these incapacitating developments on their head—while never forgetting or jettisoning what he trenchantly identifies as the tragedy of Caribbean history—into a condition for an emergent epic genre.

I want to suggest that *A Small Place* gestures towards exactly the kind of new global epics that Glissant describes. Kincaid attempts to uncover connections between what seem like distinct entities (such as the tourist, the condition of the native Antiguan, the colonial past, and the global present) suggesting that we do not yet have the language to talk about how these things are related. Kincaid contributes geographic, political, and formal specificities to fill out the lacunas of Glissant's general outlines of the new genre. Her irony undermines the neo-liberal language of self-determination while simultaneously pointing towards the point of perfect and impossible silence that would enable the forging of the causal connections and relations required by the new epic. Moreover, I want to suggest that the figure for this silence, this point of connection, is the ocean.[32] As the Barbadan poet Kamau Brathwaite writes, with a turn of phrase that Glissant never tires of quoting, "the unity is sub-marine" (*Poetics* v).

In *A Small Place's* second part, Kincaid relates how at one point a British princess visited the small island colony:

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[32] Other scholars have noted the symbolic importance of water and the ocean in Kincaid's work. Ferguson traces water-symbolism throughout Kincaid's texts (see especially the first chapter 7-40) and also briefly mentions the role water plays in *A Small Place* (83). In his World Views, Jon Hegglund briefly analyzes the role of water in *A Small Place* (128-34). While I find much to agree with in Heglund's analysis, I would claim that more than simply challenging the Euro-American view of the sea as "a means of separation and distancing" (130) in a critique of island sovereignty, Kincaid's use of the sea points to larger issues of the conception of global space.

> I attended a school named after a Princess of England. Years and years later, I read somewhere that this Princess made her tour of the West Indies (which included Antigua, and on that tour she dedicated my school) because she had fallen in love with a married man, and since she was not allowed to marry a divorced man she was sent to visit us to get over her affair with him. How well I remember that all of Antigua turned out to see this Princess person, how every building that she would enter was repaired and painted so that it looked like brand-new, how every beach she would sun herself on had to look as if no one had ever sunned there before (I wonder now what they did about the poor sea? I mean, can a sea be made to look brand-new?), and how everybody she met was the best Antiguan body to meet, and no one told us that this person we were putting ourselves out for on such a big scale, this person we were getting worked up about as if she were God Himself, was in our midst because of something so common, so everyday: her life was not working out the way she had hoped, her life was one big mess. (32-33)

As is so often the case in *A Small Place*, it is in the parentheses that the most interesting observation takes place. The sea is the one thing, or so Kincaid speculates, that cannot be made to appear as brand new. As in the myth about the Viking King Cnut the Great ordering the tide to stop, the sea is the one thing that does not respond to the royal and imperial injunction. It is no coincidence that it is in the sea where the tourist is confronted with the material waste products of his own presence ("the contents of you lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water"), as well as with the history of suppression he is a part of ("it would amaze even you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up"). The sea, in Kincaid's epic, like Freud's concept of the Oceanic, or Lacan's order of the Real, is not only that through which a small place such as Antigua

reaches out to the rest of the world, but also the one place where all the artificial distinctions and boundaries fail and where (at least the possibility) of relation is always present. It is no coincidence that Kincaid's (parenthetical) exemplification of a complete and exact account of the event of revolves around a ship's departure ("the hour in the day, the day of the year some ships set sail"), the symptomatic connective event for an island like Antigua.

Kincaid's analysis is uncannily prophetic, addressing developments that have only become more unmistakable in the years since *A Small Place* was published. Since then, the number of small places of the world has only increased—as has the number of new global epics. With time it becomes easier to see the relation between a place like Antigua and all the other places and institutions under the auspices of an ever growing contemporary neoliberalism. As I have argued, Kincaid uses irony to mock the compartmentalizing logic of contemporary economic globalization by herself compartmentalizing and minimizing her totalizing, indeed globalizing, epic aspiration. However, that still leaves the problem of the already mentioned singular open parenthesis on page 31 of *A Small Place*. If a set of parentheses usually mark the unmistakable beginning and end of a different, implicitly less important, level of discourse within a text, then the omission of one of these punctuation marks (in a text as rhetorically astute as *A Small Place*) demands our attention. Indeed, it marks the small, almost hidden, place within the text itself where the otherwise rigidly observed (if ironic) compartmentalization breaks down and the parenthetical discourse is allowed to mingle with the rest of the text, as the chance encounter between a tourist's ankle and the contents of his lavatory under the surface of the ocean. As Kincaid would say, there is a world of something in this.

Coda: The Contemporary Global American Novel

Throughout this study I have argued that a partially hidden global American genealogy can be traced from the origins of the nation to the present moment, becoming increasingly visible as the process of globalization gathers momentum and integrates the world within a vast network of connections and relations. If the global American aspects of earlier literary texts and other cultural productions had to be carefully teased out, the global Americanism of the contemporary cultural landscape is apparent and obvious. In an essay in *Mother Jones* in 1989, the novelist Maxine Hong Kingston predicted this turn towards the global when she wrote that, "[t]he dream of the great American novel is past. We need to write the Global novel. Its setting will be the United States, destination of journeys from everywhere" (39). Although Kingston arguably failed to see the true global scope of the emergent global American novel, framing it as a mere continuation of the tradition of the immigrant novel she herself had helped bring to prominence within the American literary canon, she correctly predicted the global scope of the novels that would emerge in the decades following her essay. In this coda, I will briefly look at three contemporary novels that proudly wear their global American colors on their book sleeves: Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* from 2007, Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* from 2008, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* from 2013.

This reading of three examples of the new turn towards the global in American literature does not purport to be exhaustive. It represents the beginnings of what will later become a more comprehensive study of contemporary global American literature. Many other recent texts could have been included in this section, for example novels written by Teju Cole, Yiyun Li, Roberto Bolaño, and Amithav Ghosh. This coda is intended as an overview of some of the many approaches different authors have taken to represent the American global.

"Can't Forget That": Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* focuses both on the ways in which participation in the American society can obscure other parts of immigrants' hybrid identity and on the ways in which America is part of a larger hemispheric and global space within which the importance of the American nation diminishes. Although ostensibly about the eponymous title character, the novel summons larger global, even cosmic spheres of influence even before the beginning the plot. The novels' two epigraphs, one from a comic book and the other from a poem by a Nobel-laureate, signal not only the amalgamation of high and low genres that characterizes *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, but also its attempt to look outside of a narrow, national American context. If the first quote—"Of what import are brief, nameless lives…to **Galactus**?" (xi, from the comic book series *Fantastic Four*)—suggests an impossible, almost divinely global (or even extra-global) perspective in which the fate of the individual is lost amidst the totalizing gaze of a comic book super villain, the second quote—ending with the lines "I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,/and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation." (xiii, from Derek Walcott's poem "The Schooner's Flight.")—suggests another kind of globality, one in which each individual is itself a meeting place of myriad cultures and ethnicities and where identities are irremediably hybrid. Both of these perspectives will play important parts in Díaz's novel, as it uncovers the totalizing sweep of a historical perspective that relegates thousands of forgotten victims to the trash bin of history and as it attempts to construct strategies of resistance grounded in global networks of relation.

As the novel proper begins, its narrator Yunior evokes a multigenerational and transnational curse that will, we understand, help make sense of the more localized story of Oscar:

> They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially; fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite "discovering" the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukú, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours. (1, emphasis in original).

The curse that Díaz slyly names *Fukú americanus* originated with the so-called discovery of America by Columbus ("the Admiral"), the first encounter between Europeans and Native Americans that inaugurated a new global age. Invoking the attacks of 9/11 ("Ground Zero"), Yunior suggests that we are still grappling with the terrible repercussions of that fateful event when Columbus went ashore on what he thought were East-Asian islands. The fukú works as an overarching explanation of everything that has transpired in the more than five centuries since Columbus. This example of magical thinking—which is a nod to magical realists such as Gabriel García Márquez, whom Yunior refer to several times throughout the novel—allows

the individual characters in the book to see themselves as parts of a much larger history—even if that history is one of genocide, catastrophe, and exploitation.

The novel follows the protagonist, the Dominican immigrant Oscar de León as he grows up with his mother and sister in Paterson, New Jersey, in Ronald Reagan's America. Overweight, and diffident to the point of being antisocial, Oscar spends most of his time reading science fiction and comic books and playing role-playing games while fantasizing about having a girlfriend or even a close friend. He is, as the title of the novel's first chapter has it, a "GhettoNerd at the End of the World" (11). In one sense, then, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is a bildungsroman, following Oscar as he attempts to escape his involuntary social isolation through a romantic and sexual relationship that continually eludes him throughout the novel. It quickly becomes clear, however, that Oscar's attempts at connecting with the world around him are closely related to the past of his family in the Dominican Republic—and ultimately, if we are to believe Yunior, with the fukú. The fukú is clearly inspired by Oscar's immersion in the world of science fiction and fantasy literature, but—and this seems to be Díaz's point—in Oscar's life, these imaginary worlds of superstition and fiction register as everyday reality, the extraordinary fantasy is the dream of having a girlfriend.

To grow up and become part of the world, Oscar must first confront his and his family's past. After a miserable experience in high school in Paterson and at Rutgers College and a suicide attempt, Oscar is brought to the Dominican Republic by his sister Lola. This proves to be a revelatory experience for Oscar, as Yunior relates in this long, evocative sentence:

> The beat-you-down heat was the same, and so was the fecund tropical smell that he had never forgotten, that to him was more evocative than any madeleine, and likewise

> the air pollution and the thousands of motos and cars and dilapidated trucks on the roads and the clusters of peddlers at every traffic light (so dark, he noticed, and his mother said, dismissively, Maldito haitianos) and people walking languidly with nothing to shade them from the sun and the buses that charged past so overflowing with passengers that from the outside they looked like they were making a rush delivery of spare limbs to some far-off war and the general ruination of so many of the buildings as if Santo Domingo was the place that crumbled crippled concrete shells came to die—and the hunger on some of the kids' faces, can't forget that […](273).

Even without the mention of the madeleine, the Proustian echoes are hard to miss: although Oscar has been to Santo Domingo before, the smells, sights, and sounds of the Dominican capital overwhelm him and set him on a journey to recover his family's past—a journey that his sister (and the reader) had already begun when she stayed with her grandmother in Santo Domingo after running away from home.

Oscar's attempts to find out more about his family coincide with his love affair with Ybón, an affair that will eventually cause Oscar's death but not before Oscar finally manages, for a brief moment, to find the love he has been searching for his whole life. It is by seeing his life as part of a larger struggle, not just the political struggles of the twentieth century Caribbean but also the cosmic struggle against the fukú, that Oscar manages to become part of the world around him. It is no coincidence that the chapter in which Oscar has his Proustian experience is entitled "The Condensed Notebook of a Return to a Nativeland" (272). Invoking Aimé Cesaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Díaz (or Yunior) connects Oscar's attempt to forge a larger, global American genealogy with the tradition of Caribbean epics discussed in the previous chapter.

Earlier in the novel Yunior refers to the Dominican Republic as being behind the "Plátano Curtain" (80)—as if the Caribbean nation was behind an iron curtain made of plantains. On the one hand, this metaphor evokes the difficulty of getting off the island during the reign of the dictator Trujillo, but on the other hand, it also describes precisely the veil that hid the web of connections to the past and to the rest of the globe. Rather than a novel about Caribbean immigrants shedding their previous citizenship to become part of a new multi-ethnic America, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* maps out a diasporic space that extends far beyond America's borders. As Elisabeth Maria Merman-Jozwiak argues in her article "Beyond Multiculturalism: Etnic Studies, Transnationalism, and Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao*", By the end of the novel, Díaz has mapped out an "extended Caribbean" (9) that extends to New Jersey, Europe, and Africa.

If the fukú stands for the larger totality to which Oscar must somehow break through, it is not because the globe as such in Yunior's perspective is irrevocably cursed. Rather, the fukú represents the larger global and historic forces that affect the lives of countless millions without their realizing it. Only by raising one's consciousness to a global level can one confront the true causes of one's personal misery. Whatever inhibits Oscar's attempts to break through to this global totality and with it, ordinary human sociality—whether personal inhibitions, American nationalism, or a combination of the two—it works through concealing the larger connections between the individual and the world. As José David Saldívar suggests in his article "Conjectures on 'Americanity' and Junot Díaz's 'Fukú Americanus,'" (132) this concealment or blindness to the past also represents a challenge to the obliviousness of neoliberal Caribbean and Latin American states with regard to their own violent pasts.

Oscar's (and Lola's) attempts to understand their familiy's past is just one example of this global consciousness. Another is the (rumored) book which Oscar's grandfather Abelard wrote about the Trujillo regime:

> Sometime in 1944 (so the story goes), while Abelard was still worried about whether he was in trouble with Trujillo, he started writing a book about—what else?—Trujillo. By 1945 there was already a tradition of ex-officials writing tell-all books about the Trujillo regime. But that apparently was not the kind of book Abelard was writing. His shit, if we are to believe the whispers, was an exposé of the supernatural roots of the Trujillo regime! A book about the Dark Powers of the President, a book in which Abelard argued that the tales the common people told about the president-that he was supernatural, that he was not human-may in some ways have been *true*. That it was possible that Trujillo was, if not in fact, then in principle, a creature from another world! (245, emphasis in original)

We would be wrong, I argue, to view this magical thinking as a kind wish-fulfillment that would in one fell swoop reverse the catastrophic history of the Americas through fantastical wish-fulfillment, but rather as an aspiration to come to terms with the truly epic scope of the last five hundred years of interconnected extended Caribbean history. Ironically, then, it is precisely what seemed to keep Oscar apart from the rest of the world, his love of science fiction and fantasy, that allows him to conceive of the enormity of the narrative—to merge Galactus's perspective with Walcott's attention to hybridity and relations.

"Still a Mess": Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*

In *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison examines the origins of the United States in the 17th century American colonies through the story of the slave-girl Florens, born and raised on a Maryland plantation owned by the Portuguese planter D'Ortega and then traded to the Dutch merchant Jacon Vaark in order to settle a debt. Morrison's novel explores this global space of Europeans, Africans, and Native American before it coalesced into America, and shows how that American exceptionalism that would play such a large part in America's history as the colonies became a nation and then a global superpower, was present from the very beginning.

The second chapter follows Vaark as he travels through Virginia and Maryland to meet with D'Ortega. Although far from his upstate New York home and out of his element in a Southern colony based on slave labor, Vaark admires the pristine landscape:

> Once beyond the warm gold of the bay, he saw forests untouched since Noah, shorelines beautiful enough to bring tears, wild food for the taking. The lies of the Company about the easy profit awaiting all comers did not surprise or discourage him. In fact it was hardship, adventure, that attracted him. His whole life had been a mix of confrontation, risk and placating. Now here he was, a ratty orphan become landowner, making a place out of no place, a temperate living from raw life (12-13).

The virgin land that Vaark admires recalls Turner's frontier thesis. On this land a "ratty orphan" like Vaark can be the master of his own fate despite of the corrupt political institutions ("the Company") that manage the colonies. Vaark can make a place—a place that will one day grow into a nation—out of the placeless frontier. Yet it is exactly the placelessness of the frontier that allows this process of personal and spatial development to take place: it is

through the encounter with the frontier that the nation and the new, potentially democratic, meritocratic polity emerge.

However, the corrupt political and legal institutions that Vaark believes he has more or less put behind him are still very much in effect. As Vaark is perfectly well aware, a new set of laws in the Southern colonies have cemented the class-based and racial boundaries that will play such a large part in the history of the not-yet-born nation:

> Half a dozen years ago an army of blacks, natives, whites, mulattoes—freedmen, slaves and indentured—had waged war against local gentry led by members of that very class. When that "people's war" lost its hopes to the hangman, the work it had done—which included the slaughter of opposing tribes and running the Carolinas off their land—spawned a thicket of new laws authorizing chaos in defense of order. By eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms for black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any black for any reason; by compensating owners for a slave's maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from all others forever. Any social ease between gentry and laborers, forged before and during that rebellion, crumbled beneath a hammer wielded in the interests of the gentry's profits. In Jacob Vaark's view, these were lawless laws encouraging cruelty in exchange for common cause, if not common virtue.
>
> In short, 1682 and Virginia was still a mess. Who could keep up with the pitched battles for God, king and land? Even with the relative safety of his skin, solitary traveling required prudence (12).

Not unlike Pynchon's Zone in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Virginia of 1682 that Vaark encounters is "still a mess": a battleground between different political entities and conceptions, between

immigrants like Vaark who desire a society built on individual freedom and a state-apparatus that (at least in Vaarks' view) enacts chaotic laws to keep up order in the wake of Bacon's Rebellion of 1676. As Susan Strehle notes in her article "'I Am a Thing Apart': Toni Morrison, A Mercy, and American Exceptionalism," the effects of these laws were "to privilege white European servants in order to preclude their making common cause with black slaves and native people" (116). We might think of these laws as one possible beginning of social division in America, the inauguration of institutional racism, although we should be careful not to read this historical event as an overdetermined origin that would explain the plot of the novel as well as the totality of American history. If Morrison were engaged in a simple search for such origins, rather than for a wider range of factors that together create the social conditions necessary not just for slavery but for the particular American racism which *A Mercy* traces, she would not have chosen to focus on Vaark, a person vigorously opposed to these laws, living in Upstate New York far away from their jurisdiction, yet who is arguably as complicit as the planter and slave owner D'Ortega in fostering racial division in the new colonies.

One of the many contributing powers vying for dominance on the placeless frontier of the Eastern American colonies is a nascent global capitalism the importance of which Morrison is keenly aware of. Even though at this point in history the American landscape is mostly untouched by European settlers and most plantations and farms in the new world remain almost completely isolated, the world market is everywhere present. As Morrison writes, this "ad hoc territory" is "good for planters, better for merchants, best for brokers" (15).If Vaark's ideals of free enterprise are ostensibly antithetical to the kind of laws imposed in the wake of Bacon's rebellion, he is embroiled in the same power structures as D'Ortega as becomes clear after he accepts the slave-girl Florens as payment of a debt:

> Now he fondled the idea of an even more satisfying enterprise. And the plan was as sweet as the sugar on which it was based. And there was a profound difference between the intimacy of slave bodies at Jublio and a remote labor force in Barbados. Right? Right, he thought, looking at a sky vulgar with stars. Clear and right. The silver that glittered there was not at all unreachable. And that wide swath of cream pouring through the stars was his for the tasting.
>
> The heat was still pressing, his bed partner overactive, yet he slept well enough. Probably because his dreams were of a grand house of many rooms rising on a hill above the fog. (40-41)

Still distinguishing between his own actions and those of the slave-dealing South—whether the Southern colonies Virginia and Maryland or Caribbean colonies such as Barbados—Vaark justifies his own dealings with slavers. Investing in a sugar plantation based on what he to himself calls a "remote labor force in Barbados" does not make him anything like the planter D'Ortega (whose plantation is called is called Jublio). This less-than-sound logic notwithstanding, Vaark is also forgetting that he is at this moment himself personally a slave owner—in addition to accepting Florens as payment, Vaarks also "rescued" the African woman Sorrow who works on the Vaark farm without any pay. Vaark justifies this practice by telling himself that he has rescued these victimes (including the Native American Lina) from a fate far worse than working on his farm and by comparing their fate as orphans to his own, forgetting that—at least in the case of Florens—he is himself part of the reason that she is an orphan: "From his own childhood he knew there was no good place in the world for waifs and whelps other than the generosity of strangers"(37).

Morrison's examination of the messy origins of America underscores that the racism associated by Vaark with laws made in the wake of Bacon's rebellion were part of a much larger pattern of what would much later be called American exceptionalism. Although telling a very localized story. Morrison alludes to several of the ideas that have been associated with the earliest discourse of American exceptionalism. Even as he is dreaming of creating a life for himself completely independent of any restraining European political institutions, Vaark is replicating and even intensifying the very structures of domination and bondage that he thinks he has put behind him. It is not without significance that Morrison chooses this moment of blatant hypocrisy to invoke one of the first evocations and theoretizations of American exceptionalism: John Winthrop's sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," in which the Puritan co-founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony likens America to the "City Upon a Hill" from Jesus's sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:14).[1] Vaark's dreams of a house upon a hill, rising above the fog, consumes him not just that night but the for rest of his life. As he gets back to his farm, he starts building a new and bigger manor house despite the protests and incomprehension of his wife Rebekka.

In addition to the allusion to the trope of the "city upon a hill," Morrison also engages in a sustained meditation on the role of the frontier in early colonial American culture. We have already seen Vaark's reflections on the virgin land that he encounters in Virginia. The true horror of this discourse, however, does not reveal itself until later in the book when it becomes clear that in Vaark's and Rebekka's mind Florens, Lina, and Sorrow belong on the far side of the frontier line as wild creatures that must de domesticated and ultimately—despite all of Vaark's and Rebekka's protestations of friendship and difference from the Southern plantocracy—as material objects that can be sold if it benefits the family.

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[1] For a reading of Morrison's use of early American origin narratives such as Winthrop's, see Babb 150.

Of all the characters in the novel, Florens is the only one to successfully transcend this civilization/wilderness binary. As she says by the novel's end: "I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last" (189). The words are addressed to the blacksmith, a free black man with whom Florens falls in love but who rejects her and, according to Florens, says that she "is wilderness" (184). This takes place after Florens beats Malaik, a young orphan adopted by the blacksmith. As Strehle notes, by calling Florens wild, the blacksmith "reproduce[s] the logic of [the] exceptionalist culture" (119) that will wreak havoc on African Americans in the centuries to come.

The last chapter of *A Mercy* is devoted to the voice of Florens's mother, who in addition to telling her life story explains her reasons for giving Florens away to Vaark. Here, at the end of the novel, we get the clearest expression of the divisionary logic inherent in American exceptionalism when Florens' mother says about her first experience in the colonies after being brought from Africa: "It was there I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked together in the color of my skin" (194). Rather than an essential difference on which a legal edifice could be built, race appears here as an overdetermined invention that belatedly justifies the kidnapping and exploitation of Africans. These global racial ramifications of American exceptionalism will also play a major role in the next global American novel.

"It's a Lie But You Buy Into It": Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* signals its global Americanism from the beginning—it is a novel about America written by one of Africa's most prominent contemporary writers, one of the international bestsellers of 2013, available in every airport of the world, and the aythor of which was recently sampled in the Beyonce song "Flawless." Adiche's central thesis of the permeability of American identity asserts itself even in her title: Americanah is the word used by the character in the novel for a Nigerian who sees the world through American eyes. Throughout the novel, Adichie explores this composite subjectivity—not quite American and not quite Nigerian—through the love story between the two Nigerians Ifemelu and Obinze as they grow up and fall in love in a Nigeria under the economic and cultural influence of America. The American empire we meet in *Americanah* is one that exerts its powers under the auspices of contemporary globalization. As Adichie's Nigeria moves from one political regime to another, it remains under the influence of the wave of privatization of public corporations that characterize the Washington consensus imposed by such international organizations such as the IMF. Moreover, the Nigerian youth is spellbound by popular American popular culture from Huckleberry Finn and the Cosby Show to Dr. Dre.

Moreover, or perhaps because of this pervasive American influence, the country in which Ifemelu and Obinze grow up is one in which the highest aspiration for upper middle class people such as the two protagonists is to move to America, to get an education and hopefully a green card and a citizenship. During a month-long teacher's strike at the university which they attend, they apply for American visas and colleges. Ifemelu gets in while Obinze is denied— in the aftermath of 9/11 young men from predominantly Muslim countries have a harder time obtaining US visas. Obinze moves to London where he lives for a brief period as

an undocumented immigrant but is caught and sent back to Nigeria when he tries to marry a British citizen to obtain a work permit. By contrasts, Ifemelu moves to Philadelphia, attends college and slowly loses touch with her boyfriend as she assimilates to American life.

Where *Americanah* differs from many other similar ethnic-American novels centered around immigration, from those written by Henry Roth and Maxine Hong Kingston to Jamaica Kincaid and Jhumpa Lahiri, is that it is not fundamentally a story about an immigrant coming to the United States, assimilating to the new conditions, and ultimately becoming part of the culture, as one more element of the American melting pot. Rather, Adichie's novel focuses on the failure to assimilate, the disconnects between what Americans and Nigerians in *Americanah* consider to be universal values. By the end of the novel, Ifemelu decides to move back to Nigeria, becoming one of the many American returnees who travel back to Lagos in the wake of the financial crisis to join in the burgeoning Nigerian economy.

More than anything else, it is the way that race permeates American society that astounds Ifemelu. She has barely considered race as a marker of identity or a societal question before her plane lands in New York. In Nigeria, she has identified as an Igbo, the ethnic group that makes up about twenty per cent of the Nigerian population, but in America, she is told that she is black. The inquiry into the significance of this, what we might think of as a racial interpellation, makes up the bulk of the novel. Ifemelu is only superficially aware of African-American history and does not consider herself part of that tradition, even if everybody she meets treats her as an African-American.

In what reads like a meta-poetic meditation, the novelist Shan (the sister of one of Ifemelu's African-American boyfriends Blaine) discusses the pitfalls of writing about race in America:

> My editor reads the manuscript and says, 'I understand that race is important here but we have to make sure the book transcends race, so that it's not just about race. And I'm thinking, But why do I have to transcend race? You know, like race is a brew best served mild, tempered with other liquids, otherwise white folks can't swallow it. […] You can't write an honest novel about race in this country. If you write about how people are really affected by race, it'll be too obvious. […] So if you're going to write about race, you have to make sure it's so lyrical and subtle that the reader who doesn't read between the lines won't even know it's about race. You know, a Proustian meditation, all watery and fuzzy, that at the end just leaves you feeling watery and fuzzy. (335-37, emphasis in original)

The brash inaccuracy of Shan's judgment of American literature aside, Adichie attempts to accomplish exactly this feat: to write straightforwardly about race in America. Ifemelu's public education on American racial matters is documented through her initially anonymous blog (which eventually earns her a Princeton scholarship), in which she discusses matters large and small, from the still lingering structural racism of contemporary America and the election of Barack Obama to questions of racial microaggression and black women's hair. The blog format allows Adichie to address race as an issue that is simultaneously pervasive and invisible in a discourse dealing with often traditionally feminized topics in a language that is unliterary in the traditional sense—although Adichie makes sure to name check her favorite American writers on race from William Faulkner and James Baldwin to the now defunct blog Postbourgie. As she writes in the blog post arising from the experience of being interpellated as black in America:

> Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I just made something up. And admit it–you say "I'm not black" only because you know black is at the bottom of America's race ladder. And you want none of that. Don't deny now. What if being black had all the privileges of being white? Would you still say "Don't call me black, I'm from Trinidad"? I didn't think so. So you're black, baby. And here's the deal with becoming black: You must show that you are offended when such words as "watermelon" or "tar baby" are used in jokes, even if you don't know what the hell is being talked about–and since you are a Non-American Black, the chances are that you won't know. (In undergrad a white classmate asks if I like watermelon, I say yes, and another classmate says, Oh my God that is so racist, and I'm confused. "Wait, how?") You must nod back when a black person nods at you in a heavily white area. It is called the black nod. It is a way for the black people to say "You are not alone, I am here too." In describing black women you admire, always use the word "STRONG" because that is what black women are supposed to be in America. If you are a woman, please do not speak your mind as you are used to doing in your country. Because in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY (222).

Similar to Florens's mother's experience of being racialized as black upon arriving in the Americas in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*, Ifemelu's American experience is one of interpellation into a system of racial difference that is foreign to her. Instead of attempting to insulate herself

within a fabricated, atavistic edifice, Ifemelu embraces the composite nature of herself and of her two home countries. It is neither the case that Ifemelu simply brings a fresh and potentially clarifying perspective to an intractable discussion of race nor that she sees the error of her ways and embraces her new identity as an African-American, but rather that she opens up a dialog between different perspectives and places taking place in the global space of the internet

Addressing American racism as it displays itself in the relationship between recent African immigrants and African-Americans, as well as Americans' tendency to view Africans from all over Africa as belonging to the same nationality and ethnicity—as if all of Africa were one country and one that was closely allied with the concerns of African-Americans—Ifemelu's blog globalizes the discussion of race. Rather than universalizing American racial categories, the blog posts bring different kinds of awareness and blindness into contact with each other. The result looks nothing like a solution to racial issues, nor even a revolutionary new approach: rather, the blog appears as tentative beginning to a new conversation on the global implications of American race relations.

When Ifemelu decides to move back, she sees Nigeria in a new light. She is startled when a landlord tells her casually that he does not rent out to Igbo people, unable to decide whether this is a new development or whether her years thinking about race in America has made her aware of an ethnic bias that she would not have noticed earlier. But she is not the only one who has changed, the Nigeria she arrives in is different from the one she left thirteen years earlier. A new class of internationalized Nigerian businessmen has sprung up, earning fortunes off the privatization of government contracts. Nigeria's entrance into the globalized economy permeates everything—at least in the upper-middle-class circles in which Ifemelu travels—from the global circulation of Nollywood films to the Nigerian "419" e-mail scams,

which more than anything else seem to define the country in the global consciousness. Ifemelu's former boyfriend Obinze now owns real estate in Nigeria, Dubai, China, and other emergent economies and lives in a huge house with his wife and daughter. Ifemelu herself, as mentioned, becomes part of the Nigerpolitan club, the diaspora of Americanahs, of returnees from America who do not feel quite at home in their native country.

Although Ifemelu claims in a conversation with one of her childhood friends that "[r]ace doesn't really work here. I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black" (475), she uses her experience in America to start up a new blog about the culture and politics of the new Lagos she encounters. As the novel and the overdetermined love story between Ifemelu and Obinze comes to a close, Adichie briefly focuses on America as it looks from the contemporary global south. In one of their conversations, Ifemelu tells Obinze, "The best thing about America is that it gives you space. I like that. I like that you buy into the dream, it's a lie but you buy into it and that's all that matters" (434). Not convinced by the American dream, Ifemelu nevertheless sees America as a space in which and from which the world can be thought: a different, more permeable America that is becoming ever easier to discern—even as the American state is consolidating its national boundaries—as the globe becomes more connected. As this study has shown, this phenomenon is not new; underneath the discourses of American exceptionalism and dominance, a global American genealogy of relation extends back to the nation's origins and beyond.

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