



ORBIT - Online Repository of Birkbeck Institutional Theses

Enabling Open Access to Birkbeck's Research Degree output

Scars of the visible: the politics of the image in contemporary experimental fiction

<https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/40461/>

Version: Full Version

Citation: Barrow, Daniel (2019) Scars of the visible: the politics of the image in contemporary experimental fiction. [Thesis] (Unpublished)

© 2020 The Author(s)

All material available through ORBIT is protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law.

Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

[Deposit Guide](#)
Contact: [email](#)

**Scars of the Visible: The Politics of the
Image in Contemporary Experimental
Fiction**

Daniel Barrow

**Submitted in requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English and Humanities**

Birkbeck, University of London

August 2019

Abstract

This thesis explores the politics of narrative form in a number of contemporary Anglo-American novels concerned with states of stasis, temporal fragmentation, and anti-psychological blankness of character. It focuses on an underexplored aspect of works by Tom McCarthy, Ben Lerner and Don DeLillo: their concentration on the image or the visual as an element of narrative, which both interrupts a temporal continuity conceived, in the traditional realist novel, in terms of depth, flow and plenitude and, dialectically, seems to promise the most immediate access to such depth and plenitude. Developing, in the first two chapters, a critical framework from Guy Debord's post-war theory of 'spectacle' and its recent interpreters in art history, I situate these novels' narrative experiments, by which the novel-form turns to its opposite, the visual register, within the longer-term history of late capitalism. Concomitantly, this thesis places these texts in the context of a recent critical resurgence of interest in realism, emerging out of postmodernism, arguing that the anti-realist devices of these novels constitute a means of testing and modifying realism's mimetic relationship to the object-world amid temporal conditions that make its forms of temporality untenable. Chapter Three develops this argument through close readings of Lerner's *10:04* (2014) and DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010), exploring the ways in which these novels handle their narrative temporality in a disempowered and *contemplative* manner, but turn to visual intertexts in art and film to restart narrative time. Chapter Four looks at a qualitative shift in this turn towards the visual, through Tom McCarthy's work, in which, in his avowedly anti-psychological novels, surface and space replaces depth and time. In Chapter Five, I show how the rigidified opposition between subject and object at the heart of Debord's spectacle theory is momentarily overcome in these novels, precisely by a turn back toward the image.

Table of Contents

Title page	i
Abstract	i
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: 'The World as Image'	22
Chapter 2: Late Capitalist Images	81
Chapter 3: Time and Contemplation	131
Chapter 4: Allegories of Spectacular Time	179
Chapter 5: Autonomy of the Image	228
Conclusion	272
Bibliography	285

Acknowledgements

My greatest thanks go to my supervisor, Caroline Edwards, who taught me more than anyone about the process of writing a thesis, at all levels of its structure, its life and transformation in time, and who was always encouraging in the most specific ways even when my thinking was pretty obtuse; and to Joe Brooker, who took over and assisted ably with supervision at a crucial point. Sue Wiseman and Peter Fifield were a great help in despondent moments. George Ttoouli gave much-needed advice on revising Chapter 2. As with all such projects, my immediate research community shaped it ambiently; to name some of those who helped would inevitably be to sin by omission.

Earlier versions of material that made its way into Chapters 3 and 4 were first presented at conferences at Birkbeck, SOAS and the University of Sussex. Thanks to the organisers and some very helpful interlocutors for their questions and suggestions.

The School of Arts at Birkbeck made this research possible through their award of a Studentship in 2015-18.

Finally, this project owes more to my parents, friends and partner than I can express here.

Introduction

Ads Without Products

Towards the end of *The Coming Community* (1990), Giorgio Agamben describes what he sees as the ontology of global society at the time of writing:

If we had once again to conceive of the fortunes of humanity in terms of class, then today we would have to say that there are no longer social classes, but just a single planetary bourgeoisie, in which all the old social classes are dissolved: The petty bourgeoisie has inherited the world and is the form in which humanity has survived nihilism. [...]

But the absurdity of individual existence, inherited from the subbase of nihilism, has become in the meantime so senseless that it has lost all pathos and been transformed, brought out into the open, into an everyday exhibition: Nothing resembles the life of this new humanity more than advertising footage from which every trace of the advertised product has been wiped out. The contradiction of the petty bourgeois, however, is that they still search in the footage for the product they were cheated of, obstinately trying, against all odds, to make their own an identity that has become in reality absolutely improper and insignificant to them.¹

As with much of Agamben's work, his claims here imply many premises without clarifying them. But it is clear that, although Agamben is not very specific throughout *The Coming Community* about the periodisation of his work, in his view by the end of the economic and

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 63-64.

political transformations of the 20th century, ‘the two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat’, of which Marx and Engels wrote in the mid-19th century are no more.² The divisions and oppositions that structured the meaning of class society have ‘lost any meaning’ for this ‘planetary petty bourgeoisie’, whose fate is to take on ‘the aptitude of the proletariat to refuse any recognizable social identity.’³ The world has been reduced to the level of the industrial workers of the 19th century, but with a new poverty of life, of social meaning, in place of the material poverty that previously defined the proletariat. There is, in its place, only a universal social entity that has the appearance of a class but is not one, composed instead of a mass of ‘individual existence[s].’⁴

This fragment may be more explicable when read in tandem with Agamben’s analyses, here and elsewhere, of the work of Guy Debord.⁵ He makes clear in an earlier section that he sees this condition of universal petty-bourgeoisification as an ‘extreme form’ of the ‘transformation of politics and of all social life into a spectacular phantasmagoria’ that Debord had described with the publication of *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. Social ontology, ‘a common foundation [...] this generic essence of social being’—which Agamben treats, somewhat idiosyncratically, as the ‘linguistic being of humans’—is ‘separated from the thing revealed and stands between it and humans.’⁶ He traces the development of that ontology back to the scene of Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism in *Capital* (1867), characterised by the spread of ‘both transparency and phantasmagoria.’⁷ The world that commodity production

² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp. 469-500 (p. 474).

³ Agamben, p. 64.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For examples of Agamben’s scholarship on Debord in addition to the work cited here, see: Agamben, ‘Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord’s Films’, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. by Tom McDonough, trans. by Brian Holmes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 313-319. For a lucid overview of Agamben’s engagement with Debord, see Alex Murray, ‘Beyond Spectacle and the Image: the Poetics of Guy Debord and Agamben’, in *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life*, ed. by Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron and Alex Murray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 164-180.

⁶ Ibid, p. 80-82.

⁷ Agamben, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000), p. 75.

makes is both transparent and obscured, clouded, characterised by the status of images or mirages—the commodity's was 'a secret that capital always tried to hide by exposing it in full view'.⁸ From Agamben's simple image—adverts without products—derives a vivid sense of an entire social ontology. Its inhabitants find themselves in the midst of a structure whose loci and purpose, which do not in any case originate with them, have vanished; they are joined by the context of the field—the 'advertising footage'—in which they co-exist, but remain isolated individuals. They enact gestures and looks, of longing and interaction, towards objects that are no longer there. This is the structure of the 'spectacle' as Debord described it.

Certain innovative fictions of the last 15 years seem to dramatise the condition that Debord and Agamben describe. These would include the novels of Ben Lerner (*10:04, Leaving the Atocha Station*), Tom McCarthy (*Remainder, C, Satin Island*) and the post-2010 work of Don DeLillo (*Point Omega*), which this thesis will concentrate on. In them the contemporary everyday life of the advanced capitalist economies appears as oddly unreal, at once naturalised and uninhabitable, as if it forced the protagonists to detach themselves from it. The world seems drained of meaning, flat, homogeneous, a state to which the protagonists themselves react with a turn to a self-reflexive concern with the narratives they focalise. Their environment, the diegetic worlds and plot events of their narrative, seem to address themselves in terms of images—the absent product that calls for the gesture and identity, the regarding look, of the consumer. The only relationship that they can assume towards their diegetic world and the events of the narrative is one of what Debord called 'contemplation': '[a]ll that was once directly lived has become mere representation'. The diegeses' sense of coherence and unity, their verisimilitude or realism as plausible fictional worlds, 'unites what is separate, but it unites it only *in its separateness*'.⁹ This concern with the experience of a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 14, 12; *ibid.*, p. 22

secondhand reality—transparent but structured in opposition to the subjects who live within it—extends into their form. This is especially evident in their handling of narrative time. In Peter Boxall’s analysis, temporality is a central concern of 21st-century fiction, responding to a ‘fragmentation [...] determined by a completely different set of chronological pressures and apparatuses’ from previous phases of the history of the novel.¹⁰ The contortions of global space-time in the 21st century—the ‘advent’ of what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls an era of ‘instantaneity’ through global digital communications and travel—creates a crisis in ‘the mechanics of narrative itself—our capacity to capture and recount events as they unfold in time and space.’¹¹ What results in the novel is frequently what Boxall calls a ‘fascination with the passing moment, with speeded, slowed, stalled, uneven time’ and ‘an extraordinary kind of aphasia, in which the world slips from our grasp’ and ‘we have to relearn our most basic orienteering to get from here to there, from one second to the next.’¹² Debord and a number of his contemporary interpreters—most notably theorists Anselm Jappe and Tom Bunyard, and art historians Jonathan Crary and TJ Clark—decipher these temporal shifts as entangled in a much larger and more long-term emergent logic, by which capitalism has rearranged social time according to the form of the commodity.¹³ Debord’s account of social time will form a central part of the study to follow. But in any case, in the fictions under consideration, the variable but continuous duration integral to what Zadie Smith calls the ‘lyrical realism’ of 21st century novels is altered and shifted by states of stasis, frozen time, fragmentation, synchronicity and a disordered narrative time that develops in reaction to time’s negation.¹⁴

¹⁰ Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6. The text that Boxall cites here is Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 128.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³ See for examples: Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Tom Bunyard, *Debord, Time and Spectacle: Hegelian Marxism and Situationist Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); TJ Clark, *The Sight of Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Zadie Smith, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 71.

Moreover, such formal concerns around temporality converge in a privileged status for *images and the visual* in these texts. This manifests in a number of different formal devices, which Chapters 3-5 of this thesis will address. In the novels of Lerner, McCarthy and DeLillo, devices of dilated description, ambiguous organisation of narrative time, the multimodal embedding of images within the page space and other techniques drag the sequential and diachronic time of the novel towards what the texts often take to be an ideal and synchronic visual ontology. Description becomes dominated by a hegemony of visual perception; narrative sequence, from a network of events and peripheral discursive matter, becomes a disconnected series of image-like, static impressions of scenes. Instances of visual material (photography, painting, film, digital media) function as objects of meditation, intertexts or idealised signs of a narrative time that has otherwise been made impossible: duration broken down into static intervals, narrative information rendered ambiguous. Narrative focalisation approaches a much more literally visual form of itself, with the narrative discourse becoming much more narrowly focused on individual seeing, without any attendance to the surrounding context of other characters' psychology or fictional space. Hence protagonists occasionally relieve themselves of their very control over the narrative discourse, investing in the function of images or seeing as an idealised and omnipotent power outside themselves through shifts and restrictions of focalisation.

A politics—a sense of how contemporary life, its time and space and the possibilities and limits therein, are organised socially—is often explicitly at play within these fictions' relationship to the image. But part of this project's argument is that their programmes and discourses are often subverted or inverted by their politics of form. For example, DeLillo's work has often addressed, in pointed and satirical ways, the social roles of media, digital technology and finance, from such mid-period works as *White Noise* (1985) to late fictions such as *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Zero K* (2016) and the short story 'Hammer and Sickle' (2010). But

Cosmopolis, for example, imagines no specific alternative to the finance and screen technology that fills the novel, except perhaps forces of destitution and death in the form of Benno Levin, the former hedge fund employee who assassinates protagonist Eric Packer. Throughout the novel, the primarily linear narrative sequence is interrupted by prolepses or flash-forwards, in which Eric's future death is seen inserted in the seat-mounted monitors of his car and watch: '[w]hen he looked at the watch he saw the inside of an ambulance, with drip-feed devices and bouncing heads. [...] When he looked at the watch again he saw an identification tag. It was a tag in long shot, fixed to a plastic wristband. He knew, he sensed that a zoom shot would follow [...] O shit I'm dead.'¹⁵ The image becomes the vehicle of an inescapable narrative fatalism. By contrast *Point Omega*, whilst it can often seem cynical, particularly in its presentation of the damaged masculinity of the major characters—a failed filmmaker, a 'defence intellectual' who has retired from academic fame to the desert, a disturbed cinephile who may also be a murderer—finds in film and the kind of vision film requires a suggestion (even if only in the form of parody) of a different form of life to the contemporary world of the novel. (One character describes everyday life as 'the strange bright fact that breathes and eats out there, the thing that's not the movies.'¹⁶ That difference is, in its own way, political. It establishes a means by which to critically reflect on the present and the catastrophes—of death, war and personal failure—that the characters remain trapped in. But when its attention to states of slow, image-focused time are explored in the context of the social organisation of time as images, a set of further political potentials open up: glimpses of the limits of the structuration of the visible; intimations of gaps, breaks and ruptures in the spectacle, and of what might lay beyond or outside it. In this sense, the fictions under consideration could be seen as conducting an *immanent critique* of the contemporary organisation of the world as images. They do not position themselves as somehow transcending or evading it, but as

¹⁵ Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* (London: Picador, 2004), p. 206.

¹⁶ Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* (London: Picador, 2010), p. 53; *ibid*, p. 19.

investing in it, extrapolating the logic by which vanished products structure the world of adverts the protagonist-subjects inhabit. The result, which negates the psychological plenitude, depth and durational continuity that realist fiction (a term we will return to in a moment) takes as its operating premise, replacing it with frozen surfaces and discontinuous time, takes the logic of spectacle, which makes the image the locus of value, to a formal conclusion that turns back on these very premises. Thus, if the fictions sometimes seem in their surface-level orientation to be one-sidedly critical of the place of the image in contemporary society, it is at the level of form that this critique becomes properly dialectical.

Although Debord wrote frequently on art and aesthetics during the early phase of the Situationists' career, between 1957 and 1963, the politics of form remain an incomplete and contested part of his work. In particular, there is by no means a systematised theory of narrative form in his work.¹⁷ Therefore, the analyses of fiction that form the core of this study are not simply 'Debordian' readings, or applications of Debord's theories to contemporary fiction. Rather, one particular interpretation of Debord's concept of spectacle, grounded in its foundations in Marxist and Hegelian social theory, and concretised through an encounter with the concept's interpreters within art history, will be used as an optic to refract the issues of the image, time and the structure of contemporary experience that the texts raise. The account that this study will give of the politics of the image in contemporary fiction will necessarily be informed by other frameworks of the politics of literary form. In particular Fredric Jameson's work on narrative structure and time in the novel, developed in *Marxism and Form* (1971), *The Political Unconscious* (1981), *The Antinomies of Realism* (2014) and a number of essays

¹⁷ See for examples: Guy Debord, 'The Great Sleep and Its Clients', in McDonough, pp. 21-24; Debord, 'One More Try If You Want to Be Situationists (The SI *in* and *against* Decomposition)', in McDonough, pp. 51-60; Debord, 'Theses on Cultural Revolution', in McDonough, pp. 61-66; Debord, 'The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art', in McDonough, pp. 159-166; 'The Avant-Garde of Presence', in *Situationist International Anthology*, 2nd edn, ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 142-144. Wherever in these notes no author is listed for a Situationist International text, that text was originally unsigned and published as the product of collective authorship. I have tried elsewhere to elaborate some of the implications of Debord's work for narrative theory; see Daniel Barrow, "'Our old enemy the commodity": Image, Narration, Spectacular Time', *Brief Encounters* 3:1 (2019), 29-38.

will prove invaluable in what follows. For although the spectacular narrative strategies of the texts themselves relate to the specific social and cultural condition of the image in the last 15 years, they descend genealogically to debates about the novel as a literary form dating back to the early 20th century (which I will address in the next section).

Realism, Postmodernism, the Contemporary

The work of Lerner, McCarthy and DeLillo are particularly intense and developed representatives of the tendencies described above, but their narrative innovations are not their exclusive property. They do not constitute anything like a school. These attributes—of anti-psychological flatness, distorted and slowed narrative time, dilated and visualised description, multimodal strategies—can also be seen in the context of a wide range of contemporary fiction, including the work of Tao Lin, Teju Cole, Sheila Heti, Zadie Smith's novels since *NW*, Rachel Kushner, Otessa Moshfegh, Colson Whitehead, Jarrett Kobek, Jennifer Egan, Rachel Cusk, Deborah Levy and others.¹⁸ They can, moreover, be seen as the inheritors of a diverse set of formal legacies. McCarthy has in his critical work linked his fictional writing and his art practice back to the legacy of modernist fiction from Joyce to Alain Robbe-Grillet, and laterally to recent novelists also working through the inheritances of modernist innovations, such as the Belgian Jean-Philippe Toussaint.¹⁹ DeLillo's long career reaches back to the early phase of postmodernist fiction and has itself passed through a number of stages, from the disconnected satires of his early work to the high postmodernism of *White Noise*

¹⁸ Tao Lin, *Richard Yates* (New York: Melville House, 2010); Teju Cole, *Open City* (New York: Random House, 2011); Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be?* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013); Zadie Smith, *NW* (London: Penguin, 2012); Rachel Kushner, *The Flamethrowers* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013); Otessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (London: Penguin Press, 2018); Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (London: Harvill Secker, 2011); Jarrett Kobek, *I Hate the Internet* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2016); Jennifer Egan, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (London: Corsair, 2011); Rachel Cusk, *Outline* (London: Granta, 2016); Deborah Levy, *Swimming Home* (London: And Other Stories, 2011).

¹⁹ Tom McCarthy, "'Ulysses' and its Wake", *London Review of Books* 36:12 (2014), 39-41; McCarthy, 'Stabbing the Olive', *London Review of Books* 32:3 (2010), 26-28.

(1985) and the compendious historical novel *Underworld* (1997), through to the stylistic minimalism of his fiction since then. Lerner was a practising poet before beginning to write fiction, and his work engages often with issues arising from American postwar poetics alongside the recent history of fiction.²⁰ They cannot, therefore, be arranged as a single stylistic grouping that somehow emerges punctually in a manner analogous to, for example, the advent of postmodernism as what Fredric Jameson called the ‘cultural dominant’ of late capitalism.²¹ Rather, this project positions its core case studies as potentially exemplary instances of formal reactions to a historical crisis of representation. What emerges in the formal shifts of a broad variety of 21st century fiction is a critical moment in the history of late capitalism: a crisis in social time and in the logic that organises the society of the spectacle. I will specify more clearly the nature of this crisis in the fourth section of this Introduction. But for now I will note that the literary readings that form the heart of this study position them in relation to a particular settlement of the advanced capitalist economies emerging in the post-war era—this periodisation appears independently in the work of the Situationists and the Trotskyist economist Ernest Mandel, who referred to the post-1945 capitalist order as a ‘third stage’ of the system’s development—whose trajectory can be seen to run into crisis in the 21st century.²² Thus, in Chapter 3 for example, I analyse the work of Lerner and DeLillo against the backdrop of a crisis of late capitalist social time, what Jameson describes as an ‘end of temporality’.²³

In 21st century fiction, Boxall writes, ‘the forms of cultural transformation that had been contained within a homogenising theoretical language’—that, he means, of postmodernist

²⁰ For examples, see Ben Lerner, ‘Keith Waldrop’s Haunted Realism’, *The New Yorker* 25 February 2013 <<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/keith-waldrops-haunted-realism>> [accessed 22 July 2019]; Lerner, ‘Future Continuous: Ashbery’s Lyric Mediacy’, *boundary 2* 37:1 (2010), 201-213. Lerner’s scholarship has found its way into the fiction; in the acknowledgements to *Leaving the Atocha Station*, he notes that the novel ‘includes, albeit in altered form, a reading of Ashbery’s poetry’ published in the aforementioned essay; see *Leaving the Atocha Station* (London: Granta, 2011).

²¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 4.

²² Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans by Joris De Bres (London: New Left Books, 1975), p. 9.

²³ Fredric Jameson, ‘The End of Temporality’, *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003), 695-718

cultural theory—‘have suddenly become much wilder, more unpredictable, less obedient.’²⁴ If, as Charles Altieri had already written in 1996, ‘postmodernism is now dead as a theoretical concept’, this may be in large part because its explanatory power as a periodising concept has waned within literature itself.²⁵ As Zadie Smith wrote in 2008, in what will become an important debate in this project, ‘the American metafiction that stood in opposition to realism has been relegated to a safe corner of literary history’—in other words, no longer a part of the present conjuncture in which contemporary literary form germinates.²⁶ Smith describes realism in the novel form as ‘a literary form in long-term crisis’, which, if we are to believe her tracing of a continuity between ‘the nineteenth-century lyrical realism of Balzac and Flaubert’ and a contemporary novel like Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008), one of the essay’s subjects, constitutes a very long crisis indeed.²⁷ Realism will form a key term of our enquiry, but will be treated more as a recurrent problem to which the novel must as a form historically negotiate its relation than as an historical movement or cultural dominant (in the manner of modernism or postmodernism). What Smith calls ‘lyrical realism’ may be a dominant stylistic option within contemporary literature (it has, she writes, ‘had the freedom of the highway for quite some time now, with most other exits blocked’), but the emergence of the specific narrative innovations at the heart of this study exist not in a binary opposition to it, but treat it as a formal element to be appropriated, tested, inverted, distorted.²⁸

As David Cunningham notes, the 21st century’s loosening of postmodernism’s formal logic as a cultural dominant has seen a widespread reinvestment in narrative realisms, from serial television (*Deadwood*, *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad* and so on) to ‘the renewed predominance of

²⁴ Boxall, p. 16.

²⁵ Charles Altieri, ‘What is Living and What is Dead in American Postmodernism: Establishing the Contemporaneity of Some American Poetry’, *Critical Inquiry*, 22 (1996), 764-789 (p. 764).

²⁶ Smith, p. 73.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 72.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 71.

documentary practices in the visual arts and much contemporary literature'.²⁹ As David Shields remarked in 2010, there is a form of 'reality hunger' in much contemporary writing, practices that are 'breaking larger and larger chunks of "reality" into their work', with less regard for the generic boundaries of literary fiction.³⁰ Notably, Cunningham links this renewed interest in realism to a constitutive temporal tension within realist fiction. The emergence of 'a category of "the contemporary" as a somewhat unstable means of defining the distinctive character of "our" historical present' depends upon a time-sense that Terry Smith describes as 'contemporaneity [...] the pregnant present of the original meaning of *modern*, but without its subsequent contract with the future'.³¹ In this sense, realism would not be an ahistorically fixed style with static attributes, set in opposition to modernist and later postmodernist literature, but as the fluid product of 'an ongoing process', as Cunningham remarks, 'as much related to the social and cultural forms of capitalist *modernity* as is modernism'.³² Realism always contained a sense of the 'pregnant present' only partially moored to a future. In his 2013 book *The Antinomies of Realism*, Jameson describes realist fiction in terms of a dual temporality: on the one hand, what narratology calls the 'récit' or fabula, the anecdotal sequence of events that form the temporal span of the plot; on the other, what Jameson identifies as 'affect', characterised as 'something to do with a present; but with a different kind of presence than the one marked out by the tripartite temporal system of past-present-future, or even by that of the before and after'.³³ Realism emerges as a 'symbiosis' of temporal continuity and affect's 'impulses of scenic elaboration, description and above all affective investment'.³⁴ The realist novel, which as Ian Watt remarks in his early study of the

²⁹ David Cunningham, 'Time, Modernism, and the Contemporaneity of Realism', in *The Contemporaneity of Modernism: Literature, Media, Culture*, ed. by Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 49-62 (p. 50).

³⁰ David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010), p. 3.

³¹ Cunningham, p. 49; Terry Smith, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry*, 32 (2006), 681-707 (p. 703).

³² Cunningham, p. 51.

³³ Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

form, is focused through the experience of the individual ‘free from the body of past assumptions and traditional beliefs’, using a ‘much more minutely discriminated time-scale than had previously been employed in narrative’, may then end its development in what Alexander Kluge calls the ‘insurrection of the present against the other temporalities’.³⁵ I will examine in more detail the formal effect of this insurrection in the next section. But for the moment I will note that this internal element of a ‘scenic present’ speaks formally to the time-sense of ‘contemporaneity’, a temporality ‘in concordance’, as Cunningham notes, ‘with certain hegemonic temporalities of capital accumulation in general’—what we might identify as a new phase in capitalist modernity’s abstraction of social time, which I will return to presently.³⁶

Time and the Image

The image has always occupied a place of slow or stilled time within realism. For Jacques Rancière, in his account of art’s ‘break with representation’ from the 19th century onwards, the effect of realism in the novel is to introduce into the operation by which language ‘makes visible, refers, summons the absent’ precisely through ‘under-determination, by not “really” making visible’—an operation that we can identify with the sense in the epic (in Mikhail Bakhtin’s account) of ‘an absolute fusion of subject matter and spatial-temporal aspects with valorized (hierarchical) ones’ in its ‘semantics’—an ‘equality of the visible that invades discourse and paralyzes action’.³⁷ Georg Lukács had complained in the 1936 essay ‘Narrate or Describe?’ that the development of realism from Walter Scott to Émile Zola had led to a predominance of description. This negated any sense of an ‘accurate appreciation of the

³⁵ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1983), p. 13, 24; quoted in Jameson, p. 10.

³⁶ Cunningham, p. 58.

³⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 113, 121; Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 17.

motive forces of the social process', which for him, at this stage of the development of his aesthetic theories, lay in narrative, the exposition of 'the vicissitudes of human beings' from within events, 'manifested in movement which exposes the organic unity of the exceptional and the ordinary.'³⁸ What Jameson calls the 'scenic impulse' of affect, which sought to place the scene before the reader in its visual details, slowed the narrative, now filled with 'undifferentiated, additional elements of the environment [...] dabs of colour in a painting which [hardly] rises above a lifeless level'.³⁹ As Elisha Cohn notes, forms of rhetoric that attempted to approximate the visual, most notably ekphrasis, had long been associated with a slow or stilled time within form, 'due to the conflict between verbal and visual representations'.⁴⁰ Moreover, description for Lukács made the reader *passive*: action is 'described from the standpoint of an observer', becoming 'a "thing"' and undergoing what Lukács had in an earlier essay called reification.⁴¹ I will address reification much more fully in Chapter 1, but suffice it to say for now that for Lukács description is allied to a static temporality that embodies the 'abstract human labour', the 'socially necessary labour-time' that Marx identified as the core of the form of social value in capitalism, the commodity-form.⁴²

The image then, in Lukács' account which set the terms for much of the debate in subsequent criticism on the novel, is allied with what Debord calls 'contemplation'.⁴³ A kernel of the image, which Cunningham describes as in 'an ineliminable tension' with the temporality of narrative, always existed within realist narrative as one of the sources of its very realism,

³⁸ Georg Lukács, *Writer & Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Arthur D. Kahn (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970), p. 123, 111.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴⁰ Elisha Cohn, *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 56.

⁴¹ Lukács, p. 111.

⁴² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books/New Left Review), 1976, p. 129.

⁴³ Debord, *Society*, p. 12.

being productive of what Roland Barthes described as ‘the reality effect’.⁴⁴ If, as Jameson argues, the development of realist narrative itself would lead to its very undoing, it is far from surprising that the form would appeal to one or other of its defining temporalities—*récit* and affect—to reassert itself. Especially if, as in the society of the spectacle, the image—a new and privileged field of commodity-images—is the very locus of social value, the embodiment of an abstracted social time. Indeed, a focus on the visual, images and acts of looking appears as part of narrative form in a swathe of realist, modernist and postmodernist texts, as recurrent crises of representation have shaped the history of the novel as a form.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, very little in the critical literature prepares the ground for the kind of visual approach we are taking to contemporary fiction in this study. Perhaps the closest is Josh Cohen’s 1998 monograph *Spectacular Allegories: Postmodern American Writing and the Politics of Seeing*, which outlined, drawing primarily on the work of Walter Benjamin, what it saw as an ‘allegorical impulse’ in postmodern narrative’s relationship with visual culture, which interrupts narrative with a ‘discontinuous, anti-dialectical temporality’.⁴⁶ But whilst Cohen’s work is undoubtedly ground-breaking and productive for this study, both the fictional and theoretical quandaries this project addresses—narrative form and a fetishism of commodity-images that has emerged in the wake of postmodernism—is distinct from it. What then makes

⁴⁴ Cunningham, p. 53; Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 141-148.

⁴⁵ See for some examples: Karen Jacobs, *The Eye’s Mind: Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Beci Carver, *Granular Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jonathan Potter, *Discourses of Vision in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Seeing, Thinking, Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp. 131-153.

⁴⁶ Josh Cohen, *Spectacular Allegories: Postmodern American Writing and the Politics of Seeing* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 19. Notably, despite his volume’s title, Cohen refers to Debord precisely once (p. 1). Examples of scholarship with an analogous focus on the visual are few and far between, but, as noted by Cohen, would include: Samuel Coale, *In Hawthorne’s Shadow* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1988); Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking* (London: Methuen, 1985); Carolyn Porter, *Seeing and Being* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981). The latter two texts deal with consumer culture, reification and seeing, but differ widely in their approach and period from this study. To my knowledge only one piece of scholarship takes this visual focus to contemporary fiction; see: Camilla Weaver, *Reading seeing: visibility in the contemporary novel* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2017). Unlike Weaver’s work, however, this study covers a wholly different set of authors, relies on a different set of periodisations and foregrounds a politics of the image (rather than the more formalist, art-historical category of ‘visibility’) wholly absent from Weaver’s published work.

the recent narrative innovations on which this study focuses distinct in their contemporaneity?

Crisis

These novels' forms are, within their historical juncture, related to two entwined crises. On the one hand, what Pieter Vermeulen calls a discourse of 'the end of the novel'.⁴⁷ On the other, an ongoing crisis of social and political legitimacy for the global economic settlement initiated in the post-war era, in which the economic upheaval of 2007-8 is the crucial event.

The repeated discussion in cultural and theoretical contexts of an end to the novel, whether as a literary genre or a form occurs, as Vermeulen notes, in the context of a consideration, internal to many novels themselves, of 'the role that the novel form can play in contemporary media ecologies'.⁴⁸ We may take as a paradigm Will Self's 2014 claim that the modern situation in which 'the literary novel was perceived to be the prince of art forms' was passing away: the novel loses its aesthetic autonomy and specificity in the midst of its immersion in a proliferating global image culture.⁴⁹ But many current innovative fictions in fact 'dramatize the end of the novel in order to reimagine the politics and ethics of form'.⁵⁰ To take one of our own examples, in Lerner's *10:04* the narrator—a poet recently turned novelist—struggles to write the novel that was commissioned from him, in part because he acknowledges it is no longer 'a viable commodity form' in a 'postcodex world'.⁵¹ *10:04* tests the limits and imagines the outside to individualised narrative subjectivity amid a seemingly static

⁴⁷ Pieter Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Will Self, 'The novel is dead (this time it's for real)', *The Guardian*, 2 May 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/02/will-self-novel-dead-literary-fiction>> [accessed 19 June 2019]. As Vermeulen notes, the modern history of literature is replete with diagnoses of the end of the novel, which could plausibly be traced back as far as 'the second part of *Don Quixote*, published in 1615, [which] already encoded the death of the genre that its first part had inaugurated ten years before' (p. 2).

⁵⁰ Vermeulen, p. 2.

⁵¹ Ben Lerner, *10:04* (London: Granta, 2014), p. 154.

and repetitious urban everyday life that is not amenable to novelistic narrative. But it achieves this to a great extent by furthering the contemplative element in the novel, the kernel of the image Lukács attacked, tending, in its attention to visual artefacts (fragments from paintings, films and photography, some of which are inserted on the pages), towards what WJT Mitchell called the ‘utopian’ temporality embedded in the rhetoric of ekphrasis.⁵² Such an identification of the narrative function with the image begins to divest the novel itself of its identity as *récit*, to aspire not just to represent the visual but to merge with the image.

Moreover, *10:04* makes clear that the narrative conditions with which it struggles are connected to the abstraction of capitalism in a specific moment, and the social and political responses that emerged in the wake of the financial crisis. The narrator has a distant connection with the ferment of Occupy Wall Street, giving a protestor dinner and shelter, an experience that leads him to think of the future the novel he is writing cannot itself produce, which he could instead actualise by having children. He chides himself to instead ‘harness the self-love you are hypostasizing as offspring [...] and let it branch out horizontally into the possibility of a transpersonal revolutionary subject in the present.’⁵³ This conception of a politically revolutionary occupation of the present corresponds with what we have identified as the static present of ‘affect’. However, as I discuss in Chapter 3, the novel’s formal dynamics are more complex than this, embedding this presentist narration within multiple remnants of the retrospective narration that characterises the classic realist novel. The utopian time in which the narrator perceives the unfolding of the social and environmental processes that financial capitalism organises—‘[b]undled debt, trace amounts of antidepressants in the municipal water, the vast arterial network of traffic, changing weather patterns of increasing severity’—is in fact identified with the novel’s opposite, with the flatness of the image and the

⁵² WJT Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), p. 156.

⁵³ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 47.

‘reality-effect’ of depth that Western painting since the Renaissance associated with it.⁵⁴ (I outline the transformations of this contradictory unity of flatness or deracination and the illusion of depth in Chapter 2.)

This dialectical movement within the interdependent remaining components of realist form—the image on the one hand, *récit* on the other—would seem to reach one endpoint in these novels.⁵⁵ Jameson, in a historical account at once tangled and somewhat reductionist, sees this process leading out of the realist novel itself into modernism and postmodernism’s ‘series of pure and unrelated presents in time’ in the successive stages of capitalist development.⁵⁶ By contrast this study sees the reemergence of realism as a formal problem for fiction and the formal experiments that take its core oscillation (affect/*récit*) as their object register a shift within the late capitalist system. As Cunningham notes, the issue at the core of much novel criticism around the relationship between realism and the image is the sense that the novel is uniquely attuned to the *abstraction* of capitalist modernity: the ‘problem of concreteness’ that exercises Lukács is ‘the novel’s mediation of a certain irreducible *actuality of abstraction* in the very everydayness of a modern capitalist social life’.⁵⁷ As Marx claimed, the capitalist system of social production cleaves everything enmeshed within it into abstract exchange value and a concrete use value.⁵⁸ But the latter cannot be even accessed except through what Marx called the ‘forms of appearance’ of exchange: abstraction always undergirds the apparently concrete.⁵⁹ Realism must constantly test and recompose the forms by which it mediates social material split between two types of value. But by the 1960s Debord claimed use value itself had disappeared entirely and in the spectacle he found what

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 108.

⁵⁵ Jameson posits Alexander Kluge’s short fictions of the 1960s onwards as the strongest example of the opposite tendency, a ‘realism without affect’, pure *récit* (p. 187-192).

⁵⁶ Jameson, *Antinomies*, esp. pp. 45-77, 138-186; Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 27.

⁵⁷ Cunningham, p. 57.

⁵⁸ Marx, *Capital*, p. 125-126.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 127.

Anselm Jappe calls ‘the highest stage of abstraction.’⁶⁰ Although important changes have occurred in the last decade or so to the techniques and infrastructure of the late capitalist system—witness the arrival of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s ‘new spirit of capitalism’, or the advent of such concepts as ‘digital capitalism’, ‘communicative capitalism’, ‘cognitive capitalism’, of regimes of ‘immaterial’ and ‘affective’ labour—this core problem of commodity abstraction has remained the same, if quantitatively intensified.⁶¹ More than this, since the financial crisis such abstraction has persisted in this intensified form even as its forms of appearance (the values of stocks and financial instruments) have collapsed and lost their ‘reality-effect’. While financial capitalism’s extension of abstraction has instantiated what Jonathan Crary calls ‘a time without time, a time extracted from any material or identifiable demarcations, a time without sequence or recurrence’, the ‘hallucination of presence’—Debord’s contemplative, spectacular object—he associates with it dissipates.⁶² To risk a schematic claim, which the forthcoming chapters will seek to prove, these fictions take the problem of realism’s internal blockage as a result of these conditions and invest totally in the most devalued element of its ‘reality effects’. We can thus see these texts as beginning to mobilise a politics of the image to shift and understand the operating fictions of a spectacular society in crisis.

Chapter 1, ‘Separation Perfected’, lays the groundwork for the politics of the image that will shape our analysis, in the dissident tradition of economic and social theory to which the Situationist International belonged. Debord’s spectacle thesis, it will show, is a conjunctureally appropriate development of a critique of capitalist society nascent within Marx’s analysis of

⁶⁰ Debord, *Society*, p. 31-32; Jappe, p. 5.

⁶¹ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 2nd edn, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2018); Jonathan Pace, ‘The Concept of Digital Capitalism’, *Communication Theory* 28 (2018), 254–269; Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘Immaterial Labor’, in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. by Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, ed. by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 133-147; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁶² Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 29.

commodity fetishism, extrapolated by subsequent generations of Marxist theorists. In particular, I will focus briefly on the contribution of Georg Lukács, whose modification of the commodity fetishism concept greatly influenced the heterodox Marxist groups in France who preceded Debord and the SI. In the penultimate and final sections of Chapter One, I will show that the spectacle thesis was a response to a decisive shift in the nature of the global economy during the period of the SI's existence (1957-1972), into what economist Ernest Mandel called a 'third stage' in the history of capitalism (in his phrase 'late capitalism').⁶³ The society of the spectacle, Debord writes, 'corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life.'⁶⁴ Marx saw the commodity as a manifestation of the social labour of subjects that came to appear as separated from them, 'as material relations between persons and social relations between things'; set over and against the subjects who made them, 'these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them.'⁶⁵ Thus, as Tom Bunyard writes, in the consumer society of the post-war era '[h]uman subjects are now passive observers of an objective world that is composed and conducted by their own alienated activity.'⁶⁶ The purpose of the last two sections of this chapter will therefore be to periodise the relationship between the contemporary fictions this project will focus on, and their concern with the image, and the optic of Debord's critique: it positions our own place in the 21st century at the end of the historical sequence Debord describes, in the long wake of a third stage of capitalist development.

Chapter 2, 'Late Capitalist Images' attempts to concretise this reading of the Situationists' work by moving it on to the terrain of modern theories of the visual, in the context of the history of capitalism. In particular, I will focus on the contributions of art historians and theorists who have attempted to bring together concrete analyses of visual culture with

⁶³ Mandel, p. p

⁶⁴ Debord, *Society*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ Marx, *Capital*, p. 167-168.

⁶⁶ Bunyard, p. 19.

Debord's Marxist-Hegelian work on the function of the image within capitalism's system of abstract social time. The work of Jonathan Crary, who has helped trace the logic of the spectacle in its early emergence in 19th-century capitalism, will be of particular interest here.

The following three chapters will then turn to the fictional texts that form the core of this study.

Chapter 3, 'Time and Contemplation', will focus on Ben Lerner's *10:04* and Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*. Both texts demonstrate what Debord calls a 'contemplative' orientation towards social time: realist narrative, in which a specific point of view allows a patterned movement of events in time, breaks down. Story levels collapse, time becomes abstract and ambiguous. The *récit* becomes an impenetrable and immediate object that narrators can only contemplate. As narrative solutions, the texts turn to visual intertexts to envision a time beyond frozen contemplation, with ambiguous success.

Chapter 4, 'Time of Images/Time of Networks' will take this focus on temporality into the works of Tom McCarthy, particularly his three novels *Remainder*, *C* and *Satin Island*. His fictional work has perhaps absorbed the critique of realism most fully out of all those considered in this study: the flat affect, evacuation of psychology, negation of novelistic time and intense attention to other media in his work constitute what seems like a self-conscious attempt to force the novel-form to inhabit a world of 'ads without products'. However, as I argue, time persists in his work on the other side of an 'allegorical' temporality (to use Josh Cohen's term) enacted through the flat stasis of images. And in this sense, the novel itself lives on as a 'remainder' in McCarthy's work, whose negation points beyond the closure of the spectacle.

Chapter 5, 'Autonomy of the Image', advances the argument further, moving from the question of narrative temporality and its problems of blockage and dialectical movement towards the image, to that of point of view. One of the most important formal issues in the

history of the novel, the chapter traces how all of the authors under consideration manipulate focalisation to tarry with the alienated separation of subject and object that stands at the heart of the spectacle as Debord conceived it. Building on Jameson's analysis of what he calls the 'Utopian vocation' of prose style in the novel under the spell of reification, I will analyse how the use of a style that lingers over slowed narrative time, producing free-floating descriptions that exist as an autonomous part of narrative form, identify the novel's narrative solution with the false utopia of the image, merging the subject with the reified object.⁶⁷ I then turn to point of view proper. I provide close readings of moments in the novels when narrators seem to identify with a form of seeing that is *external to* and free of themselves. These modulations of focalisation dramatise a dialectic of self-alienation and the vacation of the subject-position.

Finally, in my Conclusion, I situate these textual studies and my theoretical optic in relation to recent debates around contemporary realism, narrative innovation and the periodisation of fiction after postmodernism. Moreover, I suggest that the problems such debates engage require the extension of literary studies, via the politics of the image, into properly interdisciplinary scholarship.

⁶⁷ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 48.

Chapter 1: The World as Image – Spectacle and the Marxist Tradition

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter and the following one is to establish the framework within which the politics of images will be discussed in our case studies of contemporary texts. As mentioned in the Introduction, the optic of the work of Guy Debord and the Situationist International (hereafter SI), particularly the concept of ‘spectacle’, will centrally inform our reading of the category of the image. Debord’s work presents, as I will argue in these first two chapters, a rich and subtle critical theory of post-war advanced capitalist society, developing certain themes and motifs from the tradition of the Marxist critique of political economy in line with what he saw as the historical progression of ‘the economic realm developing *for itself*’ without regard to the rest of society.¹ What emerges in the post-war ‘society of the spectacle’ is a situation in which the only relationship individual subjects can have to any aspect of the social fabric is one of passive contemplation, apprehending the world *as an image*. The concrete substance of life is dominated by, and only gives form to, abstraction. Time no longer belongs to individual or collective subjects, but can only be apprehended in ‘pseudo-cyclical’ forms that at once mask and embody its abstraction as a result of the process of social production.² As Tom Bunyard notes, this aspect of Debord and the SI’s work—its foundation in Marxist economic theory and Hegelian philosophy—tends to be neglected in favour of what appears, due to this very neglect, to be ‘an inexplicably angry critique of the mass media.’³ By restoring attention to this layer of the SI’s work, a far more complex and productive critical theory comes into view.

¹ Debord, *Society*, p. 16.

² *Ibid*, p. 110.

³ Bunyard, p. 249.

In this chapter, I will therefore give an account of the above-mentioned components of Debord and the SI's thought. I will show how this developed out of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism and its place in his mature economic thinking, touching on how his earlier thinking, more overtly influenced by Hegel, inflected this reading of Marx. In this sense I will position Debord in what Anselm Jappe, perhaps his most important recent interpreter, calls a 'minority tendency within Marxism that assigns central importance to the problem of *alienation*'.⁴ In Debord's reading of commodity fetishism, society comes to form a 'total commodity', which though it forms the totality of social production, confronts its subjects as an alien and estranged object.⁵ Society as a whole comes to be possessed of what Marx called the 'phantomlike objectivity' of value in the system of commodity production, a system ruled by 'appearances' that nonetheless structure reality in its falsity.⁶ I will then give a brief account of the development of the commodity fetishism argument in the work of Georg Lukács, whose notion of 'reification' as formulated in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) was decisive for Debord and his generation of left-wing theorists in France. For Lukács, as we will see, the spread of commodity fetishism through the entire social fabric of capitalist societies restructures them such that individual subjects increasingly only have a *contemplative* relationship with the object of social reality. Subject and object are locked in a frozen opposition, the object rendered impenetrable and out of reach to action, practice or change. Then, in the final section of this chapter, I will situate the spectacle thesis in the context of the trajectory of development of post-war capitalism: the historical sequence initiated, as the Trotskyist economist Ernest Mandel posited, with the beginnings of a 'third stage' of capitalist development around 1945, at a far end of which we find the current post-financial crisis conjuncture.⁷ The development of the spectacle thesis occurred as a reaction to a crucial

⁴ Jappe, p. 4.

⁵ Debord, p. 29.

⁶ Marx, *Capital*, p. 128.

⁷ Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans by Joris De Bres (London: New Left Books, 1975), p. 9.

moment in that sequence, in which it became clear that a qualitative change had occurred in the advanced capitalist societies, away from the form of labour that had previously formed the productive core of capitalist societies and towards (as TJ Clark puts it) ‘the marketing, the making-into-commodities, of whole areas of social practice which had once been referred to casually as everyday life.’⁸ In this last section, I will give particular attention to the quality and nature of time in the society of the spectacle, an analysis that will lay the groundwork for Chapter 2, which will concretise the relationship between this abstract social theory and the place of the visual in Debord’s theories. This will then provide a foundation for the readings of formal techniques around narrative temporality, subjectivity and the visual to follow in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

1.1 ‘Separation Perfected’

It is necessary first of all to give, at least in outline, some sense of the structure of the theory of spectacle as a critical theory of society. This task is hindered by the fact that the material in which the SI formulated and deployed the term is, formally, resistant to summary. ‘The spectacle’ was not in the first instance the object of a unitary theorisation, but a concept mobilised by a number of Situationists across a number of texts with differing inflections or emphases.⁹ Its meaning emerged from and against the political and cultural contexts in which it was deployed. These contexts will be the subject of a fuller discussion in sections 1.2 and 1.5. The two book-length theoretical texts that emerged during the SI’s lifetime—Guy

⁸ TJ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 9.

⁹ See for example: ‘The Use of Free Time’, in *Situationist International Anthology*, 2nd edn., ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 74-75; Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem, ‘Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism’, in Knabb, pp. 86-89; Raoul Vaneigem, ‘Basic Banalities (Part 2)’, in Knabb, pp. 154-173; ‘Now, the SI’, in Knabb, pp. 174-177; ‘Editorial Notes: Critique of Urbanism’, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, trans. by Tom McDonough et al, ed. by Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 103-114; Mustapha Khayati, ‘Captive Words (Preface to a Situationist Dictionary)’, in McDonough, pp. 173-180.

Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967)—are wider and more synoptic in their scope, and present the critical theory of the SI in fuller, less context-dependent form. This section will therefore concentrate primarily on *Society of the Spectacle*, in which the concept received its fullest exposition.

In a text presented to the first conference of the SI in June 1957, Guy Debord wrote that '[t]he construction of situations'—the new forms of cultural intervention from which the group took its name—'begins beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle. It is easy to see how much the very principle of the spectacle—nonintervention—is linked to the alienation of the old world.'¹⁰ This was the first appearance of the term in the SI's writings. There is, on one level, a certain lack of concreteness to Debord's usage here that persists throughout its history: 'the spectacle' is designated with a definite article (in French, '*le spectacle*'), marking it off from other, more specific usages, but no account is given in the text of its empirical grounding, what institutions or structures are involved in it or on what level (cultural, political, economic, social) it operates or exists. But it is important to note here that, at the very beginning of the term's usage in the SI, certain inflections and distinctions are being introduced. Firstly, the 'modern spectacle' is at once contrasted with and linked to 'the alienation of the old world': it is of recent appearance, differentiated from older systems and their accompanying forms of estrangement. Secondly, whilst the text as a whole primarily addresses the field of culture—it begins with the subheading 'Revolution and Counterrevolution in Modern Culture'—it is clear that the spectacle is more than a cultural formation. '[T]he construction of situations', conceived as a means of intervening in spectacular conditions, is a more general existential or material technique: '[a] person's life is a succession of fortuitous situations', Debord writes, and those involved in situations 'cannot

¹⁰ Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action', in Knabb, pp. 25-43 (p. 40).

be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, “livers”¹¹. Debord would go on, in the preface to the fourth Italian edition of *Society of the Spectacle*, to claim that the theory of spectacle met the need, in the SI’s mission to ‘shake an established society’, to ‘formulate a theory that fundamentally explains it, or which at least has the air of giving a satisfactory explanation of it.’¹² In Debord’s formulation, then, the theory of the spectacle is one with a totalising conceptual reach through the society of the period and its historical genesis. As we will see, in this aspect it participates in a particular tradition of criticism derived from Marx.

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord writes that ‘[t]he concept of the spectacle brings together and explains a wide range of apparently disparate phenomena’, not merely uniting them within a singular conceptual field but positing such phenomena as manifestations of a single extra-phenomenal system: ‘Diversities and contrast among such phenomena are the appearances of the spectacle—the appearances of a social organization of appearances that needs to be grasped in its general truth.’¹³ (What these phenomena were will be discussed in more detail in section 1.5.) In a formulation that mimics—in a procedure that the Situationists termed ‘*détournement*’—the opening sentence of Marx’s *Capital*, Debord addresses ‘[t]he whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail’, which now ‘presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*’.¹⁴ The ‘reality’ of contemporary societies, he writes, is ‘apprehended in a *partial way*’ as it ‘unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation’. This ‘new generality’ is a ‘world of the autonomous image’ that expresses the technics of ‘specialization of images-of-the-world’: ‘Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream.’¹⁵ This very unity is defined by this operation of detachment or abstraction: it is a false or incomplete unity,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 25, p. 41.

¹² Debord, 'Preface to the Italian Edition of *Society of the Spectacle*', trans. by Michel Prigent and Lucy Forsyth (New York: Not Bored!, 2000) <<http://www.notbored.org/debord-preface.html>> [accessed 26th May 2016].

¹³ Debord, *Society*, p. 14.

¹⁴ Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, 'A User's Guide to *Détournement*', in Knabb, pp. 14-21; Debord, *Society*, p. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid.

‘merely the official language of generalized separation.’ The spectacle is a specialist ‘advanced economic sector’ of social production, but one which ‘appears as’ or imposes itself as ‘society itself and as a means of unification.’¹⁶ Debord does not specify *which* sector, although he writes in a following paragraph of the spectacle’s ‘specific manifestations—news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment.’¹⁷ Debord identifies the spectacle with ‘the economic realm developing *for itself*, with no reference to the life of the societies whose productive activity constitutes it: a historically specific form of social production in which commodities have become an end in themselves.’¹⁸ But it is also ‘a distorting objectification of the producers’: it makes a system in which living labourers function as objects itself into an ‘autonomous image’ that appears with objectivity. The spectacle, the product of a part of social production, ‘is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world’. But as Debord emphasises, it is not false in the sense of being a non-existent thing or state of affairs *represented* as being existent: it ‘cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images’ but as ‘a world view transformed into an objective force’, as ‘the very heart of society’s real unreality’.¹⁹

Much depends, as we will come to see, on the multiple and complex valences of the related notions of ‘image’, ‘appearance’ and ‘mirroring’—in short, *representation*. This network of meanings form a core to the issues of the politics of the image in late capitalism that, in these first two chapters, we are outlining: the nature of the subject, the organisation of social time and the ontology and ‘realism’ of images. These will prove to be crucial issues for the analyses of time and subjectivity in contemporary texts that make up Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Decisive for this, and to apprehending the genealogy of the critical problems and tools that the concept of

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 16, p. 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 22; *ibid*, p. 13.

spectacle presents, are the few statements Debord makes in which the recognisable terminology of the Marxist tradition comes to the fore. Debord states that, in the operation of detachment or abstraction described above, by which the spectacle ‘arrogates to itself everything that in human activity exists in a fluid state so as to possess it in a congealed form [...] we recognize our old enemy the commodity’. Although certain implications of this claim, as we will see later, are problematic it is clear that for Debord the commodity-form, as analysed by Marx in the opening pages of *Capital*, is central to the ontology of the spectacle. But it is equally clear that the spectacle represents a historically specific development of the logic of the commodity-form: ‘The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life.’²⁰ This implies a separation, an historical break, from the preceding era of capitalist development—that which gave rise to the workers’ movements of the 19th century and Marx’s own theoretical achievements. The SI, in a number of unsigned texts published in *Internationale Situationniste* in the 1960s, certainly asserted that that particular moment had passed: what they referred to as ‘[t]he classical workers movement’ was, for them, already ‘finished after the defeat of the Spanish revolution, that is, after the Barcelona May days of 1937’ and ‘the defeat of the entire revolutionary project’ had taken place ‘in the first third of this century’.²¹ Debord, in the long anatomy of the history of the workers’ movements that makes up the fourth chapter of *Society of the Spectacle*, claims that ‘a new period has begun’, accompanied by ‘[s]igns of a new and growing tendency towards negation’ within society. But he also seems to suggest in the first chapter that there is a historical contingency in the advent and reign of the spectacle: ‘what the spectacle expresses is the total practice of one particular economic and social formation; it is, so to speak, that formation’s *agenda*. It is also the historical moment by which we happen to

²⁰ Ibid., p. 26; *ibid.*, p. 29.

²¹ ‘The Bad Days Will End’, in Knabb, pp. 107-114 (p. 110); ‘Address to Revolutionaries of Algeria and of All Countries’, in Knabb, pp. 189-194 (p. 190).

be governed.' There is the suggestion here that although the spectacle has a relation of necessity to the historical configuration of the forces and relations of production that gives rise to it, its social governance, its reconstitutive power over 'the whole life of societies' does not, and, as Debord suggests in the same paragraph, some social forces 'may hasten its demise'.²²

This historical break, as we will see later, is crucial for articulating both the freight and the historical specificity of the framework of representation in Debord's concept of the spectacle. The concept is one with both critical and historiographical features: it both marks off 'the society of the spectacle' as historically original and recasts certain features of the tradition on which it draws, of Marxism as a critical theory of society under capitalism. By showing how the concept of the spectacle shifts the category of representation within the Marxist tradition we can, as Anselm Jappe puts it, demonstrate 'the *relevance to the present time* of the notion of the "spectacle"' to a society that continues to be 'based on commodity production and its corollary, the "fetishism of commodities"'.²³

Notably, this identification of the historical moment of the society of the spectacle with 'the commodity's dominion over the economy' echoes the quote from Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) that forms the epigraph to the second chapter:

The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. [...] his activity becomes less and less active and more and more *contemplative*.²⁴

²² Debord, *Society*, p. 85; *ibid.*, p. 15.

²³ Jappe, p. 3.

²⁴ Debord, *Society*, p. 28; Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 86.

As Jappe notes, Debord does not quote from or go on to comment on this claim in Lukács' work directly in the body of *Society of the Spectacle*, 'explicitly evok[ing] only his conception of the party' in Chapter Four. But nonetheless *History and Class Consciousness* 'exerted a profound influence on Debord; clearly it supplied the initial orientation for his development of Marxian themes.'²⁵ Debord subscribes, as is clear in the parallel use of Lukács here, to Lukács' historiographical argument in 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', the essay from which it comes.

The disenchanted form of the commodity becomes, with 'the advent of modern capitalism', the 'universal structuring principle', the central cell and model of the metabolism of social production. But in the leap of 'qualitative difference' that this development represents—in which, as Lukács puts it, the commodity-form 'penetrate[s] society in all its aspects and [...] remould[s] it in its own image'—the commodity itself changes. The commodity 'as a particular, isolated, non-dominant phenomenon' can no longer be contrasted with what Debord will later call 'concrete social activity', for this itself has become saturated by, and contiguous with, the logic of the commodity; it has become subject to what Lukács calls 'the reification produced by commodity relations' and the subjectivities which articulate themselves in such activity are subject to 'the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression'. In examining these formulations, we will begin to make more sense of Debord's description of 'the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world of its own making.'²⁶

It is therefore necessary in the course of the rest of this chapter to trace the development of the categories that the concept of 'spectacle' inherits and builds on. The rest of this chapter will follow this genealogy through the Marxist tradition. For, as I will go on to show, Debord's

²⁵ Jappe, p. 20-21.

²⁶ Lukács, p. 85-86; Debord, *Society*, p. 34.

account of the spectacle—its structure and what we might call its social ontology—develops, and derives its critical force from, the long-term frame of Marx’s critical account of social production under capitalism, in which the embodiment of the social subject’s labour ‘stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer’.²⁷ In particular, it is worth noting that Debord’s is a thoroughly *historical* theory, of how concrete historical time is lived or, under the contemporary regime of social production, converted into ‘the autonomous movement of non-life’, just as ‘[a]ll that once was directly lived has become mere representation.’²⁸ It would therefore be particularly useful for our enquiry to attend to the ways in which the category of time is treated and transformed in the development of this critique until, in the society of the spectacle, social time becomes the time of a world of autonomous images and ‘[t]he reality of time has been replaced by its *publicity*’. Through this retracing I will show something of the specificity and critical power of Debord’s account of spectacle as a society’s mode of appearance, in which ‘commodities are now *all* that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity’, whose purposeless function is ‘the concrete manufacture of alienation’.²⁹ The chapter will then end with some remarks situating the concept of spectacle and the tradition it draws on in theoretical and historical relation to our own conjuncture.

1.2 Philosophical Context

The relationship of the SI and Debord with the Marxist tradition as it presented itself in their own time is not straightforward. This is a topic I will deal with much more fully in Section 5 of this chapter, but for the moment a few distinctions are necessary.

²⁷ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Gregory Benton (London: Penguin/New Left Review, 1975), p. 324.

²⁸ Debord, *Society*, p. 12.

²⁹ Debord, *Society*, p. 113; *ibid.*, p. 29, 23.

The SI, in their engagement with Marxism, opposed themselves primarily to the general line of the Third International (or Comintern), in the form of the tendency's main representative in France, the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). Debord devotes much of the central chapters of *Society of the Spectacle* to an anatomisation of what he perceives as the historical failures of '[t]he "orthodox Marxism" of the Second International' and its inheritors in the parties of the Comintern, what he calls an '*image of the working class* [that] arose in radical opposition to the working class itself' and the bureaucratic 'owner of a *state capitalism*'.³⁰

In his biography of Debord, Andrew Hussey states that he came to Marxist concepts first through 'his readings of pre-war Communists allied to Surrealism, such as Boris Souvarine and Jean Bernier'. Hussey also notes the presence in *Society of the Spectacle* of elements from Lukács, German philosopher Karl Korsch and the Dutch theorist of council communism Anton Pannekoek, whose work was, from the perspective of the Comintern, heterodox by the 1930s.³¹ Andy Merrifield has also emphasised the extent to which Debord was familiar with Marx's early writings. The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, written by Marx in 1843-4, had been rediscovered and published in the late 1920s and first translated into French in Debord's early youth.³²

These texts engaged much more explicitly than *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) or *Capital* with Hegel and the generation of theorists who followed him known as the Young Hegelians. As Lucio Colletti has pointed out, the theorists of the Second International approached Marx through these later economic texts with little knowledge of

³⁰ Debord, *Society*, p. 65; *ibid.*, p. 64, 69, 72.

³¹ Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), p. 115; *ibid.*, p. 216. Lukács was obliged to publish a self-criticism in 1929 against his writings of the 1920s. xxix-xxx. Korsch was expelled from the Comintern-affiliated Communist Party of Germany in 1926; see Patrick Goode, 'Karl Korsch', in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2nd edn, ed. by Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 294-295. Pannekoek, who had been a member of the German Social Democratic Party, broke with the Third International in 1920; see Tom Bottomore, 'Antonie Pannekoek', in Bottomore, p. 407.

³² Andy Merrifield, *Guy Debord* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), p. 50.

‘the philosophical precedents and background underlying them’: figures like Karl Kautsky, Georgi Plekhanov and Eduard Bernstein, who helped to establish the orthodox line in Marxism at the beginning of the 20th century, ‘had grown up into a world profoundly different from that of Marx’, in which Hegel’s work was hardly known. Thus the contents of Marx’s early writings appeared in opposition to orthodox interpretations of his economic theories throughout this period.³³ Moreover, as Merrifield points out, Debord knew Hegel’s work extensively: the French publication of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (hereafter *EPM*) coincided with the country’s ‘inter-war Hegel renaissance’; Debord had ‘devoured Hegel’s oeuvre’, and knew the ‘chief conduit of [...] Hegelian Marxism in France’, *Dialectical Materialism* (1939) by Henri Lefebvre, with whom he would later have a close association. All these factors contributed to an original and heterodox interpretation of Marx’s concepts that would form the ground of the spectacle thesis.³⁴ That interpretation, as we will see in the next section, depended on the central category of commodity fetishism.

1.3 Commodity Fetishism and ‘Appearance’

As we have seen, the category of the commodity is central to Debord’s formulation of the concept of ‘spectacle’ and Lukács’ account of reification on which it draws. Debord, as seen in the first section of this chapter, took the category of the fetish-character of the commodity as the central one of the society of the spectacle: the spectacle fulfils the principle of ‘the domination of society by things whose qualities are “at the same time perceptible and imperceptible”’ (the quotation is from Marx’s section on ‘The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret’).³⁵ It is therefore necessary to examine this category in more detail, to see what

³³ Lucio Colletti, ‘Introduction’, in Marx, *Early Writings*, pp. 7-56 (p. 8; *ibid.*, 15-16).

³⁴ Merrifield, p. 49.

³⁵ Debord, *Society*, p. 26.

features are foregrounded in Debord's account and to grasp what forms of critical purchase the concept of commodity fetishism gives it.

This is not, it should be noted, an uncontroversial argument. Some critics of the SI have accused the group, and Debord in particular, of either reducing Marx's analysis of commodities to a repackaged version of the early Marx's philosophical critiques or transforming it into a merely cultural or subjective rather than economic theory—of siding with the 'early Marx' of the *EPM* against the 'mature Marx' of *Capital*. The most pertinent example is that of Jean Barrot, who wrote in 1979 that '[t]he SI saw capital in the form of the commodity, ignoring the cycle as a whole. Of *Capital*, Debord only retains the first sentence, without understanding it'.³⁶ For lack of space we will not be able to deal with these critiques in detail, but part of the purpose of this section is to show how the concept of spectacle builds on the commodity fetishism argument, particularly what elements of the argument it emphasises and develops, and its more general connection with the Marxist theory of value. If Jappe locates Debord within an existing 'minority tendency within Marxism that assigns central importance to the problem of *alienation*, considered not as epiphenomenal but as crucial to capitalist development', then it is necessary to examine and parse the function that the commodity and commodity fetishism plays in this genealogy within Marxism. For the orthodox tradition in Marxism against which the SI, as we have seen, defined itself, the commodity was by no means a significant category of analysis. As Jappe notes, after Marx's death 'it fell into almost total oblivion: Engels in his last period paid it no attention, nor did Luxemburg, Lenin or Kautsky'.³⁷ The heterodox Soviet economist I.I. Rubin summarises the concept's position, writing in 1928,

³⁶ Jean Barrot, 'Critique of the Situationist International', in *What is Situationism? A Reader*, ed. by Stewart Home (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996), (pp. 24-62) p. 38. The Home volume does not list the piece's translator; the online version hosted at *For Communism* gives the translator as Louis Michaelson – see <<http://www.lchr.org/a/41/kf/barsit.htm#toc>>. Barrot was the pen name of Gilles Dauvé, who would later become a leading figure in the communisation movement.

³⁷ Jappe, p. 4; *ibid.*, p. 20.

several years after the foundation of the Third International and Stalin's elevation to effective head of state of the USSR:

Some writers do not accept the theory of fetishism in the context of political economy. They see it as a brilliant sociological generalisation [...] But proponents as well as opponents of Marxism have dealt with the theory of fetishism mainly as an independent and separate entity, internally hardly related to Marx's economic theory. They present it as a supplement to the theory of value, as an interesting literary-cultural digression.³⁸

The fetishism section in *Capital* proceeds as a *qualitative* turn in the argument of the first chapter, on 'The Commodity', with the assumptions of political economy. The forms of thought of the political economists—the economic thinkers who had revolutionised the discipline in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Jean-Baptiste Say—Marx writes, are like the 'forms which stamp products as commodities' themselves: they 'possess the fixed quality of natural forms of social life before man seeks to give an account [...] of their content and meaning.'³⁹ The economists apprehend the 'finished form of the world of commodities' and their exchangeability on the market as self-evident, despite the absurdity of the assumption involved—that 'coats or boots stand in a relation to linen because the latter is the incarnation of abstract human labour'—when it is spelled out.⁴⁰ Both coats and linen involve labour in their production, but these forms of labour are qualitatively different (tailoring on the one hand, weaving on the other). Yet they stand in a specific quantitative relation to each other as 'values of definite magnitude': Marx notes that we can say that 'the

³⁸ Isaak Ilich Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, trans. by Miloš Samardžija and Fredy Perlman (Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1973), p. 5.

³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, p. 168.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 168-69.

value of a coat is twice that of 10 yards of linen'.⁴¹ This relation by which concrete objects are rendered exchangeable in specific proportion to each other is 'established by a social process that goes on behind the backs of the producers'.⁴² The commodity appears on its surface as 'an extremely obvious, trivial thing', but this requires the unacknowledged assumption that commodities' appearance and movement on the market, indexed to prices in money, occurs without the intervention of social processes—as if they appeared *ex nihilo* with their capacity to be exchanged, their value, residing within them, like the spirits that, in certain West African religions, were said to live within fetishes.⁴³ To the political economists, then, social production 'has [...] the form of a movement made by things' and for them, as Herbert Marcuse puts it, '[t]he economic process of society would be a natural process'.⁴⁴ As we will go on to see, the concept of commodity fetishism problematises any straightforward identification of social phenomena with things-in-themselves (to recast the problem in Kantian terms); hence these appearances are not, in any straightforward sense, false. Moreover in what follows we will see the effect the Lukácsian and Debordian emphasis on the commodity fetish has within the tradition of Marxism: it serves to contest those forms of Marxism that have treated as ironclad Marx's distinction between '[t]he totality of [...] relations of production [...] the economic structure of society, the real foundation' and the 'legal and political superstructure' that arises from it.⁴⁵ For such forms of Marxism, alienation has been a merely superstructural feature, 'epiphenomenal' as Anselm Jappe has it, rather than a constitutive fact of social production as organised through the commodity-form.⁴⁶ We will therefore need to address shortly in this

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴² Ibid., p. 135.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 168.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 167; Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. 2nd edn. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1941), p. 281.

⁴⁵ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by N.I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1904), p. 11-12.

⁴⁶ Jappe, p. 4.

section those aspects of Marx's early philosophical concept of alienation that manifest in Debord's reading of Marx.

The commodity, Marx writes, has a fundamentally double nature: 'sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social.'⁴⁷ 'Sensuous' is meant here as it is in the writings of the Young Hegelians, as something apprehensible to the senses and tractable to action. He has already, at the beginning of the chapter on commodities, posited that the values commodities possess are of two kinds, use-value and exchange-value. Every commodity is something present and useful, 'an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind'.⁴⁸ But, as Smith and Ricardo determined, this is not enough to actualise its appearance on the market with an attached price. Hence its 'mystical character': what creates its ability to be exchanged, its and other commodities' 'socially uniform objectivity as values', is hidden from the senses.⁴⁹ For Marx, the 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' that present themselves in the commodity are the product of a hidden determinant that links the theory of value with the formation of social production: 'the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them'.⁵⁰ This labour in fact has a double character whose two facets, Marx emphasises, are inextricable: specific, concrete forms of activity that 'satisfy a definite social need', and labour denuded of its particularity and 'inequality', the mere 'expenditure of human labour-power, [...] human labour in the abstract'.⁵¹ This last point is one of the most important in the fetishism argument for us, and we will return to it in a moment. But it is also crucial to note that for Marx the specificity of this social labour is indissolubly linked to the social character of *time*. The abstract labour embodied in commodities is 'measured by its duration, and the labour-time is itself measured on the particular scale of hours, days, etc.' The magnitude of the labour-time that commodities

⁴⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 165.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125-6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 166, 164.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163, 165.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

objectify is determined by ‘the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society’ (factors here would include forms of skill and training, social organisation, the division of labour, industrial machinery and so on).⁵² The value that confronts the worker in the commodity is therefore his own *time* mediated by a specific social relation of production. As workers must sell their labour to owners of means of production (that is, capital, machinery, factories, agricultural land, raw materials, and so on), the product of which must be exchanged on the market, their labour ‘can satisfy [...] [their] manifold needs’ only in so far as it can be exchanged with any other instance of labour. The social relations of production or the social forms of labour must be mediated by the market, so that the relations between workers ‘appear as what they are [...] material relations between persons and social relations between things.’⁵³ That is, the social objectivity of human labour, as a collective and relational temporal process, is constituted as an autonomous and inhuman aggregation of *things*. It is important to stress that Marx states that these relations ‘appear as what they are’: if they appear as the inverse of the concrete and qualitative labour that constitutes them, this is because these social relations are the inverse of the collective and concrete. In them, social collectivity is *alienated* and confronts social subjects in estranged and unrecognisable form.

This motif of alienation forms one of the central concepts of Marx’s earlier theoretical work of 1843-44. In the section of the *EPM* entitled ‘Estranged Labour’, Marx had argued that the conceptual failures of political economy rested in the fact that it was estranged from itself and its own purpose as a theory of social relations: ‘political economy has merely formulated the laws of estranged labour.’⁵⁴ He had developed the concept—*Entfremdung* in the German—from the writings of the Young Hegelians, particularly the work of Ludwig Feuerbach.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., p. 129; *ibid.*

⁵³ Ibid, p. 166; *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Marx, *Writings*, p. 332.

⁵⁵ As numerous sources note, Marx uses two distinct terms which both translate into ‘alienation’ in English. Whilst *Entfremdung* ‘refers to the sense in which the conduct and results of objective activity becomes alien and

Feuerbach, in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), had analysed religious belief as the displacement of human 'consciousness' into the ideation or concept of a higher power. He writes: 'if in the consciousness which man has of God first arises the self-consciousness of God, then the human consciousness is, *per se*, the divine consciousness. Why then dost thou alienate man's consciousness from him, and make it the self-consciousness of a being distinct from him, of that which is an object to him?'⁵⁶ As he argues in a number of his early writings, for Marx this critique is itself an instance of alienation. The notion of material reality to which Feuerbach appeals against religion is one-sided: 'the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object* or *of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human practice*, not subjectively.' Feuerbach's conception of reality, then, is a static image, something to be contemplated but not intervened into or produced, a reality placed outside of time or history — 'he does not conceive of human activity itself as *objective* activity.'⁵⁷ The form of criticism mounted by the German idealists in the wake of Hegelian philosophy, Marx is suggesting, is alienated in its own manifestation: it stalls, freezes or petrifies; it cannot proceed from the critique of the '*fantastic realization* of the human essence', to the '*inverted world*', the '*world of man, state, society*' that produces it.⁵⁸

This fragmentation and estrangement from its own premises flows from the alienated conditions it claims to analyse. The theory of alienation that Marx outlines in the *EPM* is complex and multilayered, but for the sake of brevity I will focus on his comments on the relationship between labour, subjectivity and the capitalist social structure, which feed into the analysis of abstract time in *Capital*. For Marx it is practice, '*sensuous human activity*', that

antagonistic to those who conduct it', *Entäußerung* is used 'to denote the renunciation, loss or relinquishment of objective property, or indeed of waged activity' (Bunyard, p. 212). The discussion here will focus on the condition of alienation or *Entfremdung*.

⁵⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by Marian Evans (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1893), p. 230.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 326; *ibid.*, p. 421.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

mediates the alienated particularities of the world produced by social labour.⁵⁹ This is because human beings' 'practical creation of an *objective world*' reciprocally affirms and constitutes human 'species-being', humanity's character 'as a *universal* and therefore free being'.⁶⁰ But under the system of capitalist production, all of the elements just referred to come to stand against human beings as separate and alien objects. Labour instead produces '[t]he *devaluation* of the human world [that] grows in direct proportion to the *increase in value* of the world of things'.⁶¹ It comes to stand outside the worker as a necessity that diminishes them: for the class of 'propertyless *workers*' their ability to reproduce themselves (in Marx's words to 'prevent the race of workers from dying out') is dependent on aligning their labour-power with the demands of the market: '[t]he worker has become a commodity, and he is lucky if he can find a buyer.'⁶² The totality of social production is fissured into '*capital*, in which all natural and social individuality of the object is *extinguished*' and labour emptied of the potentiality for mediation and self-externalisation, a 'fulfilled nothingness'.⁶³ This split is formalised in the institution of '*[p]rivate property* [...] the material, summarized expression of alienated labour'.⁶⁴

The whole of social production under capital constitutes itself, then, as an autonomous totality in opposition to the labouring subject. But, as indicated above, in *Capital* the social nature of labour nonetheless secures a mechanism of identification: workers' own activities have 'for them the character of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them.'⁶⁵ This dynamic, by which a split between subject and object is inscribed in the social ontology that the subject nonetheless produces, indexed to their labour, is an important point for the analysis of subjectivity and 'realism' in the

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 421.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 327-328.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 323-324.

⁶² Ibid, p. 282-283.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 336,

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 334.

⁶⁵ Marx, *Capital*, p. 167-168.

contemporary texts this study is concerned with. The subject's relationship to the world becomes precisely one of non-relation. Realism, as we will see, partakes of this *contemplative* subject-object opposition. The connection here with Marx's earlier analysis of self-estranged labour is clear. In the *EPM* he writes that, 'the object that labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer.'⁶⁶ Marx implicitly connects the paradoxical autonomy of the commodity world with the problematic of alienation by stating that it is analogous with 'the misty realm of religion', a direct paraphrase of Feuerbach's critique of religious alienation: 'There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own'.⁶⁷ The alienation of labour under the mode of production of mid-19th-century capitalism, Marx writes in the *EPM*, means that in producing commodities labour 'produces itself and the workers *as a commodity*' but that within this frame of estrangement for the labouring subject '[w]hat the product of his labour is, he is not.' The fetish-character of the commodity constitutes, then, an originary displacement of the worker as subject, their loss of any power of self-constitution and confrontation with it in the estranged form of 'congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour'.⁶⁸ Notably, this phrasing from Feuerbach reappears exactly in the early pages of *Society of the Spectacle*, describing the spectacle as 'the material reconstruction of the religious illusion': alienation made real.⁶⁹ For Marx, as we can see, the very originary instance of social production places the produced world *at a distance* from the subject, in the contemplative position that Debord will later emphasise.

The imagery here of 'congelation' and 'homogeneous human labour' bears some closer examination. What confronts the labouring subject, in the alien form of commodities and the value-form of which they are the 'material bearers', is 'human labour in the abstract'.⁷⁰ Marx's

⁶⁶ Marx, *Writings*, p. 324.

⁶⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 165.

⁶⁸ Marx, *Writings*, p. 324; Marx, *Capital*, p. 128.

⁶⁹ Debord, *Society*, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital*, p. 126, 128.

use of the notion of abstraction here occurs partly in the framework of classical political economy, in which the labour theory of value was posited as a thought experiment. Adam Smith posed the argument that labour inputs, measured in time, constitute the majority of the ‘natural price’ of commodities. But he did so in the form of an imagined examination of ‘that early and rude state of society which precedes both the accumulation of stock and the appropriation of land.’⁷¹ The argument posits a model of the laws that govern social production, but in order to do so it must *abstract* from the specific set of social circumstances in which production *actually* takes place. *Capital*, intended as a ‘critique of political economy’, takes and inverts some of its methodological premises. Thus Marx writes of making ‘abstraction from its [the commodity’s] use-value’, as part of the text’s opening methodological remarks.⁷² Labour-power as a determinant of value is, in this sense, an imaginary or theoretical form, a fact that Marx confirms when he remarks that ‘no chemist has ever discovered exchange-value either in a pearl or a diamond.’⁷³ But the converse is also true: ‘[n]ot an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values.’⁷⁴ That is, their social ontology as material embodiments of ‘[s]ocially necessary labour-time’ has nothing immediate or concrete about it. The ‘residues’ of the labour that determines exchange-value all have ‘the same phantom-like objectivity’: they are, in the first instance, rendered equivalent and indistinguishable, and their being, whilst objective, is not reducible to their empirical and sensuous qualities; on the contrary, it is utterly abstract.⁷⁵ Labour-power, then, is an imagined term that nonetheless possesses an overpowering reality—that, indeed, transforms the ontology of the concrete situation of production. It renders labour itself abstract, a point that

⁷¹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Volume One* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1910), p. 41.

⁷² Marx, *Capital*, p. 128.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129; *ibid.*, p. 128.

issues in Debord's later claim that the spectacle 'turns the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation'.⁷⁶

Insofar as a commodity, a product of labour, is an exchange-value, Marx writes, '[a]ll its sensuous characteristics are extinguished'.⁷⁷ The use-values of commodities, their sensuous or concrete being for the subject, have 'value only because human abstract labour is objectified or materialized in [them]'.⁷⁸ But this value is only measured or given social being, manifested in the form of a price, '[b]y means of the quantity of the "value-forming substance", the labour, contained in the article'.⁷⁹ When, in the early stages of the generalisation of commodity exchange, certain commodities act as an equivalent that allow exchangers to measure the value of a commodity—Marx uses the example of coats, which, because of their use-value 'to keep us warm', act as a unit of measure for the amount of labour-power embodied in linen (that is, the labour of cotton-growing and weaving that goes into producing linen, measured quantitatively)—'use-value becomes the form of appearance of its opposite, value' and 'concrete labour becomes the form of manifestation of its opposite, abstract human labour'.⁸⁰ Thus their very mode of concreteness as the objects of social production and circulation (the form in which their value assumes social objectivity, namely exchange-value) embodies or enacts this kind of equivalence and seriality, of changeless temporal repetition, in which the concrete specificity of labour is extinguished and made abstract. Exchange-value, as the 'mode of expression, the "form of appearance"' of labour-power that crystallises as value, is, in terms of its substance, arbitrary or indifferent: it emerges only in the act of exchange, in their relation to all other commodities.⁸¹ The values of commodities, as the forms of appearance of abstract labour-time, come to be expressed in terms of other commodities considered

⁷⁶ Debord, *Society*, p. 17.

⁷⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 128.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148-50

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131

quantitatively: the commodities that come to occupy this role (historically gold and silver) take on the form of a ‘universal equivalent’, whose ‘specific social function’ is to be a ‘mirror’, as Marx writes elsewhere, ‘in which all the products of labour are presented as mere congealed *quantities* of undifferentiated human labour’.⁸²

This brings us to one of the most important aspects of Marx’s work for the theory of spectacle. As we have seen, Marx’s account of market relations under the regime of the commodity depends centrally on the category of ‘form of appearance’—*Erscheinungsform* in the original German—by which surface effects embody a ‘secret’ of underlying material processes.⁸³ But Marx does not claim by this that these appearances are falsehoods compared with the social contingencies beneath them. This was, he notes, the mistake of the political economists. The Mercantilists—the school of economic thinking that preceded the formulation of modern political economy in the late 18th century—and the group that Marx calls ‘the modern bagmen of free trade, such as [Frédéric] Bastiat and his associates’ claimed that the specific value-form of commodities derived from their appearance on the market as prices, the fact that they were exchangeable for certain amounts of money. For the latter, writes Marx, ‘there exists neither value, nor magnitude of value, anywhere except in its expression [...] in the daily list of prices current on the Stock Exchange.’⁸⁴ Smith and Ricardo, in making ‘[t]he belated scientific discovery that the products of labour, in so far as they are values, are merely the material expressions of the human labour expended to produce them’, dismissed such surface movements. But such a dismissal not only failed to solve the question of price, it exacerbated it: as a consequence, Marx observes in a particularly scathing footnote, the political economists ‘have the strangest and most contradictory ideas about money, that is, the universal equivalent in its finished form’.⁸⁵ They have no account of why value should

⁸² Ibid., p. 160, 162.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 127.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 152-3; *ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 167; *ibid.*, p. 174.

assume the form of exchange-value, ‘the most abstract, but also the most universal form’ within this specific mode of production. The result is, at the level of theory, fetishism: with no ability to account for the specific ‘form of value which in fact turns value into exchange-value’, commodities and their fluctuating prices seem to move by themselves.⁸⁶ In dismissing appearances, then, political economy ends up their victim.

Thus the social ontology of capitalism is one in which it is appearances that exert, enact and embody social power. These forms of appearance are ‘socially necessary’: fetishism is, Étienne Balibar comments, ‘not a subjective phenomenon or a false perception of reality, as an optical illusion or a superstition would be’ but rather ‘the way in which reality (a certain form or social structure) cannot but appear’.⁸⁷ They constitute the very social form of production relations as organised by the commodity-form: fetishism, Marx writes, ‘attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.’⁸⁸ The obligatory mediation of labour by the market, dictated by capitalist forms of the division of labour and class structure (in which one class owns means of production and the other must sell its labour to survive) necessarily issues in such appearances, thus linking appearance to the fact of commodity fetishism that, as described above, derives from the contradictory quality of capitalist labour. Commodities, as we have seen, are sensuous things which are simultaneously supra-sensible, but they do not present themselves as split or double objects, with use-value falling onto one side and exchange-value on the other: they present themselves as fetishes, ordinary objects with mysterious social powers. The very integrity of commodities—the way in which they violently yoke together a ‘natural form’ and a ‘value form’ into a finished and seamless unity designated with a price—as they present themselves in the market is in this sense an appearance or

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1995), p. 60.

⁸⁸ Marx, *Capital*, p. 165.

semblance: an object, an instance of the perceptible, formed from a heterogeneous set of elements quite unlike the commodity. Indeed, the verb *Schein* in Marx's *Erscheinungsform* is the same used to designate images, the forms of *illusionism* central to modern forms of representation; thus for example Kant, in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), writes of '*des dialektischen Scheins*' contained in the arguments of his objectors, a phrase that J.H. Bernard translates as 'dialectical illusion'.⁸⁹ In this sense capitalist society, which 'appears as an "immense collection of commodities"' (*erscheint als eine "ungeheure Warensammlung"*) is, as a material social system, *illusionistic*, and the commodity, its ontological core, is an image of itself.⁹⁰

Here we can see a connection with the young Marx's critique of alienation. He criticised the Young Hegelians for basing their political stance against the Prussian state on the historical logic of Hegelian philosophy. The Young Hegelians attributed the persistence of the German regime to superstition and alienated ideas which had incorrectly reflected the material realities into which they could be dissolved. Abstracted from the historical processes through which they came to be, the forms of consciousness that the Young Hegelians posited were thus *timeless*, static images, to be corrected by an ahistorical operation of subjectivity. Merely overcoming such forms at the level of thought was, for Marx, insufficient. The estranged forms of the state, church and capitalist business that a critical theory of society seeks to contest could not be regarded as illusions to be wished away: a German revolution would need 'a *material basis*' and Hegelian philosophy could only 'find its progression not within itself but in *tasks* which can only be solved in one way—through *practice*'; in the formulation of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, '[t]he philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it.'⁹¹ This distortion and limitation of the powers of the subject

⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006), p. 13; Kant, *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, trans. by J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan and Co, 1914), p. 12.

⁹⁰ Marx, *Karl-Marx-Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe, Band 6: Das Kapital. Kritiken der Politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band, Hamburg, 1872* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987), p. 69.

⁹¹ Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 21, 423.

that produces social reality as such alienated appearances, Marx remarks elsewhere, produces 'an *inverted consciousness of this world*, because they [the state and society] are an *inverted world*'. In these appearances the realities of social production are present, but they appear, as Marx writes in *The German Ideology*, 'upside-down, as in a camera obscura', and this 'inversion', he emphasises, arises from the 'historical life-process' itself.⁹² The perverted historical process of capitalist society produces forms of appearance drained of time, false and static images of the world that manifest a distorted objectivity. Society's inverted and immaterial forms of appearance, its ideological instances, are the very ontology of a system of social production centred on a form which, as Debord would later write, is an 'illusion, which is in fact real'.⁹³ Ideology, for Marx, is thus the very mode of the inscription of social reality under the sign of alienation; the subject *is nothing* and cannot recognise itself except in an autonomous and dead world of abstract and unreal objects, a world that renders palpable the non-being of the subject.

1.4 Lukács and Reification

Early in his study of Debord, Jappe states that 'Debord hews narrowly to the Lukácsian tradition in Marxism, refining certain aspects of it and sharing certain of its problems.'⁹⁴ This is, as I will argue in the course of this section, a slight overstatement: the concept of the spectacle represents, rather, a qualitative intensification of the concept of reification and the genealogy of alienation it follows. But in any case Lukács' importance for the orientation of Debord's work within the Marxist tradition is clear. It is therefore necessary here briefly to outline those aspects of Lukács' work that Debord builds on, in his development of the

⁹² Ibid, p. 244; Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology: Part I', in Tucker, pp. 146-20 (p. 154).

⁹³ Debord, *Society*, p. 32.

⁹⁴ Jappe, p. 5.

commodity fetishism thesis. This development, in which the contradictions of commodity fetishism are presented in an intensified and totalised form, has important consequences for Debord's work as it informs our readings of contemporary literary texts: Lukács' emphasis on contemplation, the freezing of time into abstract, quantified objects, and the 'form of appearance' of commodity fetishism as a form of false objectivity have, as we will see, a strong relationship with both realism and the apparently anti-realist narrative innovations this study focuses on.

Lukács presents his argument in 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', published in 1923, as an extrapolation of Marx's own analysis of the fetish-character of commodities, to construct 'a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them' on the basis of 'the structure of commodity-relations'.⁹⁵ As Gillian Rose points out, the term 'reification' (in the original German *Verdinglichung*, literally 'making into a thing') does not occur in either Hegel or Marx, unlike the related terms 'alienation' or 'objectification'.⁹⁶ It is nonetheless possible to see Lukács' argument, and Debord's modification of it, as part of what Jappe sees as a genealogy within Marxism that treats the problem of alienation and commodity fetishism 'not as

⁹⁵ Lukács, *History*, p. 83.

⁹⁶ Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 28. As Lukács acknowledges in a critical preface to the 1967 French translation of *History and Class Consciousness*, Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* were unknown at the time of Lukács' writing. He was later able to study them in German at the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow in 1930 prior to their official publication. For this reason, 'reification' is by no means synonymous with 'alienation' in Marx's sense. This absence led, as Lukács later noted, to the term 'reification' effectively identifying alienation with 'objectification', the term (*Vergegenständlichung* in the original German) used in Hegel and the young Marx's writings for the creation of any externalised object or institution through human practice, such as the use-values of commodities that externalise labour. Thus *History and Class Consciousness* seemed to imply that any externalisation was false and alienated, whereas in fact 'objectification is [...] a phenomenon that cannot be eliminated from human life in society'. See Lukács, p. xxiii-xxiv, xxxvi. Andrew Feenberg remarks that whilst this results in some problematic errors on Lukács' part, '[he] reconstructed a philosophy of praxis from the methodological traces of Marx's philosophical position visible in his economic writings. The result of this effort is not identical with the position of either the *Manuscripts* or the *Grundrisse*; nevertheless, it is impressive to what extent Lukács's somewhat speculative extrapolations can find justification in these unpublished ones'; see Feenberg, *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács and the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 3. Tom Bunyard suggests that Debord would have been aware of the controversy prior to writing *Society of the Spectacle*, and that Debord's resultant philosophy of practice is 'closer to a young Marxian condition of subject-object unity' than Lukács' position; see Bunyard, p. 207-210, 218. In effect, Debord reads backwards from Lukács to the alienation theory that is his work's elided core.

epiphenomenal but as crucial to capitalist development.⁹⁷ Part of the purpose of this section is to show, by close reading, how reification is rooted in, and transforms, a logic, a critical framework and a set of metaphors and imageries derived directly from Marx's work, a repertoire that Debord's work develops, centred around the questions of abstraction and the reduction of lived social practice to *contemplation*. Moreover, as we will come to discuss in the closing part of this section, this contemplative relation has important temporal implications: following Marx's argument concerning commodity fetishism, discussed in the last section, reification traps the subject in a frozen world impenetrable to social practice or historical change.

Lukács emphasises this aspect of commodity fetishism: the way in which, by constituting the totality of social labour and social relations of production as autonomous, mysterious and immutable, capitalism becomes, as a social system, *contemplative*. The “free” worker who is freely able to take his labour power to market and offer it for sale as a commodity “belonging” to him, to be inserted at one, exchangeable part of the production process, who cannot know or grasp the process as a whole, is placed in the position of merely observing the capacities that he gives up act autonomously as part of the process.⁹⁸ The subject who constitutes society by their labour, writes Lukács, ‘finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him [...] As labour is progressively rationalised and mechanised his lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more *contemplative*.’⁹⁹ Labour and every other aspect of social life becomes less a process of self-directed and historically sedimented practice and more one determined by and ‘mechanically conforming to fixed laws’, such that activity itself passes from the subject to the social world, whose arbitrary laws and quantitative logic it seems merely to enact.¹⁰⁰ Lukács

⁹⁷ Jappe, p. 4., p. xxiii-xxiv, xxxvi.

⁹⁸ Lukács, *History*, p. 91.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

does not in fact give historical examples of such a transition from organic to rationalised labour. They could be found, however, in the account given by E.P. Thompson of the advent of industrial work-discipline. Thompson describes the working situation of pre-industrial agricultural labourers and craft manufacturers: '[w]ithin the general demands of the week's or fortnight's tasks—the piece of cloth, so many nails or pairs of shoes—the working day might be lengthened or shortened. Moreover, in the early development of manufacturing industry, and of mining, many mixed occupations survived: Cornish tin miners who also took a hand in the pilchard fishing' and so on.¹⁰¹ With the imposition of a new division of labour within factories and reorganised farms, these irregular and self-directed work schedules were recomposed and restrained to timetables set by the machines and factory owners. He quotes a 19th-century pottery worker: 'Machinery means discipline in industrial operations. If a steam engine had started every Monday morning at six o'clock, the workers would have been disciplined to the habit of regular and continuous industry'. At the Crowley Iron Works in County Durham, workers accustomed to directing their own time to include 'playing, sleeping, smoaking [sic], singing, reading of news history, quarelling, contention, disputes' were forced to work extra time for doing so, and to work to a watch held by the Works' warden, kept 'so locked up that it may not be in the power of any person to alter the same'.¹⁰²

The value-forming activity of social labour literally passes over to the market, confronting the subject in the alien and unrecognisable form of the commodity, a process 'now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life.'¹⁰³ The process of labour, yoked to quantified time-discipline, necessary for the worker to sustain themselves means the placing of their life at a distance, in an impersonal mechanism: 'the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an

¹⁰¹ E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present* 38 (1967), pp. 56-97 (p. 71)..

¹⁰² Qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 75; qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 81-82.

¹⁰³ Lukács, *History*, p. 90.

alien system.’¹⁰⁴ The modern division of labour, which creates an atomised labour force consisting of an indefinite number of specialists, changes the nature of labour as a capacity of self-constitution: the subject’s ‘faculties’, even their ‘qualities and abilities’, are no longer qualitative but quantified and rigid ‘things which he can “own” or “dispose of” like the various objects of the external world’.¹⁰⁵ As these constitutive capacities must be mediated by the market in order to have any social being, the subject ‘does not just become the [passive] observer of society; he also lapses into a contemplative attitude *vis-à-vis* the workings of his own objectified and reified faculties.’¹⁰⁶ In this sense, the subject no longer has any access to the play of human capacities and forms of thought except through these rigidified and quantitative procedures of commercial life: for the subject their own capacities appear as if at a distance, and they appear to have a curiously secondhand quality. This is a point that Debord emphasises, and one that will be important for the contemporary literary texts that we will examine in Chapters 3, 4 and 5: the image offers what appears to be the most concrete or meaningful relation to the world, but is in fact the most immediate and abstract, offering instead the world as an image.

Lukács, quoting Marx, describes the phenomenon of reification as a generalisation of the effect outlined in the commodity fetishism section of *Capital*: ‘the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things.’¹⁰⁷ The whole of the lived world constituted by social production appears as a ‘natural’, immutable object that the subject ‘is not able to modify [...] by his own activity’, and ‘a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 100.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, square brackets translator's own.

¹⁰⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 164-165.

article.¹⁰⁸ As value-forming labour is increasingly indexed, with the generalisation of commodity production, to quantitative exchange-value, abstraction dominates the labour process itself: ‘we can see a continuous trend towards greater rationalisation, the progressive elimination of the qualitative, human and individual attributes of the worker’.¹⁰⁹ As the labour process is ‘broken down into abstract, rational, specialised operations’ the quality of ‘organic necessity with which inter-related special operations are unified in the end-product’ is destroyed; social relations of production and the forms and institutions of social labour become increasingly dictated by the arbitrary ‘principle of rationalisation based on what is and *can be calculated*’.¹¹⁰ Finally human subjects themselves become the mere objects, the ‘things’ of this production process that, as Marx writes, ‘far from being under their control, in fact control them’: reification, Lukács writes, ‘stamps its imprint on the whole consciousness of man’.¹¹¹ This is one of the most important and also most enigmatic claims in ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’: the entire category of ‘consciousness’ in Lukács is unstable and requires further scrutiny later in this section.

The contemplative relation is replicated at the level of theory, Lukács suggests, by a rigid dichotomy between subject and object. The forms of thought of the bourgeois era—a category that for Lukács seems to encompass political economy, modern science, legal theory and Enlightenment philosophy¹¹²—that formulate the laws of rational calculability we have already discussed, ‘transform knowledge more and more into the systematic and conscious contemplation of those purely formal connections, those “laws” which function in—objective—reality *without the intervention of the subject*’.¹¹³ The ‘object of knowledge’ whose ‘necessary natural laws’ it is the task of research to discover is posited as existing in a reality separated

¹⁰⁸ Lukács, *History*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Marx, *Capital*, p. 168; Lukács, p. 100.

¹¹² Lukács, *History*, pp. 104-106, 103-104, 108-109, 110-131.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

from the sphere of the subject and inaccessible to the subject's practice. Note the similarities here with the features, discussed earlier in the analysis of Marx's critique of alienation, of German idealism's conception of the subject-object relationship. The positing of epistemology as the immediate apprehension of a wholly external reality, as 'unmediated contemplation [...] opens up an irrational chasm between the subject and object of knowledge'.¹¹⁴

But this 'contemplative duality of subject and object' is not merely a theoretical error.¹¹⁵ It is rather, to use the terms of the young Marx, an alienated form of thought that embodies an underlying and objective distortion in reality or, in the terminology of the later Marx, a socially necessary form of appearance: thus Lukács writes of 'the empirically existing duality of subject and object' and 'the [...] unbridgeable gap opening up between subject and object that we find confronting us everywhere in modern life'.¹¹⁶ The immediacy of the objective reality that the bourgeois subject, thus bracketed in its isolation, studies is in fact created by reification. 'When use-values appear universally as commodities', Lukács writes, 'they acquire a new objectivity, a new substantiality [...] even the individual object which man confronts directly, either as producer or consumer, is distorted in its objectivity by its commodity character'.¹¹⁷ This new objectivity 'destroys their original and authentic substantiality' and recreates it in estranged form.¹¹⁸ The most abstract forms in which the totality of human labour-power assumes social objectivity as capital—'merchant capital', money, finance capital—appear to 'the reified mind [...] as the true representatives of his societal existence'.¹¹⁹ The new objectivity and substantiality of the commodity-world that confronts the subject is thus in fact utterly abstract. Lukács goes on:

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; *ibid.*, p. 157.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 148

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 123, 158

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 92-3.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

The commodity character of the commodity, the abstract, quantitative mode of calculability shows itself here in its purest form: the reified mind necessarily sees it as the form in which its own authentic immediacy becomes manifest and—as reified consciousness—does not even attempt to transcend it. On the contrary, it is concerned to make it permanent by “scientifically deepening” the laws at work.¹²⁰

By forcing an opposition between subject and object, by forcing the worker to inhabit a subject-position opposed to the world and encountering it only in its reified immediacy, the class structure thus establishes a vicious circle: the worker can only contemplate the alienated world that his labour created, and which sustains him only in an estranged form.

These facets of Lukács’ theory—the nexus of abstraction, subjectivity, appearance and contemplation—would appear to build on the theory of alienation as it comes down through its traces in Marx’s mature economic thought, and which, I argue, later becomes crucial for Debord’s theorisation of spectacle.¹²¹ It is important to note that the category of ‘consciousness’ in Lukács, which as we saw above reification ‘stamps’ with the form of the commodity, is bound up with that of ‘point of view’.¹²² For Lukács the totality of social processes that the subject confronts is the same for all classed subjects: ‘the proletariat shares

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ It is worth acknowledging that there are other philosophical elements, from outside the Marxist tradition, in the concept of reification, which adapts the work of earlier German social theorists Georg Simmel and Max Weber. Simmel posited social and intellectual forms as a ‘structure’ which humanity creates but which exists independent of it. In his later work *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), Simmel describes modernisation and the growth of a money economy as a process of ‘objective culture’ gaining ‘preponderance [...] over subjective culture’, that is rigidified independent forms in which individual subjectivity finds expression. See Georg Simmel, *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, trans. by K. Peter Etkorn (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p. 27; Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 3rd edn, ed. by David Frisby, trans. by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 454. Weber, who exerted a vast influence on European social theory in the early 20th century, described processes of rationalisation in modern industrial societies as producing a kind of subject/object split. In Weber’s view the determining impulses and logic of early capitalist production had reformed society into an autonomous ‘tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order [...] now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism’, a self-reinforcing ‘iron cage’ of the social subject’s making. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 123. Andrew Feenberg suggests that these residues of Weberian and Simmelian idealism were due to an attempt to plug the methodological gap left by the unavailability of Marx’s *EPM*; see Feenberg, p. 3.

¹²² Lukács, *History*, p. 149.

with the bourgeoisie the reification of every aspect of its life. [...] the objective reality of social existence is *in its immediacy* “the same” for both proletariat and bourgeoisie.¹²³ Within the theoretical frame of Marxism, compared with political economy and the classical philosophy of the Enlightenment, ‘nothing has changed in the objective situation. Only the “vantage point from which it is judged” has altered, only “the value placed on it” has acquired a different emphasis.’¹²⁴ But this “vantage point” is not simply a subjective orientation or empirical placement in relation to the apparatus of social production, to, in Marx’s phrase, the ‘wealth of societies’ that ‘appears as “a vast accumulation of commodities”’. It is, rather, an objectively pre-determined frame or aperture onto the objectivity of the totality.

As Lukács emphasises, because of the division of labour, every subject occupies only a limited and determinate place in the production process. Capitalism ‘disrupts every organically unified process of work and life and breaks it down into its components. This enables the artificially isolated partial functions to be performed in the most rational manner by “specialists” who are specially adapted mentally and physically for the purpose.’¹²⁵ Consequently, ‘[t]he specialisation of skills leads to the destruction of every image of the whole.’¹²⁶ Social subjects, that is, are segmented, individuated and rationalised in the same manner that social production governed by the commodity-form is. This apparently rational specialisation is the compliment to the universalising reach of the commodity-form itself, which encompasses the totality of social production, but now in alienated form. A society structured so as to be composed of isolated owners of labour-power mediated by exchange ‘requires that every manifestation of life shall exhibit this very interaction between details which are subject to laws and a totality ruled by chance.’¹²⁷ Lukács notes that the German idealist Joachim Gottlieb Fichte, building on Kant’s system, posited a schema in which the

¹²³ Ibid., p. 149-150.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

subject of knowledge ‘can be thought of as the creator of the totality of content’, resulting from ‘the search for a level of objectivity, a positing of the objects, where the duality of subject and object [...] is transcended, i.e. where subject and object coincide, where they are identical.’¹²⁸ But in practice it fails. Fichte’s dual subject-object is *active* rather than contemplative, but this activity can only really consist in ‘the ethical act, in the relation of the ethically acting (individual) subject to itself.’¹²⁹ In such acts, the empirical split between ‘the self-generated, but wholly inwardly turning form’ and ‘the reality, the given, the empirical alien both to the senses and the understanding’ reasserts itself; the ‘freedom and autonomy’ of the subject in its positing of the ethical act ‘are reduced to a mere *point of view from which to judge* internal events’.¹³⁰ Lukács later concludes that it is the very structure of the social totality—a structure of commodity production in which fetishism is the central feature—that causes this ‘contradiction [...] between subjectivity and objectivity’ and which is precisely what cannot be perceived from this ‘point of view’.¹³¹ In this sense contemplation, in which the apparently empowered knowing subject can only watch their own social action within the hidden totality of social production, is not an attitude but a point of subjectivity’s instantiation within the totality.

Contemplation, Lukács seems to suggest then, is not a problem of (psychological) subjectivity but, like Marx’s account of alienation, a *relational* concept that outlines a state in which relation itself is blocked, impossible. The subject is situated or instantiated at a specific and unbridgeable distance from the object of social production. Lukács draws on an explicitly visual metaphor from Ernst Bloch: ‘When nature becomes landscape—e.g. in contrast to the peasant’s unconscious living within nature—the artist’s unmediated experience of the landscape (which has of course achieved this immediacy after undergoing a whole series of

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 123.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 128.

mediations) presupposes a distance (spatial in this case) between the observer and the landscape.¹³² Contemplation is then, in one sense, a *way of seeing*, a framing or organisation of the object in its relation to the subject that freezes it in its apparent immediacy.

The temporal dimension of this contemplative relation is decisive for what Debord will later call the 'pseudo-cyclical time' of the spectacle.¹³³ The key remarks come early in the reification essay:

The contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man's consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e. a perfectly closed system, must [...] transform the basic categories of man's immediate attitude to the world: it reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space. [...] Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable "things" [...]: in short, it becomes space. In this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, an environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialised production of the object of labour, the subjects of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented.¹³⁴

Lukács explicitly connects this effect with the advent of clock time in relation to industrial capitalist production, quoting Marx: "Through the subordination of man to the machine the situation arises in which men are effaced by their labour; in which the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of

¹³² Ibid., p. 158.

¹³³ Debord, *Society*, p. 110.

¹³⁴ Lukács, *History*, p. 89-90.

two locomotives [...] Time is everything, man is nothing: he is at the most the incarnation of time.¹³⁵ Social production and action are no longer qualitative or dynamic, instantiating the states of change or development that characterise the diachronic. Instead the subject confronts a world of objects that are thoroughly synchronic. The logic of capitalist development expands continually through space, recomposing new territories and areas of life into sets of objects—as Marx and Engels wrote, '[t]he need for a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe'—but cannot produce any qualitatively different configuration of social production, even as 'all that is solid melts into air.'¹³⁶ Reconfigured by capitalist production relations, the lived time of workers presents itself in the form of commodities, that never appear to have undergone any process of *becoming* and hence will never undergo change. The alienating displacement of commodity production produces 'the reified, mechanically objectified "performance" of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality' denatured into quantified abstract labour-time, crystallised into an alienated world of individual commodities.¹³⁷ Time is defined by the infinite repetition of commodity production; time appears as something entirely frozen and static, crystallised out into individuated, segmented, repetitive, mechanistic, rationalised instances of labour-power as embodied in the estranged autonomy of the exchange-value of commodities.

Lukács later explicitly relates this to commodity fetishism: historical materialism dissolves 'the fetishistic objects [of bourgeois thought] into processes that take place among men [...] At the conceptual level the structure of the world of men stands revealed as a system of dynamically changing relations'.¹³⁸ That is, the reified things of productive time under capitalism exist with no hints of the determining and qualitative processes that constitute

¹³⁵ Qtd. in *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto', p. 476.

¹³⁷ Lukács, *History*, p. 90.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

them: as Marx writes, the subject apprehends them '*post festum*, and therefore with the results of the process of development ready to hand', their 'forms [...] already possess *the fixed quality of natural forms of social life* before man seeks to give an account, not of their historical character, for *in his eyes they are immutable*, but of their content and meaning'.¹³⁹ The reified world appears objectively as a static, frozen image, a second nature placed outside of history, inaccessible to intervention from subjects. Debord would later describe this form of time as a '*consumable time*' that 'must manifest itself as a succession of artificially distinct moments'.¹⁴⁰

It is worth noting here that this temporality, as a 'form of objectivity', has the same dialectical determination as the other elements of Lukács' account. He is not marking a split between a qualitative, human time and an external or imposed time such as the rationalised clock-time of industrial production. Due to his emphasis on the qualitative nature of time as opposed to quantitative space, some scholars have allied Lukács' account with that of Henri Bergson, who in *Time and Free Will* (1889) concluded that 'space alone is homogeneous, that objects in space form a discrete multiplicity' and that 'there is neither duration nor even succession in space'. Bergson emphasised that these latter concepts only exist 'because these distinct states of the external world give rise to states of consciousness which permeate one another, imperceptibly organize themselves into a whole, and bind the past to the present'.¹⁴¹ He distinguished strictly between space, which forms the 'homogeneous medium' for enumeration and quantification, and these states of consciousness, which operate in 'pure duration'.¹⁴² Bergson would later describe this qualitative, durational totality as a 'general stream of becoming', of which quantitative, spatialised states were 'a discontinuous multiplicity of elements, inert and juxtaposed'.¹⁴³ He explicitly opposed this lived duration to

¹³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, p. 168. Emphases mine.

¹⁴⁰ Debord, p. 110.

¹⁴¹ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. by F.L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910), p. 120-121.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 87, 91.; *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 77, 134.

what he called the 'abstract time' defined by clocks and modern science. 'When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement of the hand which corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure duration [...] I merely count simultaneities'. Defined by its movement through space (the swing of the pendulum), each motion of the clock's hands can only be used to determine time by the consciousness that counts these movements:

'succession exists solely for a conscious spectator who keeps the past in mind and sets the two oscillations or their symbols side by side in an auxiliary space'. In the external space where these movements happen, these spatial dispositions of the clock hands cannot be related, 'for nothing is left of the past positions'.¹⁴⁴ Clocks in effect cut up a totality of subjective time into synchronic spatial configurations of elements. In this sense Bergson's analysis was explicitly anti-dialectical, refusing any interrelation between time and space, collapsing one term (non-subjective time) into the other (space).

There are elements within Lukács' account of time that bear a certain resemblance to Bergson's schema as I have described it. Lukács asserts that Marx's conception of praxis 'has its objective and structural preconditions and complement in the view that reality is a "complex of processes"' and that the reality of historical action 'is not, it becomes.' In other words, the 'rigid, reified facts of the empirical world', conceived as frozen in the same manner as Bergson's clock hands, are to be dissolved into a concrete and qualitative totality of processes by historical materialism.¹⁴⁵ Lucio Colletti complains that Lukács 'entered the factory not with *Capital* but with [Bergson's] [...] *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*' and sought to turn history into the 'light-and-shade of Heraclitean becoming', into a continual flux of processes without discrete entities.¹⁴⁶ But as Andrew Feenberg points out, 'Lukács had no need to study Bergson to arrive at his intellectual destination: Marx and Hegel

¹⁴⁴ Bergson, *Time*, p. 107; *ibid.*, p. 108-9; *ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁵ Lukács, *History*, p. 202-203.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Feenberg, *Philosophy*, pp. 68.

would have sufficed. [...] There is ample material in the first volume of *Capital* to support his critique of the alienating effects of the division and mechanization of labour.’¹⁴⁷ It is the historic position of the bourgeoisie, its inability to mediate and qualitatively transform the immediacy of the world it has created, that condemns the capitalist lifeworld to reification, not, as in Bergson, a problem of ontology. In this sense, for Lukács the time of reification is, dialectically, both this spatialised, determined and segmented time to which we have referred above and the time of qualitative mediation and transformation by the proletariat, whose ‘logic does not permit it to remain stationary at a relatively higher stage of immediacy but forces it to persevere in an uninterrupted movement towards [...] totality’¹⁴⁸

Reification, then, negates time in its qualitative form only to reinstate it in another, quantified form, as appearance, as the ontological condition of the reified lifeworld. As we noted above, for Lukács reification is a socially universal condition, thus the time that it transforms into quantified, frozen space is socially universal. Whilst for Bergson abstract time is a sort of figment, space mistaken for time, for Lukács the frozen commodity-world is objective but abstract, a totality composed of disconnected appearances. Such a quantified time of social production as organised by the commodity form is the precondition of the reified world’s repeated, changeless reproduction of itself as a frozen present. Or, as Debord later reformulated these categories, reification produces ‘a *consumable time* which, on the basis of a determinate form of production, presents itself in the everyday life of society as a *pseudo-cyclical time*’, belonging to the spectacle, and a ‘[u]nified irreversible time’, in which, ‘[b]y demanding to *live*’ it, ‘the proletariat discovers the simple, unforgettable core of its revolutionary project’.¹⁴⁹ This aspect of reification is important for the treatment of narrative temporality in the contemporary texts under consideration in Chapters 3, 4 and 5: it provides

¹⁴⁷ Feenberg, *Philosophy*, p. 68-69. Lukács references Bergson once in the ‘Reification’ essay, when disparaging ‘irrationalist philosophies’ that ‘radically question the value of formal knowledge for a “living life”’ (p. 110).

¹⁴⁸ Lukács, *History*, p. 174.

¹⁴⁹ Lukács, *History*, p. 174 106.

a model for analysing narrative time as providing the appearance or image of duration, whilst remaining frozen, abstract and quantified.

More pertinent for us, Lukács' treatment of time in the reification critique can be seen to illuminate what he calls the 'new substantiality', the 'distorted [...] objectivity' of the commodity.¹⁵⁰ The transformation of time into space describes the ontology of social production under the regime of the commodity: individuated, segmented, its elements delimited and located in homogeneous space, monadic, materially graspable in their substantiality, apparently unchanging even as the temporality of what Marx and Engels called the bourgeoisie's 'constantly revolutionising the instruments of production' continually replaces and reconfigures it.¹⁵¹ Lucien Goldmann compares the ontology of Lukácsian reification to Martin Heidegger's concept of '*Vorhandenheit*' or 'presence-at-hand'. In the 'false ontology' of the *vorhanden* 'the world appears as given', 'separated from the subject and its project'; the objects of the *vorhanden* world appear to be merely out there, autonomous, disenchanted and delimited, the opposite of 'objects which are not independent of qualities and which are there in the light of an action oriented towards an end'. They are, in short, the objects of a world to be *contemplated*, as Lukács and later Debord have it. Heidegger goes on, Goldmann writes, to situate this ontology 'at the level of science' and 'sees in Descartes the fundamental point where this rupture between the subject and object is determined, with the Cartesian philosophy of the knowing and thinking ego'. Lukács 'poses exactly the same problematic but [...] he does so at the level of the ideological problems of his time'.¹⁵² In this, Lukács can be seen as continuing the Marxist critique of alienation, for which '[p]hilosophy cannot realize itself without the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization of philosophy'.¹⁵³ We will pursue this

¹⁵⁰ Lukács, p. 92-93.

¹⁵¹ Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto', p. 476.

¹⁵² Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a new philosophy*, trans. by William Q. Boelhower (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 36; *ibid.*, p. 38, 33, 38; *ibid.*, p. 36; *ibid.*, p. 31; *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Marx, *Writings*, p. 257.

line of thought further in the next chapter. But it is in developing this aspect of Lukács' theory of reification, then, that Debord later writes:

[t]he spectacle is heir to all the weakness of the project of Western philosophy, which was an attempt to understand activity by means of the categories of vision. [...] far from realizing philosophy, the spectacle philosophizes reality, and turns the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation.¹⁵⁴

The very substantiality of the reified world, in other words, is that of the abstract image.

1.5 The Post-War Context

As we have seen, the concept of 'spectacle' as theorised by Debord draws on and develops a critique of capitalism as a system of social production founded on alienation. But, as we also saw in the first section of this chapter, Debord and the SI likewise specify the historical originality of the 'society of the spectacle', differentiating it from the previous phase of capitalist development, which saw the foundation of the 'classical workers [sic] movement' and the Marxism of the First and Second Internationals. It is then necessary to ask more precisely what historical circumstances the spectacle thesis emerged in response to, what conjunctural shift it had explanatory power in relation to. These questions necessitate asking a further, more general one: of the relationship between this genealogy of the critique of alienated life and the commodity, the moment of the SI's remobilisation of that critique, and our own moment in a transitional phase of the development of late capitalism. How was it, in the SI's account, that society became spectacular? What constituted the decisive shift in the

¹⁵⁴ Debord, *Society*, p. 17.

completion of the commodity's 'colonization of social life'?¹⁵⁵ How does the critique of a society whose totality the subject can only contemplate relate to the subsequent transformations of the capitalist economy and its lifeworld of the last fifty years? It may be useful first to give a more precise sense of the political contexts out of which the SI's critique of the society of the spectacle emerged: what particular charge or inflections did Marxism have in the contexts from which the SI drew? This will prepare the ground for a concrete assessment of the ways in which the SI remobilised the critique of reification in the concept of spectacle, emerging into the trajectory of late capitalist development.

In terms of the political formations of the period, the historical literature positions them in relation to two groupings in particular, both of the French left outside the PCF, who were oriented against the consensus of the Comintern.¹⁵⁶ Firstly, the *Arguments* group, founded by ex-PCF members who left the Party after the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, had published translations from Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923).¹⁵⁷ Their membership included Henri Lefebvre, who served as an editor on their journal.¹⁵⁸ Secondly, Socialisme ou Barbarie (hereafter SoB), also

¹⁵⁵ Debord, *Society*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁶ See for examples: Peter Wollen, 'The Situationist International', *New Left Review* 174 (1989), 67-95 (p. 70, 73, 76); Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 257; Edward Ball, 'The Great Sideshow of the Situationist International', *Yale French Studies*, 73 (1987), 21-37; John Roberts, 'Eleven Theses on the Situationist International', in *Selected Errors: Writings on Art and Politics 1981-90* (London: Pluto Press, 1992) pp. 114-125 (115-118, 120). The third major political influence in terms of the period's groupings, the inheritance of Marxism and radical politics associated with Dada and Surrealism, is largely outside of the scope of this project. It has, moreover, already been treated extensively in the secondary literature. For some examples, see: Wollen, p. 77-82; Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. p. 38-74; Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 2nd edn (London: Faber & Faber, 2001); Marcus, 'The Long Walk of the Situationist International', in McDonough, pp. 1-20 (4-11); Frances Tracey, *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), p. 44-55; Vincent Kauffmann, 'Angels of Purity', in McDonough, pp. 285-311, trans. by John Goodman; McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street* (London: Verso, 2011) p. 7-17; Tom McDonough, "*The Beautiful Language of my Century*": *Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); McDonough, 'Introduction: Ideology and the Situationist Utopia', in McDonough 2002, pp. ix-xviii; McDonough, 'Introduction' in *The Situationists and the City*, ed. and trans. by Tom McDonough (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 1-31 (3-16); Roberts, p. 118-122; Myriam D. Maayan, 'From Aesthetic to Political Vanguard: The Situationist International, 1957-1968', *Arts Magazine* 63.5 (1989): 49-53 (49-51).

¹⁵⁷ The group's founding members included the anthropologist and filmmaker Edgar Morin, the writer and sociologist Jean Duvignaud, Henri Lefebvre and philosopher and sociologist Pierre Fougereyrollas. See Poster, p. 211.

¹⁵⁸ The association was short-lived: in *Internationale Situationniste* #5 (published in 1960) the SI denounced *Arguments* as 'the most representative tendency of that conformist and pseudoleftist intelligentsia [...] whose bankruptcy in all domains is beginning to be recognized by all perceptive people' and announced a boycott of all

grouped around their titular journal, had been founded in 1946 by Trotskyists who had been part of the Fourth International in France. Mark Poster identifies them as the only post-war French group 'who had struggled to separate Marxism from its identification with the Soviet Union'.¹⁵⁹ They included the likes of Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Stephen Hastings-King characterises 'the group's vision' as one of 'socialism as autonomy instituted through direct-democratic worker councils, and their insistence that revolutionary theory must be grounded in a rigorous critical theory of contemporary capitalism'.¹⁶⁰ Debord was for a period closely involved with the group, co-authoring a text published in the journal with SoB member Daniel Blanchard.¹⁶¹ In other words, Debord was in close proximity to the main sources in France at the time of the revival of interest in the heterodox tradition of Lukács and the theorists of council communism, who had emphasised the critique of reification and workers' councils as a means of direct social organisation. Edward Ball notes that early issues of *Internationale Situationniste* are 'rife with the cant of Marxist existentialism that was reigning at the time', referring primarily to the focus of *Arguments* and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* on 'the new forms of alienation in social life'.¹⁶²

Lefebvre himself was not merely a conduit for the French revival of Hegelian scholarship and the critique of reification. He was responsible for the 1934 French translation of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which would go on to have a decisive influence in French Marxist circles.¹⁶³ Lefebvre would later be closely associated with Debord and the SI from the group's founding in 1957 to 1962.¹⁶⁴ In addition to his philosophical work, he

those associated with the journal (qtd in Knabb, p. 291n).

¹⁵⁹ Poster, p. 202

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Hastings-King, *Looking For the Proletariat: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Problem of Worker Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Guy Debord and Pierre Canjuers, 'Preliminaries Toward Defining a Unitary Revolutionary Program', in Knabb pp. 387-391. Canjuers was Blanchard's pen-name.

¹⁶² Ball, p. 27.

¹⁶³ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ Kristin Ross, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview', in McDonough, pp. 267-283 (p. 267). This interview is useful as a full first-hand account of Lefebvre's relationship with the SI. A more historicised account, which takes in the trajectory of Lefebvre's own work, appears in Wark, *Beach*, p. 93-108.

published a large-scale sociological project, *Critique of Everyday Life*, whose first volume appeared in 1947 and the second in 1961. The concept of ‘everyday life’ was, at one level, for Lefebvre, a methodological shift. It was developed in dialogue with Marx’s methodological remarks in connection with alienation, which I discussed in section 3 of this chapter. The project was, Lefebvre writes, ‘built entirely around a concept which Lenin had left aside or neglected, the concept of *alienation*.’¹⁶⁵ He counterposed ‘everyday life’ to philosophy’s alienated opposition between theory and practice that Marx had criticised (‘philosophers have only *interpreted* the world [...]; the point is to change it’).¹⁶⁶ Lefebvre saw Marxism as dismantling alienated forms to produce ‘*a critical knowledge of everyday life*’ that articulates and intervenes in material struggle, determined as ‘[t]he conflict between everyday life as it is—as it has been made by the bourgeoisie—and the life which a human being actually demands’. But its methodological opposition to alienated forms of analysis means that its object of analysis is, in effect, the social totality, in the same way that Marx and Lukács posited the critique of political economy’s alienated forms to be: ‘Critique of everyday life is not intended to be a new specialism, or a particular branch of sociology. What it is undertaking is a total critique of totality.’¹⁶⁷

Lefebvre's methodological shift rested on a specific historical change in the post-war era, one which he recognised as his common ground with the Situationists. In the second volume he writes that ‘[i]n the last fifteen years everyday life has undergone extensive transformations’.¹⁶⁸ In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1968), which reformulated and expanded on the work of the first two volumes of the *Critique*, he puts it thus:

¹⁶⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ Marx, *Writings*, p. 423.

¹⁶⁷ Lefebvre, p. 138, 140; Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume II*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2008), p. 27; *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Around 1960 the situation became clearer, everyday life was no longer the no-man's land, the poor relation of specialized activities. In France and elsewhere neo-capitalist leaders had become aware of the fact that the colonies were more trouble than they were worth and there was a change of strategy [...] In Europe after the war a few gifted and intelligent men [...] saw the possibility of exploiting consumption to organize everyday life. Everyday life was cut up and laid out on the site to be put together again like the pieces of a puzzle, each piece depending on a number [of] organizations and institutions, each one—working life, private life, leisure—rationally exploited (including the latest commercial and semi-programmed organization of leisure).¹⁶⁹

Everyday life, as a zone separated from the direct alienation of the capitalist work process, was nonetheless dependent on a rationalised segmentation of time into reified entities, in exactly the manner described by Lukács that I examined in the last section. The lived unity of time still had to be broken down into work and non-work, strictly demarcated according to the clock: both everyday life and work time were deformed by this, two halves that did not add up to a whole. It had, he writes in a phrase he attributes to Debord, 'literally been "colonized"'.¹⁷⁰ The notion of everyday life as a totalising field of analysis for the capitalist lifeworld depended, then, on a totalising extension of the reach of the logic of the commodity. This is a claim that we must expand on and concretise but it is important to note that this notion of 'the colonisation of everyday life' was decisive for the SI's formulation of the concept of spectacle.

But what did this 'colonisation' consist of? It is necessary at this point to turn to the social and economic context of post-war France, which underwent major changes in this period.

¹⁶⁹ Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. by Sasha Rabinovitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 58-59.

¹⁷⁰ Lefebvre, *Critique II*, p. 11. See also Debord, 'Conscious Changes in Everyday Life', in Knabb, pp. 90-99 (p. 93): 'Henri Lefebvre has extended the idea of uneven development so as to characterize everyday life as a lagging sector, out of joint with the historical but not completely cut off from it. I think that one could go so far as to term this level of everyday life a colonized sector.'

From 1945 onwards France experienced strong economic growth, due to vast investment (much of it as a result of the Marshall Plan), industrial restructuring and limited economic planning. James F. McMillan notes \$2500 million of Marshall Plan investment between 1948 and 1952, in addition to the \$12900 million received from the US prior to this.¹⁷¹ Key French industries and firms were nationalised: 'the Renault car company was the first, in January 1945 [...] It was followed by the major part of the aerospace industry, the coalmines and Air France: in January 1946 came gas, electricity and the four main deposit banks, plus a large part of the insurance sector.'¹⁷² Many smaller firms were consolidated. This was accompanied by an increasing concentration of the workforce in the industrial sector and the white-collar roles of the tertiary industries (commerce, services, administration). Between 1952 and 1973 French GDP grew by an average of 5.2% annually.¹⁷³ This was, McMillan notes, the highest rate of post-war 'economic [sic] growth among the countries of the EEC.'¹⁷⁴ This process of rationalisation and expansion of capital, and these rates of growth, were similar to those of other advanced industrial countries in the same period, for example in West Germany and Italy: the former had 7.4% annual growth and 5.7% increases in productivity between 1949 and 1954, while the latter had 5.9% growth and 4.8% productivity increases in the same period.¹⁷⁵

All of this had a remarkable effect on standards of living. Nationalised utilities and reduced import tariffs introduced by President de Gaulle in 1958 effectively lowered prices for many luxury goods.¹⁷⁶ John Ardagh notes that various studies calculate that average real wages increased by as much as 170% in the period 1950-1970.¹⁷⁷ Manual workers were increasingly

¹⁷¹ James F. McMillan, *Twentieth Century France: Politics and Society 1898-1991* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p. 169.

¹⁷² D.L. Hanley, A.P. Kerr and N.H. Waites, *Contemporary France: Politics and Society since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 2.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 5, 79; *ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷⁴ McMillan, p. 170.

¹⁷⁵ Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1996*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 182.

¹⁷⁶ Hanley et al, p. 19.

¹⁷⁷ John Ardagh, *The New France: A Society in Transition 1945-1977*, 3rd edn (London: Pelican, 1977), p. 400.

able to afford commodities and leisure activities previously only available to the bourgeois: white goods, electronics, cars, holidays.¹⁷⁸ Consequently, during the same period private consumption increased by 174%.¹⁷⁹ From 1946 onwards the government also constructed a strong welfare state with fairly generous provisions, particularly on family benefits.¹⁸⁰ New forms of housing and urban space accompanied these shifts: Lefebvre points to the example of the 'new towns', modern residential suburbs or dormitory towns to replace or supplement what McMillan describes as 'ancient, overcrowded' housing stock.¹⁸¹

The post-war moment in France could be seen, then, as a top-down, technocratic transformation by the state and capitalist industry of the social conditions and lifeworld of much of French society. Kristin Ross describes the thoroughgoing effect of this whole process on everyday life:

French people, peasants and intellectuals alike, tended to describe the changes in their lives in terms of the abrupt transformations in home and transport: the coming of objects—large-scale consumer durables, cars and refrigerators—into their streets and homes, into their workplaces and their *emplois du temps*. In the space of just ten years a rural woman might live through the acquisition of electricity, running water, a stove, a refrigerator, a washing machine, a sense of interior space as distinct from exterior space, a car, a television, and the various liberations and oppressions associated with each. [...] Modern social relations are of course always mediated by objects; but in the case of the French, this mediation seemed to have increased exponentially, abruptly, and over a very brief period of time.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ McMillan, p. 173.

¹⁷⁹ Ardagh, p. 400.

¹⁸⁰ McMillan, p.174.

¹⁸¹ Lefebvre, *Critique II*, p. 8; McMillan, p. 173.

¹⁸² Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 5.

As Ross emphasises, this transformation was one in which an existing social texture and set of social subjects had seemingly been deracinated, thinned and disintegrated, and replaced by a unitary one that consisted of commodities—what she calls ‘the upheaval in social relations occasioned by the sudden, full-scale entry of capital into “style of life,” into lived, daily, almost imperceptible rhythms.’¹⁸³ Lefebvre referred to this process as a “reprivatization”, in which the ‘residual deposit’ of the bourgeois family and social individualism are not broken up but ‘consolidated’, as in the process of reification described in the last section. As pre-war social institutions and forms are destroyed, Lefebvre suggests, they reappear in the alienated form of private life, which is estranged and distant from the collective fabric of social production of which it is now in some sense the nucleus: ‘while life and consciousness are becoming “globalized”, consciousness and private life are withdrawing into themselves [...] In his armchair, the private man—who has stopped even seeing himself as a citizen—witnesses the universe without having a hold over it and without really wanting to.’¹⁸⁴ Even as post-war capitalism extends itself over the totality of social life, ‘the point of view of totality bears witness to a “detotalization”’, the dissolution of a graspable totality into individual social monads. Debord formulates the situation in even stronger terms: ‘Modern society is viewed through specialized fragments that are virtually incommunicable; and so everyday life, where all questions are liable to be posed in a unitary manner, is naturally the domain of ignorance [...] the isolated inhabitants (generally isolated within the framework of the family cell) see their lives reduced to the pure triviality of the repetitive combined with the obligatory consumption of an equally repetitive spectacle.’¹⁸⁵ This effect can be seen as an intensification

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁸⁴ Lefebvre, *Critique II*, p. 88; *ibid.*, p. 89. Regarding pre-war social institutions, Lefebvre refers in particular to the traditional social texture of French village life: see the chapter ‘Notes Written One Sunday in the French Countryside’ in *Critique I*, p. 200-227.

¹⁸⁵ Lefebvre, *Critique II*, p. 87; Debord, ‘Conscious Changes’, p. 92-94.

of the forms of social segmentation, of individuation into contemplative subjects, described by Lukács.

There are two further and related aspects to this historical context that are particularly important for the spectacle thesis. The first is the extent to which these economic and social processes appeared in fact to be a transformation of class society and its dynamics of struggle. What was apparently emerging in post-war France was a flattening of the constitutive differentiations of class society, achieved not by the pressure of demands from a working class strengthened by the contradictory progress of capitalist accumulation, but by the bloodless application of policy and technology, white goods and white-collar jobs. For Lefebvre, as Mark Poster comments, '[c]apitalism had attempted to "integrate" the classical working class and had partially succeeded. By 1967 [he] stated flatly that the working class no longer had revolutionary aims.'¹⁸⁶ The Situationists addressed this view directly, noting that '[m]any people are skeptical about the possibility of a new revolutionary movement, continually repeating that the proletariat has been integrated or that the workers are now satisfied, etc.'¹⁸⁷ As Kristin Ross puts it, what seemed to be emerging in the new French state was a society with only a single and bourgeois class: 'modernization leaves in its wake the "broad middle stratum," the consensus at the center.'¹⁸⁸ As we will go on to discuss, this impression was, in the Situationists' terms, spectacular: social inequality persisted amid the false objectivity of this new social base. But it is worth stating that this is the thesis which the Situationist International developed the concept of spectacle in part to explain and critique.

The second aspect of this historical context important for the spectacle thesis is a more fundamental one, to which the first, which I have just discussed, could be seen as a response. Namely, the extent to which the advent of the society of the spectacle is a fundamental shift in

¹⁸⁶ Poster, p. 245.

¹⁸⁷ 'The Bad Days Will End', in Knabb, pp. 107-114 (p. 111).

¹⁸⁸ Ross, *Cars*, p. 149.

the capitalist mode of production, a new stage in the development of capitalism: the advent of what Frances Stracey calls ‘a new type of image-based exchange mechanism’.¹⁸⁹ TJ Clark describes the spectacle thesis as a reconceptualisation, a theoretical inversion, of an existing typology of the transformations of the post-war economy:

the concepts of “spectacle” and “spectacular society” [...] represent an effort to theorize the implications for capitalist society of the progressive shift within production towards the provision of consumer goods and services, and the accompanying “colonization of everyday life”. [...] It indicates a new phase of commodity production—the marketing, the making-into-commodities, of whole areas of social practice which had once been referred to casually as everyday life.

The concept of spectacle is thus an attempt—a partial and unfinished one—to bring into theoretical order a diverse set of symptoms which are normally treated, by bourgeois sociology or conventional Leftism, as anecdotal trappings affixed somewhat lightly to the old economic order: “consumerism”, for instance, or “the society of leisure”; the rise of mass media, the expansion of advertising, the hypertrophy of official diversions (Olympic Games, party conventions, *biennales*).¹⁹⁰

Outlined thus the spectacle thesis, as it applies to the ‘wide range of apparently disparate phenomena’ of the post-war era, in Debord's words, is composed of two moments. Firstly, there is the movement, in ‘the colonisation of everyday life’, of the core territory of capitalist accumulation from zones of colonial extraction (in the case of France, the Francophone states of West and North Africa, the Caribbean, Guiana and Indochina) to the previously neglected

¹⁸⁹ Stracey, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ TJ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 9.

sector of the capitalist lifeworld. Secondly, there is, in this movement, a shift in the nature of accumulation itself. This was the advent of what Lefebvre called ‘the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption’.¹⁹¹ Labour had previously been the constitutive capacity and form of the social subject but, in the process of reprivatisation, ‘in the advanced industrial countries, this situation relative to work and “outside work” tends to be reversed.’¹⁹² Everyday life becomes the locus of consciousness, of the capitalist lifeworld. ‘It is the attitude to work’, Lefebvre writes, ‘which is formed in everyday life (including those leisure activities which have become a part of everyday life [...]), and not vice versa.’ Both work and leisure are recomposed within the same logic of deracination and alienation: ‘for the worker, work and life outside work have sunk into the same lack of interest, a lack which is poorly disguised by entertainments which are as noisy as they are empty.’¹⁹³ Debord noted that, with the advent of ‘an expanding economy of “services” and leisure activities’, the ‘most advanced sectors’ of ‘a highly concentrated capitalism has begun selling “fully equipped” blocks of time, each of which is a complete commodity’.¹⁹⁴ Where previously the unorganised forms of time outside of work had been in some sense opposed to the alienation of capitalist time-discipline in the workplace, they were now at the very core of the operation whereby surplus-value, in the form of abstract labour-time, is extracted from the subject of social production. The abstract equivalence of labour-time, the ‘time of production’ that workers treated as their only commodified property, becomes ‘a *consumable time*’, as the form of appearance or ‘*consumable disguise* of the time-as-commodity of the production system.’ As Lefebvre writes: ‘Everyday life has become [...] the province of organization; the space-time of voluntary programmed self-regulation, because when properly organized it provides a closed circuit (production-consumption-production), where demands are foreseen because they are induced [...] as such

¹⁹¹ Lefebvre, *World*, p. 68.

¹⁹² Lefebvre, *Critique II*, p. 68.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68-69; *ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁹⁴ Debord, *Society*, p. 111.

it would be the main product of the so-called “organized” society of controlled consumption.¹⁹⁵ In post-war society then, in this account, consumption itself becomes the engine and form of social production.

The superstructural nature of the commodity-form in this situation is not incidental. ‘[T]he time of the spectacle’, Debord writes, is ‘in the narrow sense [...] the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and, in the broadest sense, [...] the image of the consumption of time.’¹⁹⁶ The dialectic that Debord outlines here moves in two directions. The spectacular time of a reified everyday life is lived through a proliferating mass of images, which inscribe the subject in ‘the spectacle-spectator relation [...] itself a staunch bearer of the capitalist order’, establishing a contemplative distance between subject and object.¹⁹⁷ But these very acts of consumption are a generic image of themselves, of consumption-as-such as social action, the social use of time. Consumption only appears meaningful in this totality of consumption, but this totality is an appearance, static and excluding time, only to be looked at and not participated in. Post-war society, he writes elsewhere, ‘frankly admits that wasted time is the time spent at work, the only purpose of which is [to] earn enough to enable one to buy rest, consumption and entertainments’—that is, to live the forms of time that once appeared as an alternative to the alienation of human individuality in labour.¹⁹⁸ But the individuality of this time of consumption is, as we have seen that Lukács says of reified individuality in general, abstract. These ‘consumer needs’ are ‘prefabricated and ceaselessly stimulated by modern industry.’¹⁹⁹ The commodity-form is the bearer of ‘[t]he image of the blissful unification of society through consumption [...] a dramatic shortcut to the long-awaited promised land of total consumption’, and of the consumer-subjects as social actors: ‘the consumers themselves become as spectacular as the objects of consumption [...] Totally reified man has his place in

¹⁹⁵ Debord, *Society*, p. 111; Lefebvre, *World*, p. 72.

¹⁹⁶ Debord, *Society*, p. 112

¹⁹⁷ Debord and Canjuers, p. 390.

¹⁹⁸ Debord, ‘Conscious Changes’, p. 96.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

the show-window as a desirable image of reification.²⁰⁰ Thus Debord describes the spectacle as 'tautological': what it produces is itself as 'publicity-propaganda' for its organisation of social production as contemplative object, 'basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory'.²⁰¹ In Lefebvre's formulation, the "'world of appearances'" of 'today's "consumer society" [...] hides a deeper reality: the manufacture of consumers by those who hold the means of production and who produce for profit.'²⁰² Its only productive capacity, its form of accumulation, 'is the concrete manufacture of alienation'.²⁰³

As an historical account of the transformation of capitalism since Marx first critically analysed it in *Capital*, *Society of the Spectacle* thereby maps out the successive phases of transition to what Jappe calls 'the highest stage of abstraction'.²⁰⁴ It is thus that 'present culture as a whole', Debord writes with Pierre Canjuers, 'can be characterized as alienated in the sense that every activity, every moment of life [...] has a meaning only outside itself, in an "elsewhere" which, being no longer in heaven, is only the more maddening to try and locate: a utopia [...] dominates the life of the modern world.' The very lifeworld that capitalism produces, as the articulation of a particular mode of social production, recedes and becomes abstract: 'in the spectacle the totality of the commodity world is visible in one piece, as the general equivalent of whatever society as a whole can be and do.'²⁰⁵ Society as the totality of social production is reconstructed as a new totality that is in fact only separated and contemplative appearances; the consumer consumes the image of the 'satisfaction allegedly derived from the *consumption of the whole*', the encounter with the commodity as totalised form, but in the confrontation with the commodity in its objectivity 'the real consumer can

²⁰⁰ Debord, *Society*, p. 45; 'Geopolitics of Hibernation', in Knabb, pp. 100-107 (p. 106).

²⁰¹ Debord, *Society*, p. 15.

²⁰² Lefebvre, *Critique II*, p. 27.

²⁰³ Debord, *Society*, p. 32.

²⁰⁴ Jappe, p. 5.

²⁰⁵ Debord and Canjuers, p. 389; Debord, *Society*, p. 33.

only get his hands on a succession of *fragments* of this commodity heaven'. Thus society's 'very *manner of being concrete* is, precisely, abstraction.'²⁰⁶

We will explore these formulations more fully in the next chapter. For the moment it is necessary to conclude these analyses of the SI's context with a few remarks situating these problems in a wider historical frame, that will assist in establishing a sense of my methodology's historical freighting, and the specificity of the problems this project tracks across the historical and economic shifts of the period. This will also be crucial for situating the developing critique of political economy this chapter has outlined, as part of an overall critical framework, in relation to the contemporary conjuncture of the literary texts examined in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Chronologically, the post-war transformation that Debord and the SI set out to analyse can be situated at the beginning of what Ernest Mandel and later Fredric Jameson described as the 'third stage' of capitalist development, periodised also as 'late capitalism'.²⁰⁷ In *Late Capitalism* (1972), Mandel outlines a model of capitalist history wherein 'long waves' of technological and economic development and restructuring have characterised capitalism since its inception as a major system of social production in the 18th century. After its initial development he traces a second, industrial phase 'in the middle of the 19th century, immediately following the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution'. He posits that a third period begins 'in North America in 1940 and in the other imperialist countries in 1945-48, characterized by the generalized control of machines by means of *electronic apparatuses*' and 'a radical rise in the rate of surplus-value, [...] a radical change in the relationship of class forces', alongside '[a] general transformation of productive technology [...] [and] a significant rise in the organic composition of capital'.²⁰⁸ This is precisely the set of economic

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 43; *ibid*, p. 22.

²⁰⁷ Mandel, *Late*, p. 9; Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 3.

²⁰⁸ Mandel, p. 116. 120-121.

circumstances in France that the SI set out to analyse and critique. The paradigmatic new post-war technologies, Jameson adds, were precisely those of visual media, whose purpose was to transmit or convey the appearances of the world of capitalist technology rather than themselves have 'emblematic or visual power': 'the computer [...] or even the casings of the various media themselves, as with that home appliance called television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself.'²⁰⁹ The signature productive technologies of this transfigured mode of production are 'machines of reproduction rather than of production'.²¹⁰ The transformed logic of capitalist production that 'late capitalism' names, at whose historical origin is the moment of the SI and the theory of the spectacle, is not only that of the installation of what they referred to as '*machines of consumption*' but what T.J. Clark would later refer to as 'a technology of visualization', whose 'production of an image world would eventually be decentralized, and become the very *instrumentation of the market*'.²¹¹

An historical sketch of the entire intervening era of late capitalist development is beyond the scope of this project. I would nonetheless like to highlight one or two aspects of theoretical importance for our inquiry. Firstly, there is the question of how late capitalism transforms or recomposes the temporality of production. In the final text published by the SI at the group's dissolution in 1972, Debord wrote that in the economic crises that gripped advanced industrial countries beginning in the late 1960s, the recurrent structural crises of capitalism 'ha[ve] just crossed a qualitative threshold'. In the form of unemployment and environmental degradation 'capitalism has at last furnished the proof that *it cannot develop productive forces any further*'.²¹² The growth of the spectacle was 'the economic realm developing *for itself*', but

²⁰⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 37.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ 'Bad Days', p. 108; Clark, *Sight*, p. 175, 184-185.

²¹² Situationist International, *The Real Split in the International*, trans. by John McHale (London: Pluto Press, 2003), p. 18; *ibid.* The text quoted, 'Theses on the Situationist International and its Time', is attributed to Guy Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti. According to Vincent Kaufmann, Debord was the text's sole author, Sanguinetti co-signing it 'solely out of solidarity'; see *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, trans. by Robert Bonnono

this development of mounting abstraction was also necessarily '*the supersession of the economy*'.²¹³ Debord saw the time of spectacular consumption-production as collapsing: 'The world of the commodity, which was already uninhabitable *in essence*, has become so *visibly* [...] the dominant science and the science of domination have taken to calculating with pinpoint accuracy the ever-increasing growth of inner contradictions which abolish *the overall conditions of survival* in the society of dispossession.'²¹⁴

It is precisely the crises of this period that Jameson points to as periodising signs in the full emergence of late capitalism. Both at the level of economic base and superstructural cultural logic the change was 'crystallized in the great shock of the crises of 1973 (the oil crisis, the end of the international gold standard, [...] the end of the great wave of "wars of national liberation" and the beginning of the end of traditional communism)'. As Jameson notes, what emerged from that period was not global revolution but a global recomposition of capital that 'no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely, the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle.'²¹⁵ What can be observed in the development of late capitalism, with its emphasis on services industries and international finance, is an intensification of abstraction that Jameson describes in terms that recall Debord's description of spectacular accumulation:

Capital itself becomes free-floating. It separates from the "concrete context" of its productive geography. Money becomes in a second sense and to a second degree abstract (it always was abstract in the first and basic sense) [...] it implies a new ontological and free-floating state, one in which the content [...] has definitively been suppressed in favour of the form, in which the inherent nature of the product becomes

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 191.

²¹³ Debord, *Society*, p. 16; *SI, Split*, p. 12.

²¹⁴ *SI, Split*, p. 17.

²¹⁵ Jameson, p. xx; *ibid.*, p. 3.

insignificant, a mere marketing pretext, while the goal of production no longer lies in the any specific market, any specific set of consumers or social and individual needs, but rather in its transformation which by definition has no content or territory and indeed no use-value as such, namely money.²¹⁶

Although Jameson here concentrates on the spatial effects of this shift in the mode of production, this spatial emphasis is itself dependent on its temporal consequences, which he described, by way of Lacan's theorisation of schizophrenia, as a breakdown of time's unity into 'a series of pure and unrelated presents'.²¹⁷ Moreover, Jameson explicitly notes a deep identification between the abstraction of late or finance capital and the spectacle, forming 'a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced', in a sentence in which he goes on to directly invoke Debord.²¹⁸ This is, importantly, not a mere epiphenomenon, with 'image culture' a superstructural expression of transformations in the base, because, within late capitalism, 'the very sphere of culture itself has expanded, becoming coterminous with market society' and '[s]ocial space is now completely saturated with the culture of the image'.²¹⁹ Following the periodising hypothesis outlined above, it is important to stress that the crises of late capitalist abstraction in the form of finance capital are therefore always also crises of the spectacle, internal crises of the image. The fact that the present conjuncture does not lack for such crises can therefore be seen in close relation to the politics of the image that Debord analysed. In the next chapter, this politics will be further concretised through an encounter with scholarship in art history

²¹⁶ Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 142, 153.

²¹⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 27.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18. The quotation that Jameson goes on to give in the same sentence—'a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it "the image has become the final form of commodity reification" (*The Society of the Spectacle*)'—does not in fact appear anywhere in *Society of the Spectacle*.

²¹⁹ Jameson, *Turn*, p. 100, 111.

theories of the image sensitive to Debord's critique. This will thus prepare the framework for the readings of contemporary literary texts that occupy the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Late Capitalist Images

2.0 Introduction

In the first chapter, I established the origin and valences of the concept of ‘spectacle’, in the work of Guy Debord and the SI, in a tradition of Marxist analysis centred on the notions of alienation, commodity fetishism and reification. As we have seen, during the historical development of capitalism the subject becomes increasingly distanced from a social totality rendered abstract by exchange value. The object, created by the subject in the matrix of social production, is only meaningful or legible as an object of contemplation, as an abstract appearance to be consumed. It exists in the perpetual present characteristic of commodity production, which at once creates vast qualitative changes in the means of production and serial repetitions of the production of the same interchangeable objects.

The purpose of this chapter is to further concretise this analysis, which would otherwise remain at the abstract level of social theory and the critique of political economy. Debord’s account of the post-war transformation of social time—the process by which ‘capital accumulates to the point that it becomes image’, and images become the form of a system of abstract social time—has profound implications for the reading of late capitalist culture, particularly the relationship between narrative form and the frozen state of images. As we saw in the Introduction, the narrative innovations of this study’s core texts (by Lerner, McCarthy and DeLillo) can be seen in relation to the status of the image in the current phase of late capitalism. The dynamic that Debord diagnosed in the post-war transformation of capitalist production—the incorporation of the fabric of everyday life into a system of abstract exchange—reaches one particular point of crisis, located around the 2007-8 financial crisis. In the literary case studies that compose Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I will go on to show how the core texts’

forms internalise, approach or develop in reaction to this privileged place of the visible and its crisis. To this end, I will turn to a small body of literature within art history and theory that has grounded the analysis of visual culture and aesthetic form within Debord's Marxist-Hegelian account of the abstraction of commodity fetishism. The widespread neglect within those disciplines of Debord's connection with the critique of political economy—its exclusive treatment of 'the predominantly visual terminology employed in Debord's theory of spectacle [...] in a literal sense', as Tom Bunyard puts it—should be reversed, in aid of a potentially much richer and more productive critical account of the contemporary texts with which this study is concerned.¹ Moving the argument on to the historical terrain of modern theories of the images, we will advance the work begun in the last section of the previous chapter, relating the vicissitudes of contemporary narrative form in my central fictional texts to the political freight of the post-war image, at either end of the historical sequence of late capitalism.

In order to advance this analysis, it would be useful to begin by returning to Debord and the SI's formulations, to give some sense of the substance and attendant problems of his argument concerning the spectacle's relation to vision and images. I will relate these to the long-standing philosophical discourse on images and vision that Debord mobilises, in order to show how his linkage of commodity fetishism to images produces a subtle and flexible account of a series of problems for the novel-form, around the subject-object relationship, the freezing of time and the contemplative passivity that the spectacle produces.

The critical work around which this chapter will pivot—primarily the scholarship of theorist and historian Jonathan Crary and art historian T.J. Clark—is as much independent interpretations and redeployments of the concept of spectacle as exegeses, and turn on some aspects that are problematic for our argument so far. For example, Crary explicitly rejects Lukács' and Weber's accounts of modern capitalist development—the process that, as we

¹ Bunyard, p. 17.

showed in the section on Lukács in our last chapter, centred on the unfolding logic of the commodity-form—and describes commodities as only one among a number of important forms for modern capitalism. Likewise, whilst Crary, Clark and others have produced accounts of the operation of spectacle in the period of primary concern for us—the history of contemporary and post-war capitalism—they have not been the fullest and most rigorous parts of their accounts. Crary's theorisation of the contemporary spectacle, for example, cannot be usefully understood without referring to his historical work on what he has called its 'prehistory', focused on the 19th and early 20th centuries.² It will therefore be useful and necessary to refer to this prehistory, not least because it will be possible to discern more clearly the visual logic of spectacle in its moment of emergence or rupture.

Finally, we will conclude this chapter by tracking the transformation of some aspects of temporality—as cinema and photography, with their attendant form of realism, begin to dissolve into digital images—under late capitalism (which we discussed at the end of the last chapter). This will help us to prepare the ground for the analyses of our core fictional texts, beginning in the next chapter.

2.1 'A negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself'

In a short set of theses early in the first chapter of *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord places his critique in the context of modern discourses about vision, optics, representation and the social position of sight. 'The spectacle', he writes, 'is heir to all the weakness of the project of Western philosophy, which was an attempt to understand activity by means of the categories of vision.'³ To what is Debord referring here? There have been a wide variety of arguments that

² Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 10; *ibid.*, p. 19.

³ Debord, *Society*, p. 17.

sight and the eye are central or hegemonic either in Western culture and thought in general or (perhaps only particularly) in the Western iteration of modernity. Thus Martin Heidegger argued that, for the ancient Greeks, being was intimately related to perception: ‘That which is, is that which arises and opens itself, which, as what presences, comes upon one as the one who presences, i.e., comes upon the one who himself opens himself to what presences in that he apprehends it.’⁴ Historian of science Hans Jonas has noted that ‘[s]ince the days of Greek philosophy sight has been hailed as the most excellent of the senses’, with Aristotle ‘stating that it is the sense yielding the most knowledge and excelling in differentiation.’⁵ This may or may not be the case, but it is hard to argue, drawing on the same evidence, that there have not been qualitative shifts in the position of sight during the history of that tradition—most obviously in relation to the history of capitalist modernity. Thus Chris Jenks, paraphrasing the work of Martin Jay, notes that ‘modernity’s project was most effectively achieved through the privileging of “sight” and [...] modern culture has, in turn, elected the visual to the dual status of being both the primary medium for communication and also the sole ingress to our accumulated symbolic treasury.’⁶

Debord goes on to describe the spectacle as being underpinned by ‘an incessant deployment of the very technical rationality to which that philosophical tradition gave rise’, suggesting that he draws here implicitly on Lukács’ critique of modern bourgeois rationality as an expression of class society’s stratifications and limitations, which I discussed in the last chapter. The spectacle would then be related to the project of modern philosophy after Descartes, taking their bearings from his foundational split between subject and object and emphasis on quantifying rationality. But, as Debord notes, the spectacle in effect inverts the aspirations of that project: instead of rendering the world knowable through the relation of

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 131.

⁵ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 135.

⁶ Chris Jenks, ‘The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An Introduction’, in *Visual Culture*, ed. by Chris Jenks (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-25 (p. 2).

the seeing subject to the seen object, ‘the spectacle philosophizes reality, and turns the material life of everyone into a universe of material speculation.’ That is, in the spectacle perception does not produce knowledge of the concrete or meaningful: echoing Feuerbach’s critique of religion, Debord writes that ‘[t]he spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion [...] a technological version of the exiling of human powers in a “world beyond”’.⁷ If the position of sight in Western philosophy since Descartes has been a hermeneutic one—in which vision has a privileged relationship to what the theory itself designates as reality—then the spectacle’s work as its ‘heir’ is to turn this relationship, as in Marx’s metaphor for the function of ideology as presenting ‘men and their circumstances [...] upside-down as in a *camera obscura*’, on its head: the image comes to stand in for the objectivity of a distorted reality.⁸

Marx’s description draws in part on what Martin Jay has called an ‘antiocularcentric discourse’ that emphasised the faculties of seeing and representation as sources of distortion and error in relation to the external world.⁹ That tradition has many variations, but its basic tropes can be found outlined in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. In the *Republic* (380 BC), he had described human perception in relation to ‘the region of the known’ in terms of shadows cast by ‘passing objects’. Subjectivity and the discourse between subjects assumed that ‘in naming the things that they saw they were naming’ the objects, but they never ‘would have seen anything’ of these same objects.¹⁰ Sight cannot attend to *real* objects, but only perceives in appearances their imitations. Sight or representation would be a mere distortion or mystification of the objective world that is re-presented. Such a notion forms a component of some critical theories of representation contemporaneous with Debord’s work, as in art

⁷ Debord, *Society*, p. 17; *ibid*; *ibid*, p. 17-18.

⁸ Marx and Engels, ‘German Ideology’, p. 154.

⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 16.

¹⁰ Plato, *The Republic Books VI-X*, trans. by Paul Shorey (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/Heinemann, 1943), p. 131, 121; *ibid*, p. 121-3.

historian Nicos Hadjinicolaou's conception, outlined in 1973's *Art History And Class Struggle*, of 'visual ideologies' that structure the artistic perception of a given historical era.¹¹ It is just such claims that Debord addresses when he writes that the spectacle 'cannot be understood [...] as a deliberate distortion of the visual world'. The spectacle, as the objectivity of a false world, does not intervene between the subject and some neutral, natural external object. Thus in the passage quoted above, Marx goes on to comment that the inverted images of ideology arise 'just as much from [the] historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.' As we noted in Chapter 1, such ideological instances are in this sense what Marx called forms of 'socially necessary appearance', the phrase that he applied to commodity fetishism and the money-form in relation to value: fragments of concreteness that exist only in relation to the abstraction of exchange-value they give objectivity to. In these forms, Marx wrote, things 'appear as what they are': opposing some unmediated set of forces, relations or objects to their representation in ideology 'by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by' these outcomes of social production.¹² They can therefore be seen in relation to what, in theories of art and visual culture since the 1980s, have been called modes of 'visuality'. For Hal Foster, 'visuality [is] sight as a social fact' and the difference between vision and visuality is one 'between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations'. In other words, it is not a question of ideology, as in Jay's 'antiocular discourse', consisting in a misrepresentation of an underlying and given reality of phenomena, but of the way the visible itself comes to be structured—'how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein', as Foster puts it—through its imbrication in the social.¹³ Historical development—in the case of this study, the spread, transformation and

¹¹ Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, trans. by Louise Asmal (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 95.

¹² Debord, *Society*, p. 12; Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 154; Marx, *Capital*, p. 166, 167.

¹³ Hal Foster, 'Preface' in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. by Hal Foster (Seattle/New York: Bay Press/Dia Art Foundation, 1988), p. ix.

intensification of commodity fetishism across the history of capitalism and its effect on subject-formation, as analysed in Chapter 1—therefore necessarily entails developments in perception itself.¹⁴

To return briefly to the philosophical tradition of seeing Debord alludes to, it is worth emphasising that one of its central components, since Descartes, has been a privileged relationship between sight, a theory of the subject and a historically specific conception of the real or realism. Cartesian innovations in epistemology, physics and philosophy of mind worked to produce an account not only of the object world and the subject but of the function of the human sensorium in the relation between the two.¹⁵ We have already examined some of the aspects of that theory in our discussion of Lukács in the last chapter—for Lukács to a great extent it is Descartes' positions, as a founding figure in the philosophy of the bourgeois era, that he criticises in the thought of a reified world as 'the contemplative duality of subject and object'.¹⁶ The picture of the subject and object-world that Descartes developed in his philosophical and scientific work—what is usually referred to as 'Cartesian dualism'—was, as Martin Jay points out, the most important body of philosophical work for 'modern ocularcentrism'. As Richard Rorty notes, modern philosophy, dominated by 'ocular metaphors',

¹⁴ The art historian E.H. Gombrich traces the notion that perception has an evolving history, reflected in differing forms of the image, as far back as the 18th century. He quotes the painter James Barry lecturing at the Royal Academy in the late 18th century, who proposed that the lack of realism in 13th century Italian painting showed vision was a capacity affected by knowledge: 'The people, then, of those ages only saw so much, and admired it, because they knew no more.' (Qtd. in Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 2nd edn (London: Phaidon Press, 1961), p. 11.) More influential in formulating the notion of a history of differing senses was the tradition in German art history that evolved out of the problems of aesthetics posed by Kant, Hegel and Schiller at the turn of the 19th century; for an overview, see Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). Of particular importance from this tradition for a whole variety of literature in art history, philosophy and critical theory was Alois Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901); see Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, trans. and ed. by Rolf Winkes (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985). As Walter Benjamin later noted, Riegl and fellow art historian Franz Wickhoff 'were the first to think of using such art to draw conclusions about the organization of perception at the time the art was produced.' See Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 3, 1935-1938*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland et al, p. 104. For more general overviews of the history of the senses, see: Constance Classen (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses, Volumes 1-6* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. by James Lynn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

¹⁵ René Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 20-72.

¹⁶ Lukács, *History*, p. 148.

which posited that its ‘central concern is to be a theory of representation’, with the thinking subject reflecting the object-world, had Descartes, along with Locke and Kant, as its foundational and central figures.¹⁷

Descartes published his major work on vision, the *Optics*, simultaneously with his first major philosophical treatise, the *Discourse On The Method* (1637). The account of sight in the *Optics* was framed as an attempt to apply the principles of the *Discourse*, ‘the true method of attaining the knowledge of everything within my mental capabilities’.¹⁸ That is, it was meant to be a rational and logical account, one legible to and derived from a method concerned with ‘certain and evident reasonings’.¹⁹ He dismisses the scholastic doctrine that appearances were transmitted by ‘little images flitting through the air, called “intentional forms”’, a notion underwritten by Nature’s creation by God, saturating the objectivity of the physical world with significance.²⁰ Instead he attributed their transmission to light, ‘a certain movement, or very rapid and lively action, which passes to our eyes through the medium of the air and other transparent bodies’.²¹ But this light is specifically physical: he describes it by analogy with the sticks carried by a blind person to feel the objects in their surroundings by ‘the movement or resistance of the bodies [they] encountered’ felt along its length.²² Light rays are refracted or deflected by media other than air and by surfaces with different textures, giving data about their qualities. Images, formed on the back of the eye, ‘sets the optic nerve-fibres in motion’ and thus act upon the consciousness or ‘soul in so far as it is united to our body [...] ordained by nature to make it have such sensations’ of the qualities of the phenomenal world such as ‘light, colour, position, distance, size and shape’.²³ In other words, despite the theological results of his philosophical system—he deduced in the *Discourse On The Method* that ‘it is at

¹⁷ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 13, 3.

¹⁸ Descartes, p. 28.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 29.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 59, 58.

²¹ Ibid, p. 58.

²² Ibid, p. 60-61.

²³ Ibid, p. 65, 64.

least as certain as any geometrical proof that God, who is this perfect being, is or exists’—Descartes’ forms of causation for the nature of images and seeing involved no necessary supra-physical factors.²⁴ His account of perception thus participates in what TJ Clark, following Max Weber, called ‘the disenchantment of the world.’²⁵ It was, moreover, as we will shortly discuss, the worldview proper to capitalist modernity, in which individuated subjects related to a world composed of, as Marx said of the commodity, ‘external object[s]’, each of them an ‘extremely obvious, trivial thing’, ‘an ordinary, sensuous thing’. Marx remarked that, in his particular form of the materialist worldview, Descartes ‘saw with the eyes of the period of manufacture’. We have already referred in the last chapter to Lukács’ critique of modern philosophical and scientific rationality as being invested in a worldview composed of ‘a frozen continuum filled with quantifiable “things”’.²⁶ It was Descartes’ work that expressed the logic of being that capitalism, as a determinate organisation of social production, operated with. That logic, which determined the presuppositions of the forms of realism posited by the Cartesian model of seeing, simultaneously made sight and the visual into an autonomous category.

As Martin Jay points out, in this case ‘Descartes’s reasoning was neither deductive’, as in the *Discourse*, ‘nor inductive but rather analogical, based on a comparative thought experiment that involved another sense.’ Descartes rather maps the existing results of his enquiry in the *Discourse* onto the problem of sight. That work had famously posited a dichotomy between consciousness or *res cogitans* and the rest of the physical world, including the body: ‘I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is solely to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, to exist.’²⁷ Descartes contrasted his account of physical matter with that of previous philosophers, who had, as he

²⁴ Ibid, p. 38

²⁵ TJ Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes From a History of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 7.

²⁶ Marx, *Capital*, p. 125, 163; *ibid*, p. 512; Lukács, *History*, p. 90.

²⁷ Jay, p. 74; Descartes, p. 36.

sees it, distinguished its being and qualities as matter ‘from its own proper quantity and from its outward extension, that is, from the property it has of occupying space.’²⁸ For Descartes, as Jonathan Rée comments, matter—the substance of the objective world—‘did not *underlie* extension; it was *identical* with extension.’ Nature had no vacuums, hence his supposition in the *Optics* of ‘some very subtle and very fluid matter, which extends without interruption from the heavenly bodies to us’, rendering action at a distance, which necessitated divine causation, impossible.²⁹ The objects of the phenomenal world thus *only were* insofar as they had extensity in space—that is, surfaces, curvature and quantifiable volume, which the senses report.

This has two consequences. Firstly, subject and object are mutually secured in their opposition. The body to which consciousness belongs exists as part of the physical world, as a specific point within it. As Susan Bordo puts it, in modernity ‘*locatedness* emerged as a central category of thought.’ The subject is located in a specific relation to the objectivity of ‘the alien, impersonal nature of the infinite universe—that wasteland of meaninglessness, that terrifying, cold expanse.’³⁰ Individual subjects are not connected by their involvement in the physical world but rather separated by its extensity. The world that vision apprehends ‘is stable—and its stability is a function of its continuousness: Objects retain a constancy despite changes in the viewer’s position.’³¹ But this is the precondition for knowing and returning meaning to the world through rationality and the categories of objectivity and quantification: ‘The quest for objectivity [...] is capable of transforming the barren landscape of the modern universe into a paradise for analysis, dissection, and “controlled” experimentation.’ Relation to the objects of

²⁸ Descartes, *The World and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. by Stephen Gaukroger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 24.

²⁹ Jonathan Rée, *Descartes* (London: Allen Lane, 19745), . 51; Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 59.

³⁰ Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism & Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 69; *ibid.*, p. 78.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64. Bordo draws here on psychologist James Gibson’s distinction between the ‘visual field’ and ‘visual world’. ‘The visual *world* is “the familiar, ordinary scene of daily life” [...] The visual *field* is what we perceive when we fixate our eyes and pay attention to what lies within the frozen boundaries of our vision’ (p. 64). For our purposes this distinction does not apply: capitalist modernity remakes the context of experience in the image of its disenchanting reality-effects.

the world through a ‘*pure perception*’ requires their ‘disentangling [...] *from* the whole of things, and beaming a light on the essential separateness of each—its own pure and discrete nature, revealed as *it is*, free of the “distortions” of subjectivity.’ Secondly, it associates a privileged relationship to the real—a form of realism—with a detemporalised visual space. As art historian Norman Bryson comments, writing on the place of modern philosophical and social discourses on sight to Western painting since the Renaissance, ‘[i]n the Founding Perception, the gaze of the painter arrests the flux of phenomena, contemplates the visual field from a vantage-point outside the mobility of duration [...] Elimination of the diachronic movement of deixis creates, or at least seeks, a synchronic instant of viewing that will eclipse the body’.³² Martin Jay relates the new spatial arrangements of perspective to the image’s ‘denarrativization’: as ‘space was robbed of its substantive meaningfulness to become an ordered, uniform system of abstract linear coordinates’, it could no longer act as the foil to the integrated, meaningful temporality of narrative, becoming instead ‘the eternal container of objective processes’.³³ The time of representation had to be parsed from a dynamic continuum and frozen in place.

The cumulative effects of the operation of the Cartesian model on seeing and images, then, are clear enough. Vision is now configured as the relation between what Crary calls an ‘interiorised subject’ and an external world in its naturalised objectivity. The forms of quantifiable spatial depth and apprehension to touch proper to Renaissance perspective become guarantors of reality and significance even as the previous forms of meaningful relation in pre-modern space are dissolved and the object-world relentlessly disenchanted. This lays the groundwork for a deep association between forms of spatialised, frozen time to which the subject can only relate in a fixed opposition, and the codes of realism. This is, however, only part of the shift that Debord describes. As we will see in Sections 4 and 5 of this

³² Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 52-53.

³³ Jay, p. 51, 52-53.

chapter, the growth of the spectacle depends on the *breaking or abolition* of the Cartesian model, which then survived as the production of reality-effects within images, what Crary variously calls ‘the fictions of realism’, “‘naturalistic” pictorial codes’ and, citing Roland Barthes, ‘the referential illusion’.³⁴ Following Crary, I will refer to such instances of reality produced within and as part of the ‘phantom objectivity’ of the commodity-world by Roland Barthes’ term ‘reality-effect’.³⁵ The spectacle’s logic thus emerges as the cooperation of such ‘reality-effects’, which instantiate themselves with what Marx called the ‘phantom objectivity’ of the commodity-form (analogous with what Debord calls ‘pseudo-cyclical’ forms of time) and the disenchanting abstraction that underlies it.

To return for a moment to the literary texts that are the ultimate concern of this study, the interpretative resources of this optic can be seen in the connections it allows us to draw between innovative aspects of narrative form and the complex formation of ideology. The spectacle realises ideology as a form of false objectivity, as ‘a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm—a world view transformed into an objective force’.³⁶ Therefore, what might be conceived of as ‘false’ aspects of form that have an anti-realist or non-realist effect—such as pieces of narrative discourse unrelated to plot, the freezing of narrative time, generic tropes or narrative structures that seem out of place in the overall narrative, events with no explanation connected to conventional character psychology—can be seen as reproducing the antinomic character of such a false objectivity. The contemplative aspect of realism, which we referred to in the Introduction—the kernel of the frozen image coupled with the temporality of plot that is the *récit*—can be seen as the locus of this formal tension: realism moves towards the frozen and contemplative aspect of itself as a means of reasserting or reinscribing its objectivity, but must break its own realism in the

³⁴ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 14, 133, 129.

³⁵ See Barthes, *Rustle*, pp. 141-148.

³⁶ Debord, *Society*, p. 13.

process. Three particular such anti-realist aspects can be identified—sites of tension or breakdown in contemporary realism—that will be examined in Chapters 3, 4 and 5: the freezing and disorientation of narrative time; dilated description that tends towards the visual, taking the image as a locus of depth and meaning; and the subject-object opposition that organises both character psychology and narrative perspective. But to examine these in more detail, we must further the convergence between abstract theory and the history of visual form begun in this chapter.

2.2 'The world of the autonomous image'

As we recall, Debord describes the transition to the society of the spectacle thus: 'All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.'³⁷ We have already discussed in Chapter 1 some of the periodising implications of this phrase, showing how the spectacle thesis emerged in response to a transformation of post-war capitalism away from industrial production and towards consumerism, in which social life as a whole is incorporated into 'the economic realm developing *for itself*'.³⁸ As we have already shown, the advent of the spectacle in effect unfolds an already-existing logic in the process of capitalist development, emerging out of the cell-form of the commodity. But it is worth noting what form of qualitative shift this transition marks. For Debord, it is '[t]he whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail' that presents itself as an accumulation of objects of contemplation.³⁹ The very content of life, as all that can be thought of as lived social practice, is not itself, but something lived and apprehended indirectly, in the form of a semblance. The objects of social practice are not themselves, but merely the illusionistic appearance of themselves. These representations are not, in themselves, mediating functions, references

³⁷ Debord, *Society*, p. 12.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

back to some prior content of social practice that is re-presented through the image. Rather they form ‘a new generality, a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation’, a ‘world of the autonomous image’.⁴⁰ This action of representation is part of what Debord will elsewhere call ‘separation’, as the phrase ‘[i]mages detached from every aspect of life’ suggests.⁴¹ The ‘perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to the world yet at the same time impose themselves as *eminently* perceptible’: the world that presents itself to the senses and to social practice, as the *only* world that can be sensed, is one of images broken off from the world—thus the spectacle’s integrity ‘unites what is separate, but unites it only *in its separateness*’.⁴² Debord directly links this analysis to commodity fetishism, wherein, as we recall, the structure of commodity production and the quality of labour results in the effect of ‘sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social’.⁴³ Debord’s description of the spectacle’s images as ‘*eminently* perceptible’ has, then, a double valence. They are higher in the hierarchy of perceptual objects than the objects that they are images of—as he writes elsewhere, the spectacle is ‘that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges’ and corresponds to the moment when ‘commodities are now *all* that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity’.⁴⁴ But it also implies that their perceptibility is their foremost quality: they are the parts of a structure in which “‘Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear.’”⁴⁵ Every phase of capitalist development, as we noted in our discussion of commodity fetishism in the last chapter, has its form of socially necessary appearance for value, but in the spectacle social production becomes ‘a social organization of appearances [...] the spectacle proclaims the predominance of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, p. 26, 22.

⁴³ Marx, *Capital*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ Debord, *Society*, p. 12, 29.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance.⁴⁶

It is important to note the ontological status and social positioning of these appearances is ambiguous in Debord's work, but can be determined when seen in relationship with the philosophical genealogy on seeing outlined in the last section. Although Debord distinguishes the society of the spectacle from the industrial capitalist society that preceded it, he rejects the notion that it is 'a product of the mass dissemination of images'.⁴⁷ He goes on in a later chapter to criticise the analysis of American historian and social theorist Daniel Boorstin. In *The Image* (1962), Boorstin had analysed the social temporality of post-war American society as composed of 'pseudo-events', negatively shaped by what Debord calls 'the superficial reign of images' and the overdevelopment of 'a technology of image-diffusion'.⁴⁸ For Boorstin, who sees the breakdown of authentic social life composed of genuine events as deriving partly from 'too great an appetite for sensationalism on the part of today's public', with the nature of the subjects that compose the public and their social relations essentially unaltered, 'the technology of reproduction and communication [is] independent of overall industrial development'.⁴⁹ By contrast, Debord emphasises that '[t]he spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship mediated by images'.⁵⁰ It is important to note the echo of Marx's claim in *Capital*, developing his earlier analysis of commodity fetishism, that 'capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things'.⁵¹ For Debord then, the images diffused and circulated through the technologies of post-war everyday life—'from cars to televisions, [which] also serve as weapons for [the spectacle] as it strives to reinforce the isolation of "the lonely crowd"'—are the form that the dumb objects of

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 140-141.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 141

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 12.

⁵¹ Marx, *Capital*, p. 932.

commodity production take in the society of the spectacle.⁵² Capital as the totality of social forces and relations of production appears as an immense collection of individual objects seemingly possessed of fetishistic powers to mediate value between each other. In the society of the spectacle, the whole life of society appears as ‘images-of-the-world’, which have their own impenetrable coherence as ‘a pseudo-world apart’, and as the spectacle makes visible and legible to society the internal aggregate of social relations that produced it, only in alien and unrecognisable form.⁵³ The false totality of social production that is capital, in which social production as it were separates out from itself, becoming an autonomous form that tautologically pursues only its own reproduction and expansion, ‘becomes image’, an ‘eminently perceptible’ and separated world of semblances.⁵⁴ The world constituted by their social relations becomes, Debord writes, ‘*foreign* to them [...] The spectacle is a map of this new world—a map drawn to the scale of the territory itself. In this way the very powers snatched from us reveal themselves to us in their full force.’⁵⁵

It is not the case here that we should assume either some specific congruence between such post-industrial technologies of image-diffusion and this particular historical development of capitalist production—that is, a form of technological determinism in which, as it were, particular image-technologies usher in the society of the spectacle, shaping its social texture—nor that we should describe the spectacle as a congelation of media images concealing some historically unchanged stratum of commodity production. As Debord cautions, the spectacle—its mode of imaging, of making-visible of the alienated content of social practice—‘is not something *added* to the real world—not a decorative element [...] it is the very heart of society’s real unreality.’⁵⁶ He describes ‘news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment’ as ‘specific manifestations’ of the spectacle, as parts

⁵² Debord, *Society*, p. 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

of its form of appearance as it were, but they do not constitute its being.⁵⁷ They enact its logic but do not by themselves form it, because ‘the society of the spectacle is a form that chooses its own technical content’.⁵⁸ The crossing of the historical threshold in which ‘the commodity completes its colonization of social life’ qualitatively changes the nature of the commodity, as we saw in our discussion of reification in the last chapter. The mechanisms of exchange and consumption that use concrete labour as their ultimate raw material unfold their logic of abstraction into the form of the spectacle: ‘whereas all *particular* commodities wear themselves out in the fight, the commodity *as abstract form* continues on its way to absolute self-realization.’⁵⁹ Thus in the economic landscape created by the colonisation of everyday life, the spectacle serves the function of ‘the advanced [...] sector directly responsible for the manufacture of an ever-growing mass of image-objects’ and the mode of appearance of the totality of social production under this new phase, ‘the indispensable packaging for things produced as they are now produced’.⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the role that Debord gives technology and media here is supported by issues of historical lag. The paradigmatic consumer goods of the post-war era (television, cars, suburban housing, leisure) pre-date the turn to the colonisation of everyday life by decades. If these technologies become socially dominant at a particular stage, it is because a historically new development of social logic recruits such technologies to itself into its own, creating what Debord calls a ‘technology of *separation*’.⁶¹

The spectacle elevates seeing and its concomitant condition of *visibility*, Debord suggests, because sight is ‘the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived [...] [it] is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society’s generalized abstraction.’⁶² In a

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 13, 19.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 121.

⁶² Ibid, p. 17.

number of accounts of the history of sight, the separation of sight from the other senses is a crucial event usually associated with the advent of modernity. In a particularly important example for theories of visual media, Marshall McLuhan analysed the advent of pictorial space or perspectivalism and of print-culture in terms of the ‘interruption’ of the unity and ‘interplay’ of the senses in ‘tactile synesthesia.’⁶³ The development of new techniques and media technologies ‘gives new stress or ascendancy to one or another of our senses’, making both the senses and their objects specialised and abstracted from any functional unity—thus for example McLuhan cites the philosopher Bishop Berkeley in 1709 ‘denouncing the absurdity of Newtonian visual space as a mere abstract illusion severed from the sense of touch.’⁶⁴ For McLuhan this world of technical modernity was overwhelmingly visual, dominated by ‘an abstract explicit visual technology of uniform time and uniform continuous space in which “cause” is efficient and sequential.’⁶⁵ Tactility related to what Marx called the ‘material shell’ of commodities that supplied their use value and which served as ‘the form of appearance of human relations hidden behind it’, the abstract and unseen nexus of exchange value.⁶⁶ But in the course of the development of modern capitalism, Debord writes, ‘[t]he process of exchange became indistinguishable from any conceivable utility [...] Starting out as the condottiere of use value, exchange value ended up waging a war that was entirely its own.’⁶⁷ The hegemony of exchange value is what Debord means by describing ‘a world that is no longer directly perceptible’. The operation of the spectacle, therefore, is that of the technics of making such a world perceptible—but perceptible only *as* the abstract, in the form of images and the visible.⁶⁸

⁶³ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p. 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24, 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Marx, *Capital*, p. 185.

⁶⁷ Debord, *Society*, p. 31-32

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

If as Debord writes, the spectacle's 'very *manner of being concrete* is, precisely, abstraction', then the supposedly most abstract sense (sight) would become detached and elevated to a structuring principle of social ontology. The abstract (the commodity, as we saw in the case of Lukács' analysis of reification in Chapter 1) becomes the only available form of the concrete and vice versa. Perception ceases to be a relation between subject and object and detaches to become a new and independent realm of the abstract. What is henceforth perceptible is thus the abstract immediacy of appearances, atomised from the social totality that it could compose and appearing as such as an object to a similarly atomised subject. Meaning and the concrete recedes to the totality of social relations that the spectacular image-object bodies forth, but this totality remains unseen. But this perceptible datum of abstraction, the image, appears *as the concrete*, where what is concrete—namely, the spectacle's 'manufacture of alienation'—appears as the abstract: '[t]his is not to say [...] that the spectacle itself is perceptible to the naked eye [...] The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction.' The spectacle thus creates a whole vast new and privileged realm of visibility, its image-objects neatly reified, occupying quantified space, but they are objects that in their very presence and immediacy make tangible the realm where 'representation takes on an independent existence'.⁶⁹ Social time has no existence except in this tautological accumulation of image-objects. Having, in the previous sections, outlined the historical transformations of modern ways of seeing and the structure of perception, it is necessary now to ask: within the account that these present, what could be the contours of the spectacle today in its relation to contemporary forms of visibility? Moreover, what can the politics of these forms of visibility show us about narrative innovation in the texts we will examine Chapters 3, 4 and 5 by Lerner, McCarthy and DeLillo? In the last chapter and the preceding sections, an attempt was made to outline a periodising schema to

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 22; *ibid*, p. 23, 17; *ibid*, p. 17.

place the arrival of the society of the spectacle in a longer-term frame of, on the one hand, transformations in alienated labour, the commodity-form, capitalist accumulation and temporality, and, on the other hand, transformations in sight and representation and their social, technological and ontological inscription.

In the closing section of the last chapter, I placed the emergence of the theory of the society of the spectacle in relation to the post-war emergence of the new productive order of late capitalism. As I noted there, the Situationist International dissolved in 1972, at the point marked by Fredric Jameson and Ernest Mandel as that of the full emergence of late capitalism as a distinct transformation of the capitalist order. Perry Anderson places 'the origins of postmodernity' in relation to the post-war emergence of a new regime, determining everyday life, of image-technologies, of which the most decisive is the new image-diffusion system of television, which Lefebvre also highlighted: 'image-resistant themselves, the machines pour out a torrent of images [...] The decisive technical environment of the postmodern is constituted by this "Niagara of visual gabble" [...] The new apparatuses [...] are perpetual emotion machines, transmitting discourses that are wall-to-wall ideology, in the strong sense of the term.'⁷⁰ In the penultimate book-length text Debord published in his lifetime, *Comments On The Society Of The Spectacle* (1988), he asserted that, in the years after 'the disturbances of 1968 [...] having nowhere overthrown the existing organisation of the society from which it springs apparently spontaneously, the spectacle has thus continued to gather strength; that is, to spread to the furthest limits on all sides, while increasing its density in the centre'. In the preface to the third French edition of *Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1992, he maintained that '[t]he continued unfolding of our epoch has merely confirmed and further illustrated the theory of the spectacle' and that the 'striving of the spectacle toward modernisation and unification, together with all the other tendencies toward the

⁷⁰ Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 89.

simplification of society, was what in 1989 led the Russian bureaucracy suddenly, and as one man, to convert to the current *ideology* of democracy—in other words, to the dictatorial freedom of the Market, as tempered by the recognition of the rights of Homo Spectator.⁷¹ But it is worth emphasising that, in the transformations of the late capitalist economy and culture after the original publication of *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord did not see any further qualitative historical shift—any periodising alteration—that put an end to the spectacle. This should, at the very least, act as a counterpoint to the numerous analyses that suggested the spectacle thesis was, in the final quarter of the 20th century, already outdated.⁷²

This is particularly interesting for our argument in light of the transformations in forms of imaging in the period since the initial formulation of the spectacle thesis. Jonathan Crary begins his reinterpretation of Debord in *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) with exactly this circumstance, which he terms ‘a transformation in the nature of visuality probably more profound than the break that separates medieval imagery from Renaissance perspective’. Crary does not analyse that break at length in that text, but what is clear is that the rupture in image-life to which he refers—the terms of which we will examine more closely in a moment—is not directly comparable to that which inaugurated the spectacle. This suggests that, as Debord had already emphasised, the spectacle was not merely a phenomenon of the particular logic of technology, ‘a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images.’⁷³ Rather, as Crary would go on to suggest in the later text *24/7* (2013), it is a social logic that presupposes particular technological forms (in the case of the post-war era, the image-

⁷¹ Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990), p. 2-3; Debord, *Society*, p. 7, 9.

⁷² See for example Michel Foucault’s claim in 1974 that ‘[o]ur society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth [...] We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine’; see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 217. Or Jean Baudrillard’s assertion in 1999 that ‘[w]e are no longer dealing with a problematic of lack and alienation, where the referent of the self and the dialectic between subject and object were always to be found [...] For Debord there was always still a chance of disalienation [...] By shifting to a virtual world, we go beyond alienation, into a state of radical deprivation of the Other, or indeed any otherness, alterity, or negativity’; see Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. by Julia Weaver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 66.

⁷³ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 1; Debord, *Society*, p. 13.

diffusion technologies referred to above), which takes them as its form of articulation, rather than vice versa. It may be useful at this point to turn to the interpretations of Crary and others as to how this logic may persist within late capitalism and, if so, what form it takes. Crary's interpretation in particular is useful for how it draws out and concretises specific aspects of Debord's analysis that this Chapter focuses on: the relationship between subject and object; forms of realism and their relation to visibility; and vision's imbrication within a social time of production.

2.3 Flat worlds

As we have already indicated in the last chapter, the emergence of the society of the spectacle is related to the unfolding of an emergent logic over the longer term of the history of industrial and late capitalism. That larger history is outside of the scope of our enquiry. But in order to make clear how the status of the visible in the period oriented by the Cartesian model of vision has been transformed in the society of the spectacle, it is necessary to briefly point to one or two aspects of that history—the points of emergence that Jonathan Crary calls the 'prehistory' of the spectacle. It will then be possible to historically trace the visual logic of the spectacle in the form of the three aspects mentioned at the end of the last section.

Many histories of art and media conceive of the visual cultures of industrial and late capitalism as essentially continuing the regime of Cartesian perspectivalism outlined above. To give an example, in one of the standard histories of photography Beaumont Newhall begins from the camera obscuras used by 16th-century painters to produce perspectival images as guides for their easel paintings.⁷⁴ Photography and the other lens-based media that grew from

⁷⁴ Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the present*, 2nd edn (New York: Museum of the Modern Art, 1982), p. 9. For other examples of this historiographical assumption in the literature, see: Michael Frizot (ed.), *The New History of Photography*, trans. by Susan Bennett, Liz Clegg, John Crook et al (Köln: Könemann, 1998); Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd edn (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997); Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002); Helmut

it, then, is supposed to continue the history of perspectival visuality driven only by what Crary calls 'a vague collective drive to higher and higher standards of verisimilitude'. Crary has posited, by contrast, that whilst this form—what he refers to as the 'camera obscura model' of vision—persisted until at least the end of the 18th century, a major rupture with it occurred in European science and culture in the first half of the 19th century, particularly in the 1810s and 1820s. Both the new applications of realistic, referential pictorial space in photography and cinema and the break with perspective in modernist painting of the 1870s onwards then are 'overlapping components of a single social surface on which the modernization of vision had begun decades earlier.'⁷⁵ This rupture, which affected the nature of the subject, representation and the techniques of the configuration of social discipline and production, was then the precondition for the emergence of the new forms of mass, industrialised visual culture (film, television, advertising and so on) that form the architecture of the spectacle. Perhaps the most important of the consequences of this rupture for our argument, which we will look at most closely in this section, is the sundering of the subject/object relation that, in the model of vision derived from Descartes, underwrote the significance of representations of the object-world.

As we have seen, the Cartesian model posited as one of its necessary conditions a specific physical relation between perceiving subject and perceived object. Descartes, we recall, stated that light travels in straight lines from objects to the subject, forming, as diagrams in the *Optics* showed, images on the back of the eye. Building on this, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), John Locke had described human consciousness in the terms of a camera obscura, with a few specific apertures providing 'external visible Resemblances, or Ideas of things without' on the surfaces of this '*dark Room*'.⁷⁶ Perspectival consciousness was

and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography : from the Ealiest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century up to 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).

⁷⁵ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 110; *ibid*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 163.

conceived then in terms of a physically constructed space with specific paths of spatial movement for images, with clear demarcations between the subject, with its capacity to see and understand, and the object that is seen.

The model that emerged, particularly in philosophy, physiology and psychology, in the 19th century proposed instead a fundamentally arbitrary relation between the object *qua* perception and the subject. Instead of perception taking place in ‘an inner space or a theater of representations’, it was now a process that was ‘increasingly exteriorized, the viewing body and its objects begin[ning] to constitute a single field on which inside and outside are confounded.’⁷⁷ Johannes Müller’s physiological research, published in the *Elements of Physiology* (1833-1840), suggested that light sources were only one among a number of means by which the sensation of seeing light could be produced:

The experience of light becomes severed from any stable point of reference or from any source or origin around which a world could be constituted or apprehended. Sight here has been specialized and separated certainly, but it no longer resembles any classical models. The theory of specific nerve energies presents the outlines of a visual modernity in which the “referential illusion” is unsparingly laid bare. The very absence of referentiality is the ground on which new instrumental techniques will construct for an observer a new “real” world. It is a question, in the early 1830s, of a perceiver whose very empirical nature renders identities unstable and mobile, and for whom sensations are interchangeable.⁷⁸

This notion of seeing as an interface between subject and object in which the specific nature or qualities of objects are denatured, made equivalent, recalls Marx’s analysis of

⁷⁷ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 73.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 91.

commodity fetishism. Lukács, as we recall from the last chapter, had shown how the commodity-form ‘stamps its whole imprint on the consciousness of man’. As we shall see in a moment, Crary describes this reconstruction of the subject/object relation as the preparation of a subject and a set of operations—most obviously that of vision—that can be made productive in new ways. This process, which involves, at one level, the identification of interchangeable, quantified procedures within individual physiology and psychology and their maximisation, reorganisation and streamlining, has affinities with the reifying discipline of Taylorism, in which, as Lukács wrote, ‘the modern “psychological” analysis of the work-process’ of commodity production ‘extends [...] this rational mechanisation right into the worker’s “soul”’.⁷⁹ At some level then, this recomposition of the subject is an introduction of capital’s relentless logic of deracination to the structure of perception. The forms that once guaranteed coherence, meaning and access to reality in representation as a relation between subject and object are abolished.

What results from these transformations is the notion of an ‘innocent eye’, a pure form of sight ‘uncluttered by the weight of historical codes and conventions of seeing and mimetic codes’.⁸⁰ If sensation was undifferentiated in its translation of stimuli then the notion that vision was focused on the recognition of the resemblances of a world external to the subject, which underlay the notions of realism embodied in Descartes’ model, was negated. Seeing became its own capacity with its own autonomous register of representational forms and sensations, decoupled from existing meanings. Physiological research of the period on nerve stimulation reinforced this. Müller, building on the work of the Scottish physiologist Charles Bell, developed the thesis that, as Jonathan Sterne puts it, ‘each sense is functionally and mechanically distinct from the others’, even literally transmitting impulses along separate sets

⁷⁹ Lukács, *History*, p. 100; *ibid*, p. 88.

⁸⁰ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 96.

of nerves.⁸¹ The embodied subject, writes Crary, was increasingly seen as ‘the active, autonomous producer of his or her own visual experience’. Thus for example art critic John Ruskin suggested in the 1850s that vision was to be understood as a perceptive capacity of attention to the object-world prior to any sense of concrete form or any instrumentalisation: ‘The perception of solid Form is entirely a matter of experience. We see nothing but flat colours [...] The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify’.⁸² In his earlier volume *Modern Painters* (1843) Ruskin suggested that the anti-perspectival semi-abstraction of JMW Turner’s late paintings, composed of vast, flat washes of colour that resemble specific objects and landscape features only with difficulty, were actually instances of a more intense form of seeing that discerned in nature ‘a peculiar character of exquisitely studied form bestowed on every wave and line of fall [...] it is this variety of definite character which Turner always aims at, rejecting, as much as possible everything that conceals or overwhelms it’.⁸³ Representation becomes an independent capacity that penetrates the surface-level appearances of the object-world captured by perspectival painting to a protean visibility beneath any given appearance. But the visible is thus at once—in a dialectic that we will return to—open, in the sense that it is a given capacity proper to physiological embodiment, and sealed off, in the sense that visibility or representation is no longer necessarily a condition connected to any tangible, material objects.

This notion later became a central focus for theories of modernist art. To give the most influential example, in his writings on modernist painting from the 1930s onwards, the art

⁸¹ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Origin of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 59-60.

⁸² Crary, *Techniques*, p. 69; John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin Vol. XV*, ed. by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1904), p. 27.

⁸³ Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin Vol. III*, ed. by E.T. Cook and George Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903), p. 553.

critic Clement Greenberg suggested that art practice had become ‘a question of purely optical experience as against optical experience modified or revised by tactile associations’. For Greenberg this purely optical painting, which refused any of illusionistic art’s cues for reading into the depth of pictorial space, was identified with ‘the ineluctable flatness of the support’, the material limitation, the dull facticity, that perspectivalism had ‘dissembled’ through Renaissance art theorist Leon Battista Alberti’s theory of the picture plane as window giving onto continuous space.⁸⁴ This flatness of representation was appropriate to an object-world whose social and phenomenological texture capitalist modernity had thinned and decomposed beyond reconstitution. As T.J. Clark writes, the pioneering impressionist painter ‘[Édouard] Manet *found* flatness more than invented it; he saw it around him in the world he knew.’⁸⁵ (See Fig. 1) More than that, ‘the fact of flatness was compelling and tractable for art [...] because it was made to stand for something: some particular and substantial set of qualities which took their place in a picture of the world’ that could not be found in the social world except in commodified, empty form.⁸⁶ This attention to opticality and the bare specificity of its medium, Greenberg held, was the main instance of modernist painting’s ‘use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself’—that is, to conduct an ‘immanent criticism’ of existing forms of representation by tarrying with the mere objecthood of the commodity-world it represented.⁸⁷ Modernist painting’s flatness, its critical enactment of the procedures of representation, discloses the congruity between representation and the blank, meaningless materiality of objects that is the latent content of the commodity-form: art’s representations, with their privileged relationship with the spectator, are only one object among others. Modernism’s forms of representation took on these other representations—capitalist society’s necessary forms of appearance—in the

⁸⁴ Clement Greenberg, ‘Modernist Painting’, in *Modern Art & Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Francis Francina and Charles Harrison (London: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 5-10 (p. 7); *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁵ Clark, *Painting*, p. 165.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸⁷ Greenberg, p. 5.

modes of irony and negation. The modern visual forms that still appealed to depth and fullness, Greenberg suggested, were 'kitsch' undifferentiated from commodities: 'using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture', by which he means the artistic avant-garde, kitsch 'cultivates [...] insensibility', a now-standardised and reified form of sight.⁸⁸



Figure 1: Édouard Manet, *The Monet Family in their Garden at Argenteuil* (1874), oil on canvas.

In a passage of the *EPM*, Marx had suggested that alienated property relations performed exactly this kind of disarticulation and specialisation of the structure of human perception. Perception is socialised insofar as it mediates or 'appropriates' the objects of a social world, insofar as 'objective reality universally becomes for man in society the reality of man's essential powers, becomes human reality'.⁸⁹ The sensorium of socialised human beings is restructured, just as the objects to which sight provides a relation are themselves stamped

⁸⁸ Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) p. 10.

⁸⁹ Marx, *Writings*, p. 351, 352.

with the imprint of alienation: 'An object is different for the *eye* from what it is for the *ear*, and the eye's object *is* different from the *ear's*. The peculiarity of each essential power is precisely its *peculiar essence*, and thus also the peculiar mode of its objectification'.⁹⁰ But if those objects are the alienated apparition of the labour of the subject itself, 'all the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of *all* these senses—the sense of *having*'.⁹¹ In such circumstances the subject will 'lose himself in that object', in the sense of dispossessing themselves, giving their being as subjects over to the sensed object. The senses now only count insofar as the subject has economic control over the properties of the object. The abstraction of economic life, in which the subject can have no concrete relation of mediating practice with the object in its necessary form of appearance, existing instead as an overpowering and alien apparition, enters perception: 'Sense which is a prisoner of crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense. For a man who is starving the human form of food does not exist, only its abstract form exists'.⁹² An analogy can be seen here with the increasing abstraction and fragmentation of labour as mediating practice, under conditions of the division of labour, which we discussed in the last chapter: the senses can no longer co-operate in a concrete relation to the sensuous objects of the world but can and must carry out their own specialised tasks, which are quite different from their previous ones. Fredric Jameson describes this as part of a more general process in capitalist modernity whereby the 'now isolated broken bits and pieces of the older unities acquire a certain autonomy of their own, a semi-autonomous coherence which, not merely a reflex of capitalist reification and rationalization, also in some measure serves to compensate for the dehumanization of experience reification brings with it. As sight, Jameson writes, 'becomes a separate activity in its own right, it acquires new objects that are themselves the products of a process of

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 353.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 352.

⁹² Ibid, p. 353.

abstraction and rationalization which strips the experience of the concrete of such attributes as color, spatial depth, texture, and the like, which in their turn undergo reification.⁹³ This autonomisation of vision and imaging was, in Crary's account, a process that took two trajectories: its compensatory function was twinned with a 'disciplinary' one, that moved 'toward the increasing standardisation and regulation of the observer [...] towards forms of power that depended on the abstraction and formalization of vision'.⁹⁴ I would like to argue, by contrast, that this double nature of the new regime of images is not a matter, as Crary writes, of separate, 'overlap[ping]' functions, but a dialectical tension within a single qualitative historical development. Each one follows the other as its necessary consequence and contrary: the reformatting of the subject and object by commodity reification—their form of appearance as the natural coordinates of the society of the spectacle—is untenable without this new heightened richness in visibility, what Jameson calls 'the Utopian vocation of the newly reified sense, the mission of this heightened and autonomous language of color to restore at least a symbolic experience of libidinal gratification to a world drained of it, a world of extension, gray and merely quantifiable'.⁹⁵ Both functions are present in Debord's account of spectacle: both the locus of quantified value and illusions of depth, meaning, richness, vividness. And, as we shall see, both of these aspects are related to the development of realism and temporality in the same long-term period.

2.3.i Spurious depths

The spread of generalised reification, to reiterate, strips social forms and experience of their depth, integrity and substance. In an enactment of this same logic, the subject/object

⁹³ Jameson, *Unconscious*, p. 48.

⁹⁴ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 150.

⁹⁵ Ibid; Jameson, *Unconscious*, p. 48.

relation that had, through the orders of quantification and ‘objective’ rationality, guaranteed the legibility and significance of the world—the relation between signifying image and signified referent—represented in seeing is negated. But as Marx saw, capitalism also brought into being immense historical novelties, ‘industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected’, manifested as new forms of social production in the guise of commodities.⁹⁶ The Retort collective describe this logic, which culminates, in their view, in its purest form in the “consumer society” of late capitalism or the society of the spectacle:

it offers its adepts a seeming solution to the disenchantment of the world: it promises to fill the life-world with meanings again, with magical answers to deep wishes, with models of having and being and understanding (undergoing) Time itself. It is the false *depth* of consumerism that drives its opponents to distraction [...] It promises a world in which possessable and discardable objects do the work of desiring and comprehending for us, forming our wishes, giving shape to our fantasies, making matter signify.⁹⁷

This is, at the most obvious level, a clarification and restatement of the analysis presented in the tradition that informed *The Society Of The Spectacle*, an account of which we presented in the last chapter. What is necessary at this point is, firstly, to briefly show how capitalism’s artificial production of new semblances of richness and significance, in the lifeworld it composes from commodities, at once gives its privileged operations of seeing and representation a newly intense role and places them under a new pressure.

⁹⁶ Marx, ‘Speech at the Anniversary of the *People’s Paper*’, in Tucker, pp. 577-578 (p. 577).

⁹⁷ Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2006), p1.7. Retort has a shifting membership, but *Afflicted Powers* (2005) lists its co-authors as Iain Boal, TJ Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts.

Debord, we recall, described the spectacle as the ‘advanced sector of society’ responsible for the intensified production of an increasing mass of ‘image-objects’.⁹⁸ Although he disavows any complete identification between the spectacle and ‘mass media’, the technologies of image-diffusion that colonised the post-war capitalist lifeworld can be seen as the primary site where these image-objects were produced—the place where the disembodied form of the commodity, in which eventually ‘use value has no existence outside the illusory riches of augmented survival’, establishes its dominion.⁹⁹ It would be useful, then, to glance back to the historical phase in which these technologies and their accompanying function appeared in embryonic form—that is, the very period that Crary locates as the ‘prehistory’ of the spectacle. It was during this period that the forms of ‘mechanical reproduction’ described in the 1930s by Walter Benjamin as having ‘around 1900 [...] reached a standard that permitted it to reproduce all known works of art’—photography, lithographic printing, optical devices that animated motion, early cinema—came into being.¹⁰⁰ These technologies themselves are not the focus of this section; rather, what I am interested in here is an emerging general logic of image-production: the way in which a mass, industrialised visual culture arises as the dialectical contrary of this break in ‘the referential illusion’, with the production of image-objects as the unstable production of new meanings, appearances of referentiality and depth, what Roland Barthes calls ‘reality-effects’.¹⁰¹ In this manner, capitalism enshrines, in the spectacle, image-consumption as a naturalised lifeworld. Meaning and legibility now only reside in the image-commodities whose totality of integrity and coherence remains just out of reach of the subject. Image-commodities thus enact a standardisation of vision and visibility precisely in making it productive.

⁹⁸ Debord, *Society*, p. 16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 3, 1935-1938*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott et al (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 102.

¹⁰¹ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 129.

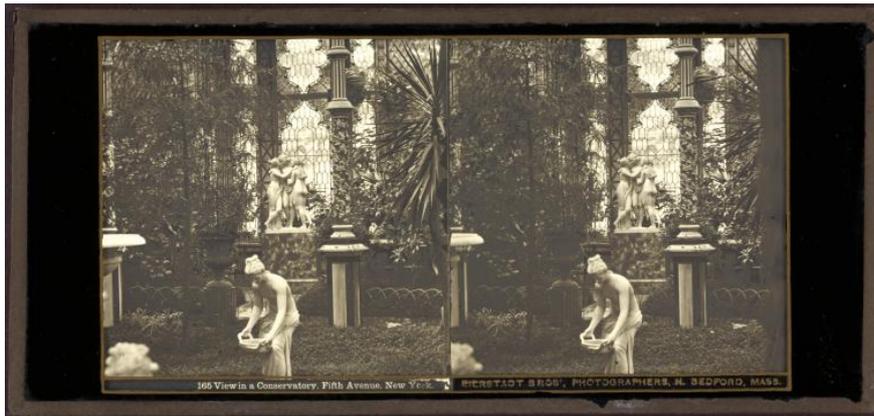


Figure 2: Bierstadt Brothers, *View in Conservatory, Fifth Avenue* (1854), stereoscopic card

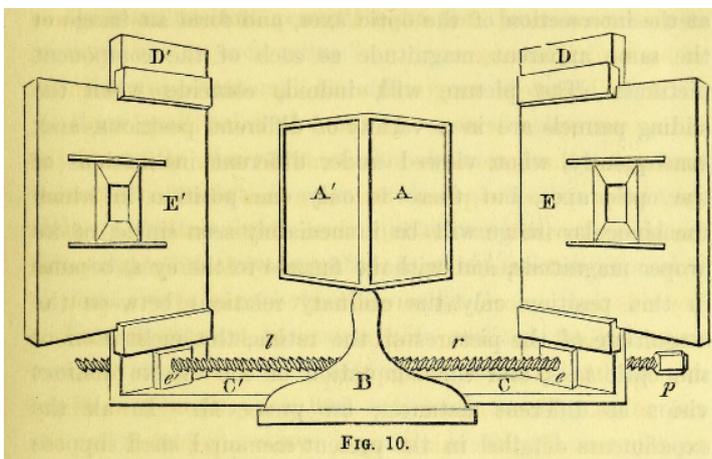


Figure 3: Wheatstone stereoscope, from David Brewster, *The Stereoscope* (London: John Murray, 1856), p. 59.

This social logic can be observed in nascent form in technologies that emerged from the physiological research and models of abstract vision discussed in the last section. Cray refers for example to the stereoscope, which went through several distinct models between the 1830s and 1860s but declined in popularity due to innovations in photography that made it more available to a mass audience (most obviously gelatin silver printing and Eastman Kodak roll film). The working principle remained the same: the viewer looked through two separated lenses or apertures, one for each eye, at duplicates of the same image (see Fig. 2), synthesising them into a single 3-dimensional image. The foregrounding of physical binocular vision makes clear its preconditioning break with the Cartesian model, with its single abstract viewing point. The model invented by Charles Wheatstone operated by having the viewer look at two angled mirrors placed at 45 degrees to images either side of the viewer's head, demonstrating

how arbitrary its referential mechanics were. (See Fig. 3.) The device forced the viewer to adopt a specific viewpoint, as in perspectivalist painting—the effect was lost if they moved their head away from the lenses, and it reproduced the sense of looking at the image as if through a transparency—but necessarily mediated vision, investing the capacity to see not in the body but in technology, mobile and detachable from the subject. The stereoscope offered a form of optical realism that depended less than perspectival painting on the distance needed for the showing of spatial recession. Crary writes, it ‘provided a form in which “vividness” of effect increased with the apparent proximity of the viewer [...] Thus the desired effect of the stereoscope was not simply likeness, but immediate, apparent *tangibility*.’¹⁰² But this tangibility was, unlike that conjured by post-Renaissance painting, abstract, ‘a purely visual experience.’¹⁰³ The optical comes to replace the ‘real’. This machine designed to manufacture a ‘naturalistic’ vision has the effect, Crary writes, of aggregating flat, unreal objects: its effect is of ‘an assemblage of local zones of three-dimensionality, zones imbued with a hallucinatory clarity, but which when taken together never coalesce into a homogeneous field.’¹⁰⁴ Depth is organised ‘as a sequence of receding planes [...] We perceive individual elements as flat, cutout forms arrayed either nearer or further from us.’¹⁰⁵ The disenchanted space of perspectival painting had nonetheless created an order of significance and integrity through its rational, quantifiable apparition for the senses. By contrast the space here, whilst contained within the naturalising frame of the stereoscope, is fractured, uneven, unstable. The device, Crary writes, turns the ‘apparently passive observer’ of images into a machinic component, with their ‘specific physiological capacities [...] into a producer of forms of verisimilitude.’¹⁰⁶ And what the observer produced, again and again, was the effortless transformation of dreary parallel images of flat stereo cards into a tantalizing apparition of depth.’ The objects themselves

¹⁰² Crary, *Techniques*, p. 123-4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 125.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 132.

remain in their facticity flat, disenchanting, but 'each time, the mass-produced and monotonous cards are transubstantiated into a compulsory and seductive vision of the "real".'¹⁰⁷ The effect that Crary describes here, of 'a derangement of the conventional functioning of optical cues', is something we will return to in a moment, converging as it does with the appearance of the spectacle as at once tangible and impossibly distant.¹⁰⁸

Consideration of these now-obscure technologies is useful insofar as it estranges the function of those forms, governed by and productive of new kinds of 'realism', which did become dominant, such as photography and cinema. These technologies in turn underpinned the media that became hegemonic in the era of the society of the spectacle: cathode ray technology, centralised image broadcasting, graphic monitors, print and environmental advertising and so on. For the moment, a few remarks are necessary on the paradoxes of the image within these new forms of technological realism.

Photography took as an a priori assumption the ideal of pure seeing that we discussed in the last section, becoming what Roland Barthes calls, in 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964), 'the myth of photographic "naturalness": the scene *is there*, captured mechanically, not humanly (the mechanical is here a guarantee of objectivity).' But as Barthes implies, instead of making photography an example of abstract, non-referential vision, this condition turned into an ideology of photographic realism. The photograph seems to display transparently a reality to which its representation refers; as he puts it, '[o]f all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a "denoted" message, a message which totally exhausts its mode of existence.'¹⁰⁹ Unlike the stereoscope, whose claim to place the spectator in spatial relation to a reality 'out there' was, as we have seen, uncertain, the photograph, Crary writes, 'perpetuated the fiction that the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 125.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Barthes, *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 44; *ibid*, p. 18.

“free” subject of the camera obscura was still viable.’¹¹⁰ The camera—and this is true also of the cinematograph, developed during the latter half of the 19th century and patented by the Lumières in 1895—functioned as ‘an apparatus fundamentally independent of the spectator, yet which masqueraded as a transparent and incorporeal intermediary between observer and world.’¹¹¹ Its design, which in technical terms replicates that of the camera obscura—light entering through a lensed aperture to project an image onto a surface—allowed it to easily produce images that ‘seemed a continuation of older “naturalistic” pictorial codes.’¹¹² But these mimetic codes were an artificial addition to what was an abstract, machinically produced form of seeing. As Barthes noted, the minimal conditions for producing photographs—‘framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed’— which appeared to be denotative (that is, the simplest and most literal meaning of a term or piece of information), ‘effectively belong to the plane of connotation’, that is to the order of discourse that imposes meaning onto the image from outside.¹¹³

The artificial, technical forms of referential signification thus produced are therefore naturalised as simply a fact of the object-world that the camera discloses. Indeed, this naturalised visibility, at one level, *is* the meaning of the photograph. The photograph’s meaning oscillates, as Allen Sekula suggests, ‘within the terms of a kind of binary folklore’: on the one hand, the connotative use of images in, for example, advertising and publicity, and on the other the formalist and modernist art discourse of pure visibility.¹¹⁴ Sekula relates these two poles of the image’s meaning to Lukács’ ‘antinomies of bourgeois thought’, which he glosses as ‘objectivism and subjectivism.’¹¹⁵ But in practice, despite the fact of the image’s

¹¹⁰ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 133.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹¹³ Barthes, *Image*, p. 44.

¹¹⁴ Allen Sekula, ‘On the Invention of Photographic Meaning’, in *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1982), pp. 84-109 (p. 108, 100).

¹¹⁵ Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), p. xv.

meaning emerging from its embedding in a network of discourses or signification, any connotative signification would be impossible without its armature of 'pure' visibility. The visual signifier, despite its artificial, unstable nature, could not operate as a signifier without what Jacqueline Rose calls its 'purity [...] the smoothness of the visual image'.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Colin McCabe argues that the 'realism' of narrative fiction film as it evolved in the 20th century, in common with the 19th century novel, produced itself by making its 'metalanguage' (the organisation of the representational apparatus by which the text is produced), 'transparent'. He clarifies: 'Transparent in the sense that the metalanguage is not regarded as material; it is dematerialised to achieve perfect representation'. The 'reality-effects' of the spectacle make themselves transparent in precisely the manner of the commodity fetish: appearances seem to give onto a natural, merely existent object-world, to 'let the identity of things shine through'.¹¹⁷ Realism, a relation of representational transparency and hermeneutic privilege, comes to be identified with the spatialised time of the commodity. Indeed, it is precisely such a slow time of the image that Barthes marks out as the guarantor of the real in fiction since the 19th century: what he calls '[i]nsignificant notation', narrative information that seems to exceed the needs of narrative itself (or what Fredric Jameson, as we saw in the Introduction, calls the *récit*) and hence dilate the story time of the text, act as signifiers of the *real* as such, of a transparent access to the referent: 'Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's little door finally say nothing but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of "the real" (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified'.¹¹⁸ It may be the case that, as Victor Burgin claims, '[t]reating the photograph as an object-text, "classic" semiotics'—he refers here to early works such as Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* (1964)—'showed that the notion of the "purely visual" *image* is nothing but an Edenic fiction.' But, as we have seen, such fictions, in the form of ideology,

¹¹⁶ Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 230.

¹¹⁷ Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian theses', *Screen* 15:2 (1974), pp. 7-27 (p. 8).

¹¹⁸ Barthes, *Rustle*, p. 148.

have their own power. The spectacle, Debord wrote, is ‘ideology in material form’ or ‘a world view transformed into an objective force’: it is a realm in which the notion of autonomous visibility, ‘cleared utopianically of its connotations’, as Barthes writes of the photograph, ‘radically objective, or, in the last analysis, innocent’, dominates the world’s ontology.¹¹⁹

2.4 Spectacular time

In the last chapter, we examined the forms of temporality that emerge in industrial and late capitalism as they appear in the critical theories that informed *The Society of the Spectacle*. As the question of mediation by image technology is crucial here—particularly with regards to the implications of this theoretical framework for our readings of the contemporary literary texts that form the core of this study—a further clarification of their place in our argument may be useful before we begin to examine the relationship of the image and temporality in late capitalism, through the lens of the spectacle. As should be clear already from our discussion in the third and the previous sections of this chapter, and the long tracing of the social logic of abstraction in the last chapter, the problem is not that of technology intervening in and distorting vision or—in this case—the social form of temporality that structures images. Debord makes this clear in his rejection of the notion of the spectacle as merely ‘a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images.’¹²⁰ The impersonal structures of technology do not determine in a top-down manner the structure and capacities of the human sensorium. Rather, it would be better to consider the subject as one component among others in a wider field of productive visibility, capable, as Crary writes, of ‘multiple connections with other agencies and machines.’¹²¹ The possibilities of media are indeed

¹¹⁹ Victor Burgin, ‘Looking at Photographs’, in *Thinking Photography*, pp. 142-153 (p. 144); *ibid.*, p. 149; Barthes, *Image*, p. 42.

¹²⁰ Debord, *Society*, p. 13.

¹²¹ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 94.

determined in part by their use and position in social production: as Crary points out, key media of the post-war era, most obviously television, were placed within a ‘vast interlocking of corporate, military and state control’ soon after their invention, combined with ‘the complete vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition within the film industry and its amalgamation with the corporate conglomerates’, blocking some political and formal functions for these media almost a priori.¹²² By the same token, I would not suggest that the logic of technology in some sense merely reflect, as a superstructural after-effect, that of an economic base. Technologies may have, in their design and operation, their own functional logics which abet or unfold those of the economic base, as Debord’s remark that the spectacle ‘chooses its own technical content’ suggests. But the forces of production could find no development or expression without the capacities of technology—in an 1863 letter to Engels, Marx describes ‘the invention of gun-powder, the compass and printing’ alongside ‘the *clock* and the mill’ as the ‘necessary pre-requisites for bourgeois development.’¹²³ Therefore, whilst our argument posits commodity fetishism as the determining overall logic of the social field of the visible, it would not be correct to point to any of these elements as a final instance that overrides all of the others. Rather, technology is one element in relationships of mutual dialectical determination with others. Indeed, the separation of components is an important aspect of the ideology of the spectacle: in social practice vision cannot help but be technological, interfacing with a variety of machines, but it equally appears as fully natural, positioned in relation to an object-world of commodities and technologies that are simply ‘out there’.

For Debord, images *are* the instantiation of time and, as we saw in the final section of the last chapter, the monadic instance of the totality of social production alienated in

¹²² Crary, ‘Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory’, in McDonough 2002, pp. 455-466 (p. 458).

¹²³ Debord, *Society*, p. 19; Marx and Engels, *Letters on ‘Capital’*, trans. by Andrew Drummond (London: New Park Publications, 1983), p. 83-84.

commodities. That temporality is composed from what Debord calls the 'irreversible time' produced by secularisation and the development of capitalist modernity. In his rather telegraphed account in chapter five of *Society of the Spectacle*, the global expansion of capitalism has the effect of merging local temporalities into a single, irreversible time: '[w]hat appears the world over as *the same day* is merely the time of economic production—time cut up into equal abstract fragments. Unified irreversible time still belongs to the world market—and, by extension, to the world spectacle.' Constructed as the time of a 'second nature' of capitalist technology, 'constructed by means of alienated labor', this abstract, homogeneous time preserves 'the natural vestiges of cyclical time, while also using these as models on which to base new but homologous variants: day and night, weekly work and weekly rest, the cycle of vacations and so on.'¹²⁴ Pseudo-cyclical time thereby combines, in a non-dialectical relation, an abstract continuity of time and mystified instances of slowness, stoppage and division of time.

In the last section we discussed the place of photography and its forms of temporality and realism in the prehistory of the spectacle. The photograph obviously constitutes a stoppage of time: the camera freezes appearance as a tiny fraction of time; the image shrinks from the diachronic to the synchronic. Crary describes photography in its expansion during the 19th century as 'homologous' with money as 'forms of social power [...] They are equally totalizing systems for binding and unifying all subjects within a single global network of valuation and desire.' Homology is perhaps not quite the correct relation to posit between the two, but certainly the photograph subjects time and the image to the logic of seriality and equivalence that belongs to the money-form—what Gilles Deleuze calls 'any-instant-whatever', which he posits as the temporal category of '[t]he modern scientific revolution' and industrial

¹²⁴ Debord, *Society*, p. 107; *ibid*, p. 111.

rationality.¹²⁵ In the photograph is enacted what Jean-Louis Comolli calls the ‘development of the mechanical manufacture of objects which determines by a faultless force of repetition their ever identical reproduction [...] The mechanical opens out and multiplies the visible.’¹²⁶

But as we have seen, this form of temporal isolation does not exist on its own. As Crary notes, the dialectic of this form becomes clearer in Eadweard Muybridge’s studies of animal locomotion, begun in 1877. Using a mechanism whereby cameras exposed film at regular temporal and spatial intervals along the path of a moving animal or human, Muybridge broke up a single movement into a sequence of still images. (See Fig. 4.) In doing so, as Rebecca Solnit puts it, he performed the ‘invention of the essentials of motion-picture technology.’¹²⁷ The disintegration of the subject/object relation into abstraction affects temporality: Crary comments that ‘[t]he breakthrough of Muybridge’s work in 1878 was its deployment of machinic high speeds for the creation of perceptual units beyond the capacities of human vision, and their subsequent abstract arrangement outside the terms of any subjective experience.’¹²⁸ Vision, as a generative capacity that involves but isn’t restricted to the human sensorium, is adjusted to orders of time that not only have no reference in the human lifeworld but even in its physiological components (most obviously, the eye). Muybridge presents a paradox which will reoccur in the examination of spectacular time: *relentless speed or activity enacts or underpins stasis or extreme slowness*. This mutual imbrication of contradictory temporality is a crucial point, which will be important for our analyses of narrative time in Chapters 3 and 4. Sequentiality and flow in Muybridge’s animal locomotion studies—he arranged them in grids that can be followed left to right—is achieved through an action of freezing and fragmentation that turns the human body to a diachronic object, even as

¹²⁵ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 13; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 4.

¹²⁶ Jean-Louis Comolli, ‘Machines of the Visible’, in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (London: St Martin’s Press, 1980), pp. 121-142 (p. 123).

¹²⁷ Rebecca Solnit, *Motion Studies: Time, Space & Eadweard Muybridge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 3.

¹²⁸ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 140.

it ‘invests bodies in depth’, as Michel Foucault said in another context.¹²⁹ But, as Crary comments, the logic unfolded by Muybridge’s images participates in the process that David Harvey has called ‘time-space compression’, which he identifies as intensifying in the second half of the 19th century, with the expansion of railroads and communications technology.¹³⁰ Marx had posited that ‘[t]he more production comes to rest on exchange value [...] the more important do the physical conditions of exchange—the means of communication and transportation—become for the costs of circulation.’ The reproduction and expansion of capital obligates ‘the annihilation of space by time’, as the realisation of abstract labour-time in the form of commodities requires the enormous shrinking of space by infrastructure and new forms of technological speed.¹³¹ Thus Muybridge’s photography, despite its apparent breakup of the continuity of the time of the image, rejoins it in another, abstract form: ‘It announces a vision compatible with the smooth surface of a global marketplace and its new pathways of exchange.’ Time in some sense continues in this field of global capital, which is also a global field of images, ‘an instantaneity of vision from which space is deleted’, but its form of appearance is as a spatial distribution of equivalent instances of disarticulated time.¹³²



Figure 4: Eadweard Muybridge, *Attitudes and Poses of the Human Figure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), trans. by Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin/

of Animals in Motion (1879), albumen silver print

A result of this relation between stillness and continuity is that the articulation of time as a continuity does not solve the problem of frozen appearance the photograph presents. Major currents in film theory and filmmaking practice had emphasised the fluidity and integrity of time in the moving image. The formal model or set of ‘aesthetic norms’, as David Bordwell puts it, that are usually called ‘classical Hollywood cinema’ posited the narrative time it presented to the viewer as a unity.¹³³ Developing from the mid-1900s to the 1920s, a whole series of formal conventions rose to prominence within American filmmaking that would come to dominate the world film market. Jane M. Gaines describes it thus: ‘the protagonist-driven story film, valued for the way it achieves closure by neatly resolving all of the enigmas it raises [...] by using these narrative and imagistic economies it is able to convince viewers that it is one and the same with the physical world’.¹³⁴ The film’s techniques and components were subordinated to and shaped by what Bordwell calls ‘a specific sort of narrative causality’. Directors would ‘adjust time to fit the cause-and-effect progress of the story’ through a single temporally integral sequence of events.¹³⁵ Script conventions and editing techniques established the appearance of a temporally and spatially stable diegesis between shots or

¹³³ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, ebook edn (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.

¹³⁴ Jane M. Gaines, ‘Introduction: The Family Melodrama of Classical Narrative Cinema’, in *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars*, ed. by Jane Gaines (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

¹³⁵ Bordwell, Staiger et al, p. 11; David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 11th edn (New York: McGraw Hill, 2017), p. 98.

scenes. These features would include the ‘match-on-action’ cut, in which ‘a character starts to stand up in one shot and continues the movement in the next shot’, eyeline matching, in which characters are positioned in the frame in two linked shots in such a way that each appears to ‘return that look’ the other gives, and crosscutting, pioneered by DW Griffith in the 1900s, composed of ‘alternating shots of [...] simultaneous actions’, that establish the temporal continuity of the action as well as emphasising narrative causality, as ‘the visual tempo of the cutting [...] parallels the dramatic tempo of the action photographed’.¹³⁶ These techniques came to constitute the ‘realism’ of the image-world of narrative cinema, precisely because they minimised themselves: they form what Noël Burch calls a ‘zero point of cinematic style’, constituting the appearance of continuity through making themselves transparent.¹³⁷ Such a conception of temporal fluidity affected film even outside of the Hollywood model. Thus for example André Bazin had championed those filmmakers who preserved ‘a respect for the continuity of dramatic space and, of course, of its duration’, and what he called ‘real time, in which things exist, along with the duration of the action’.¹³⁸ Realism thus participated in a formal rearrangement of time that linked fluidity or continuity with an underlying stoppage or freezing. As we will see in the following chapters, this aspect of realist temporality also plays an important role in literary texts. What we described in the Introduction as a kernel of the image in realism—what Jameson calls the ‘present’ of affect, allied with the slow narrative time of description—enacts precisely this static or elided time that nonetheless permits narrative as flowing duration.

Muybridge himself was easily able to set his images in motion, through the use of a device similar to the phenakistiscope or zoetrope known as the ‘Zöopraxiscope’, without thereby

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 46; Susan Hayward, *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 91; David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 3rd edn (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), p. 67.

¹³⁷ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. by Helen R. Lane (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), p. 15.

¹³⁸ André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume I*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 34, 39.

ultimately changing their character.¹³⁹ Burch has described Muybridge's animated photographs as 'at the antipodes' of the style of classical Hollywood films but suggested also that the genesis of that mode consists not in a qualitative transformation of their bare, flat frozenness but 'restoring to moving photography the "beauty"—that of bourgeois painting but also of bourgeois theatre and the novel—which Muybridge's innocent procedure had robbed it of.'¹⁴⁰ In other words, the apparently natural coherence and fluidity of the time of the visual is shown by the counter-example of Muybridge's work to be heavily constructed, rather than naturally emanating from film technology. From this perspective, Roland Barthes' claim that 'the distinction between film and photograph is not a simple difference of degree but a radical opposition' is correct only in the historical sense that photography, as he suggests, produces the historically original form of representation of 'a "flat" anthropological fact, at once absolutely new and definitively unsurpassable, [...] *messages without code*.'¹⁴¹ The continuity of moving-image—the sense that in the cinema 'a "blind field" constantly doubles our partial vision', in which the depicted figures and movements carry on despite our no longer viewing them, that a referential diegesis exists through its use of realist pictorial codes—is an effect *added* to the bareness of represented time.¹⁴² The security of referentiality in cinema's narrative time is always threatened by the presence of instances of stillness within it; as Raymond Bellour puts it, the instants of stasis in film 'can only spring from any-instant-whatever'. Viewing the photograph from the vantage-point of the moving-image, it 'designate[s] a vanishing point: this point comes from the unique way in which space can be

¹³⁹ Eadweard Muybridge, *Zoopraxography, or the Science of Animal Locomotion* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1893), p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. by Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 12. Burch does not refer in this text to classical Hollywood, but uses the term 'Institutional Mode of Representation'. The term encompasses not only classical Hollywood but a number of national cinemas that share a set of technical and conceptual presuppositions about how moving images are governed by and necessarily produce forms of 'realism', through 'processes of internalisation and naturalisation' (p. 151). For our purposes, insofar as we consider classical Hollywood as simply an example of the 'realism' of the spectacular image-world, the two are functionally synonymous.

¹⁴¹ Barthes, *Image*, p. 45.

¹⁴² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1984), p. 57.

divided whenever the continuity and the illusion of its “natural” movement is called into question.’¹⁴³ As Laura Mulvey has pointed out, these points of fracture in the paradoxical autonomy and naturalness of the filmic image are constituted by the very means by which it establishes itself. The securing mechanisms of identification with a represented world and (male) subjects ‘demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end.’ But the fetishistic techniques used to support the *illusionism* of the visible world—most obviously the close-up, applied typically to female characters—‘tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.’¹⁴⁴

Jean Baudrillard had identified the end of the society of the spectacle with a collapse of this time of the visible in the mid-to-late 1970s.¹⁴⁵ This was a period that Crary, writing in 1984, describes as one in which ‘television, as a system which functioned from the 1950s into the 1970s, is now disappearing, to be reconstituted at the heart of another network in which what is at stake is no longer representation, but distribution and regulation.’¹⁴⁶ This would be the initiation of a new phase of telecommunications development, beginning with the development of VCRs and personal computers, in which images disappear to be replaced by unrepresentable information and connections: as Baudrillard wrote, ‘today the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and network.’¹⁴⁷ The fact that Crary contradicts his own argument in the 1984 text, claiming that in fact ‘the computer was to be central to the remaking of the spectacle by offering the semblance of a “homogeneous and neutral” table on which one could know and manipulate the contents of the world without

¹⁴³ Raymond Bellour, ‘The Film Stilled’, *Camera Obscura*, 8:3 (1990), 8(3 24): 98-124 (p. 108); *ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁴⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 22; *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ Jean Baudrillard, ‘The Ecstasy of Communication’, in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster, trans. by John Johnston (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 126-134 (p. 132).

¹⁴⁶ Crary, ‘Eclipse of the Spectacle’, in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), pp. 283-294 (p. 284).

¹⁴⁷ Baudrillard, ‘Ecstasy’, p. 126.

reference to the visible', and abandoned the historiographical model he endorsed there in subsequent works, suggests that there are good reasons to argue the post-televisual era does not bring any implosion or overcoming of the temporal logic of spectacle.¹⁴⁸

It is now possible to see the longer-term historical logic on which Crary's and others' outlines for a spectacular structure in contemporary culture builds. As TJ Clark puts it, '[t]he spectacle was a logic and an instrumentation inherent in the commodity economy, and in certain of its social accompaniments, from the very beginning.'¹⁴⁹ In the society of the spectacle the increasing autonomisation of exchange-value as an abstract form of appearance of labour-time reaches its full expression, and is not necessarily overcome simply by a shift in its technological or productive components.

Consequently, in closing, we can ask: what would the logic of spectacular time look like in the image-life of contemporary society? Moreover, how can this logic assist us in interpreting the imbrication of contemporary narrative form in spectacle? How do the politics of the image that I have outlined in these first two chapters play out in the texts under discussion? The contours of such a logic of spectacular time are hopefully already clear from our discussion so far. In *24/7*, Crary posits that the global expansion of informational networks does not fundamentally alter the abstract nature of spectacular time, but rather intensifies it. Instead, it establishes itself as 'an instrumentalized and unending condition of visibility.'¹⁵⁰ This unendingness, Crary suggests, establishes itself as what Walter Benjamin called a 'homogeneous, empty time': 'duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning [...] a time that no longer passes, beyond clock time.'¹⁵¹ Debord's global time becomes a temporality in which the arbitrary forms of pseudo-cyclical time have been put under pressure or even erased, namely 'the diurnal pulse of waking and sleeping and the

¹⁴⁸ Crary, 'Eclipse', p. 292.

¹⁴⁹ Clark, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review*, 2 (2000), pp. 85-96 (p. 90).

¹⁵⁰ Crary, *24/7*, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Harry Zohn, Rodney Livingstone et al, p. 395.

longer alternations between days of work and [...] rest.¹⁵² As with the abstract underside of Muybridge's experiments in photographic time, it is 'a time without time, a time extracted from any material or identifiable demarcations, a time without sequence or recurrence.'¹⁵³ The standardisation of vision (and objects of vision) that Crary, following Debord, identifies in the spectacle becomes 'a disintegration of human abilities to see'.¹⁵⁴ The single global continuity of time that is arbitrarily broken into segments of which Debord wrote, becomes a single global image-world divided into individual fragments of image-time to be consumed—as TJ Clark puts it, 'the spectacle would in due course be internalized, privatized, "personalized"—miniaturized, domesticated, speeded up, put at every infant's disposal—with the image doses more and more self-administered by interactive subjects, each convinced that the screen was the realm of freedom.' He is referring—in terms that are perhaps too bitter but give an outline of the objective situation—to the proliferation of digital image-devices in the form of personal computers, laptops and smartphones. The subject is now positioned in a permanent machinic interface with images whose time they can apparently control. But the reality-effect of this temporality is, as it were, predetermined by a more total set of relations of production: as Debord described it, what the spectacle produces is 'the omnipresent celebration of a choice *already made* in the sphere of production'. Social time, Clark writes, now consists of 'images dispersed and accelerated until they become the true and sufficient commodities.'¹⁵⁵

There have been remarkably few effective attempts to reinterpret Debord's theories in the context of late capitalism in its 21st-century phase.¹⁵⁶ Crary's own account, for all its

¹⁵² Crary, *24/7*, p. 30.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ Clark, *Sight*, p. 185; Debord, *Society*, p. 13; Clark, *Sight*, 185.

¹⁵⁶ For some further examples from the literature that attempt such a reinterpretation, with varying success, see Wark, *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008); Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 2013), esp. pp. 1-12, 189-204; Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord & the Practice of Radical Philosophy* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011); *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*, ed. by Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano (London: University of Westminster Press, 2017). One example of particular interest, which the author has not been able to consult in detail at the time of writing, is Peter Szendy, *The Supermarket of the Visible: Towards a General Economy of Images*, trans. by Jan Plug (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019). A

importance in linking the contemporary conjuncture back to the longer-term history of spectacular culture, has limits: *24/7* is not intended as a scholarly work and draws on a small and disparate set of data, which may exacerbate the tendency to technological determinism some reviewers have noted.¹⁵⁷ A fuller theoretical study of Debord's work in a 21st-century context would require extension into fields remote from the purview of this study, most obviously in Media Studies, Software Studies and Game Studies. For our purposes, what needs to be emphasised is the conjunction between the ongoing systemic crisis in the global economy—which some Marxist economists have hypothesised as a 'secular decline' to which no apparent solution exists within the system in its current form, one inherent in the configuration of late capitalism since the 1970s—and what Retort call 'the falling rate of illusion'.¹⁵⁸ That is, the sense that a crisis in the capitalist world-system, in its organisation of social time into abstract exchange value to which concrete use value is a mere appendage, is also therefore a crisis in the effectivity of images, of the social organisation of appearances. The aspects of the politics of images in late capitalism I have outlined in this chapter—the subject-object relationship, the freezing of time and the contemplative passivity that the spectacle produces—form points of convergence between the abstract level of the theory of commodity fetishism and the politics of form, and between the *longue durée* of the spectacle's development and our own period. The contemporary sense of a crisis of images is not simply one confined to the level of theory, but to be traced out in the specifics of cultural form. That is the wager of the case studies that will comprise the next three chapters.

persuasive case, moreover, can be made for the work of Mark Fisher as a particularly useful reinterpretation of the spectacle thesis in a 21st century context, although he rarely refers to Debord directly; see Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009).

¹⁵⁷ See for examples: Matthew Wolf-Mayer, 'Once More unto the Breach (of capitalism and nature) – jonathan crary's 24/7', *Somatosphere* (Chicago: Somatosphere, 2014) <<http://somatosphere.net/2014/once-more-unto-the-breach-of-capitalism-and-nature-jonathan-crays-247.html/>> [accessed 1 July 2019]; Sara Spike, 'Review: *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* by Jonathan Crary', *Labour/Le Travail* 75 (2015), 342-344.

¹⁵⁸ Retort, p. 188. For an overview of the theory that the late capitalist period since 1973 has been characterised by a deferred 'secular decline', see Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2008).

Chapter 3: Time and Contemplation

3.0 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I examined a theoretical account derived from the work of Guy Debord and the Situationists that posits that, under late capitalism, social relations and the relation of the subject to social objects becomes increasingly one of contemplation. The colonisation of everyday life constructs a whole new and privileged field of visibility and images. Temporality no longer seems to have any qualitative duration, but becomes a single global and abstract form, arbitrarily segmented into quantitative fragments to which the subject cannot have any relation save that of contemplation. In the following chapters, I will turn to the central fictional texts of this study, to examine, in the light of this critical optic, the ways in which the forms of these texts are shaped by and mobilise this socialised visibility. These formal techniques, rather than breaking entirely with the existing conventions of realism as some contemporary experimental fictions have, attend to such conventions whilst questioning and testing their effectivity and, in the process, subvert them. Such formal mutations emerge in relation to a transformation that I have already discussed in the preceding chapters of key elements that structure the devices and ideology of realism: the psychologised subject, temporality, specific forms of narrative focalisation, and so on. The above-mentioned techniques define themselves, as Michael Sayeau writes of a number of late 19th-century fictions, by maintaining ‘the contours of coherence and the basic architecture of fictional form intact’, harking back to its ‘reality-effects’ whilst inverting, hollowing-out or pushing to their limit those devices and techniques.¹

In this current chapter, I will therefore begin by focusing on the problem of temporality as a newly *contemplative* element with which this study’s central texts engage. The problem of

¹ Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 47.

contemplation is most clear, in the first instance, in works by Ben Lerner and Don DeLillo, namely *10:04* (2014) and *Point Omega* (2010) respectively. What is at stake in these texts is, I will argue, the formal condition of a temporality defined not only by what Zygmunt Bauman calls an ‘era of instantaneity’, in which duration is homogenised in a single temporality, but by its global abstraction in the commodity-form as described in the preceding chapters. The reified objects of experience in which abstract social time congealed, Debord wrote, were ‘portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, *at a distance*, and as desirable by definition.’ Such a temporality, as it conditioned experience, was ‘bereft of language or concept [...] It cannot be communicated.’² Operations of seeing or imaging become, I will argue, privileged relations to the object-world but, as we saw in the last chapter, these ‘reality-effects’ are intertwined in unstable ways with a deeply disenchanted and meaningless pure visibility. The texts therefore have an ambivalent relationship with the visible. The mimetic procedures of the novels—their approach to the relationship between the ‘reality effects’ of fiction, as Roland Barthes referred to it, and the phenomenal and social world—tarry with such durationless visibility as an authorising form of ‘realism’, and shape alternatives that, nonetheless, define themselves in relation to such visibility.³

I will outline in more detail in what follows my argument concerning these formal transformations. I will begin by examining *10:04*, which takes this new, contemplative temporality as a given condition for its self-reflexive enquiry into the composition of fiction as, historically, a form in a dependent relationship with a certain effect of realism. This enquiry into forms of realism differs from the self-reflexivity of postmodernist fiction in part by virtue of its object. Brian McHale makes the claim that postmodernism’s self-reflexivity represents a break from a modernist paradigm ‘dominated by epistemological issues’ for one ‘dominated

² Quoted in Boxall, *Fiction*, p. 15; Debord, *Society*, p. 112; *ibid*, p. 114.

³ Barthes, *Rustle*, p. 141.

by ontological issues'.⁴ In other words, it moves from a concern with the particular claims to knowledge about a world that modes of representation can make to one focused on how representation *produces* worlds and their being. By contrast, Lerner's novels are not focused on producing new objects among the referents of a posited external world but on discovering the forms by which the subject of prose narrative relates to and even furthers an existing process of transformation in the world of referents. Thus for example Lerner dwells repeatedly—not only in *10:04* but in his previous novel *Leaving The Atocha Station* (2011) and in his critical writing, most pertinently *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016)—on a distinction between the nature of existing texts and their 'virtual' forms, a relationship that, in glossing the work of John Ashbery, he describes explicitly in terms of temporality.⁵ The novel's formal self-questioning dramatises the form of temporality it takes as a backdrop to the utopian image invoked a number of times of 'the world to come' in which '[e]verything will be as it is now, just a little different.'⁶ The temporal structure of *10:04*, I will argue, flattens out the developmental trajectory of the novel, spanning a precisely delimited quantity of time without presenting any diegetic markers of progression or internal differentiation. The text's story-levels collapse into a flat surface, to which the narrator can have no relation other than that of contemplative bafflement. The narrative—and the narrator, who is a poet-turned-novelist who therefore adds an element of determining self-reflexivity to the text—must develop compensatory techniques to create such differentiation: the temporal movement of the narrative consists precisely of the development, discarding or alteration of these experiments in mimetic strategies, cycling through the aesthetics of different literary genres, now understood as commodified objects. Within the narrative's struggle, the notion of seeing appears as a privileged viewpoint for the narrator in relation to the diegetic world of the *récit*,

⁴ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge), p. xii.

⁵ Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 2016), p. 90-91.

⁶ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 1.

but cannot relate him to the dimension of social time, which appears as an impenetrable image.

We will then turn to the work of Don DeLillo, whose response to a contemplative relation to temporality is to mobilise looking and images as a—potentially failed—attempt to jump-start narrative time.

3.1 Lerner and the Unrepresentable Time of Late Capitalism

3.1.i Ambiguous Time

10:04, Lerner's second novel, is set over the course of one year—although not named, the hurricanes that bookend the narrative would seem to correspond with Hurricane Irene and Hurricane Sandy, which arrived in New York in late August 2011 and October 2012 respectively, suggesting its dating and temporal span. The first-person narrator is a poet who, having published a novel with a 'small press' that his agent describes as 'unconventional but really well received', publishes a story with *The New Yorker*, the text of which appears as the second section of *10:04*. He then receives 'a "strong six-figure advance"' to 'turn it into a novel': the signing of the contract for this novel is *10:04*'s first scene. As becomes clear late in the text, that second novel is in fact 'the book you're reading now, a work that, like a poem, is neither fiction nor nonfiction'.⁷ Apart from the process of the text's coming into being, the novel depicts for the most part scenes from his everyday professional life: for example, assisting in a food co-op, tutoring a young Hispanic boy, Roberto, attending institutional dinners and meetings and working through a writing residency in Marfa, Texas. The relation of these dual aspects (text and everyday life), as I will argue, is key to the novel's treatment of temporality:

⁷ Ibid, p. 154-55; ibid, p. 3; ibid, p. 194.

it poses implicitly—at times explicitly—the question of how the novel as a textual form produced in and unfolding in time can represent an everyday life whose temporality is structured by forces that far exceed the representational scope historically available to fiction. This question is focused around a number of figures, of which I will concentrate on two: the concept of genre in its relation to the novel, and visual intertexts that prompt what Jameson calls the ‘scenic impulse’ of a static narrative present. Shaping the alternatives that the novel explicitly or implicitly proposes, I will argue, is the force of an idealised relation to such everyday life: a contemplative relation, a relation to the world as a static spectacle.

The first aspect of the text to note is the extent to which Lerner removes any sense of temporal differentiation or progress for much of the novel. The text begins with the narrator signing the contract for his second novel (a scene I will return to), followed immediately afterwards by an analeptic transition to ‘the previous September’.⁸ The signs of such a movement of the narratorial present backwards in time are, however, noticeably weakened. The phrase ‘the previous September’ is the only reference that suggests any temporal transition relative to the fabula (that is, the one-year chronology of successive events) that the syuzhet establishes over the course of the text. The opening paragraph of the scene is worth examining in some detail:

A giant octopus was painted on the wall of the room where I’d been sent the previous September for evaluation—an octopus and starfish and various gill-bearing aquatic craniate animals—for this was the pediatric wing and the sea scene was intended to calm and distract the children from needles or the small hammers testing reflex aptitude. I was there at the age of thirty-three because a doctor had discovered incidentally an entirely asymptomatic and potentially aneurysmal dilation of my aortic

⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

root that required close monitoring and probable surgical intervention and the most common explanation of such a condition at such an age is Marfan, a genetic disorder of the connective tissue that typically produces the long-limbed and flexible.⁹

Whilst there is no strict shift from the past tense of the previous opening scene, the movement in the sentence's first clause from the simple past ('A giant octopus was painted on the wall') to the past perfect ('I'd been sent') suggests that 'the previous September' is chronologically prior to the narrated present in which 'this was the pediatric wing [...] I was there at the age of thirty three.' As mentioned above, no further indications are given as to the chronology of the narrative until the end of the text's third part, where the contract signing is narrated again, marked by the narrator's description of 'an outrageously expensive meal'.¹⁰ This marks, in an unemphatic way, lacking the proper names of the month, season or year, a return to the beginning of the novel's narration of its fabula. The narration makes no proleptic references to these future events until it arrives at them. The novel thus effectively begins twice, the first time with an *erased* sense of temporal distinctions; its narrative, for all practical purposes, does not begin until the fourth section of the novel.

There is another dimension to this curious analepsis that follows the opening of the novel. If it is only clarified at the end of the third section, by a process of inference, that the opening scene is in fact chronologically subsequent to what follows, the *significance* of the analepsis does not become clear. The largely self-contained nature of most distinct scenes in the novel has the result that, apart from the nature of the 'story of mine that had appeared in *The New Yorker*', there are no parts of the scene that would remain obscure without information from chronologically prior scenes in the fabula. The flashback structure is not utilised as a means of giving structural function or meaning to the temporal span that could be inferred from the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3, 154.

first scene. The flashback's purpose is thus at once minimised—the typical function of such techniques in structuring the novel's temporal span in meaningful ways—and ornamental, an unusual narrative choice in a text that gives no indication that it does not otherwise follow its fabula in a linear fashion. Such a treatment of temporality could apply to the narrative more generally: what function is there in the temporal differentiation of one scene or section from another, is the temporal organisation of the narrative anything other than arbitrary? This poses immediate problems for the text's relationship to realism as a legitimating formal code. As Michael Sayeau notes, a particular balance or tension was crucial for the development of the realist novel in the 19th century. Tracts of closely observed non-eventful time—what narratologist Seymour Chatman calls narrative 'satellites [...] minor plot event[s]' that 'can be deleted without disturbing the logic of the plot'—became, in Sayeau's phrase, 'the subsidiary backdrop against which significant, revelatory action can occur.'¹¹ Such instances of action formed what Chatman referred to as narrative 'kernels', 'major events' that 'give rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events.'¹² This variation or oscillation between the event and the non-event, which Franco Moretti contrasts with the temporal structure of the romantic novels that preceded the emergence of the major realist novelists, became constitutive of the 'reality-effect' in narrative form, what Sayeau calls 'a normative rhythm of eventfulness and uneventfulness.'¹³ To make such a distinction indifferent, to collapse the segments of a narrative discourse, is to severely impair a certain form of realism.

The ambiguity of *10:04*'s analepsis means the events of the first three sections do not appear as narrated retrospectively: they are not separated from the narrator by a temporal distance but lived through as a narratorial present. The analepsis at once expresses a temporal difference, positioning the narrator in a mediatory and reflexive relation to the events of the

¹¹ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 53-4; Sayeau, p. 32.

¹² Chatman, p. 53.

¹³ Franco Moretti, 'Serious Century', in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. by Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 364-400 (p. 370-372); Sayeau, p.37.

fabula, and negates it. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth notes, in realist fiction the narrator acts as a mediator and coordinator of fictional time: '[t]he rationalizing consensus of realism depends [...] on the presence of the narrator. The realistic narrator's function, like that of the implied spectator in painting, is to homogenize the medium'.¹⁴ By providing a specific viewpoint on a continuity of fictional time, they make meaningful '[t]he very distinction between past, present, and future [...] because these periods thus distinguished are mutually informative', forming a 'cumulative, serial development'.¹⁵ In the typical retrospective narration, the narrator 'exists in the same temporal continuum' as the narrated events 'but outside the arbitrary frame, in the future to which this present action will eventually (has already) led. In other words, every event that is happening in realism has already taken its place in a pattern of significance'.¹⁶ By contrast here, time cannot be mediated or processed by narration but remains a single, continuous fabric of immediate time. The narrative's movement becomes an object of durationless contemplation.

3.1.ii Realism and Abstraction

It is possible to see this contradictory state—a fictional temporality at once homogeneous and unmoving, and articulated by established novelistic techniques—in relation to what Fredric Jameson has called an approaching 'end of temporality' in late capitalist society. In a 2003 article, Jameson identifies 'finance capital' as 'one of the most effective mediations to be constructed between the cultures of postmodernity and the infrastructure of late capitalist globalization'—as we have already seen at the end of Chapter 1, he posits a strong affinity between finance capital and the abstraction of what he calls the 'image culture' of the

¹⁴ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space, Narrative*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 40.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 40-41.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 41.

spectacle. Such a mediating function is exemplified by ‘the impact of the new value abstractions on everyday life and lived experience, and this is a modification best articulated in terms of temporality’. For Jameson, the temporality of late capitalism in the 21st century is characterised by a ‘reduction to the present’, in which the various parts of a continuity of time contract or are abolished in favour of a single element, the present, autonomous and unmoored from any relation with these other components of a temporal span. He describes the form of simultaneous, global, abstract time that we have analysed in previous chapters: a sequential and differentiated regime of time is radically flattened, reduced to ‘a succession of explosive and self-sufficient present moments’, a development that in the realm of culture ‘gradually crowds out the development of narrative time’ itself.¹⁷ Nonetheless, as Jameson acknowledges, financialised late capitalist culture *does* produce narrative forms, the contours of which we will return to in a moment. It is important to note, though, the implication of this for the status of the novel as a literary form in the narrator’s schema in *10:04*: the form becomes, as Debord suggested of classical realist cinema in the mid-20th century, a *form of appearance* of a temporality that moves towards the abolition of time into abstraction, appearing as a coherent time, time as a ‘reality-effect’.¹⁸

10:04’s narrator poses the question of the realist novel as a temporally organising object both at the level of content and form. ‘This’—he’s referring to his book deal—‘would have made sense to me in the eighties or nineties, when the novel was more or less still a viable

¹⁷ Jameson, ‘The End of Temporality’, *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003), 695-718 (p. 702, 703); *ibid.*, p. 713; *ibid.*, p. 714. Jameson avers that the historical ‘modification’ wrought by finance capital – which correlates with the distinction between ‘the formal abstractions of the modernist period’ and ‘the less palpable abstractions of the image or the logo [...] a distinction between an object and its expression and an object whose expression has in fact virtually become another object in its own right’ – from the period of monopoly capitalism is better expressed through temporality ‘rather than image theory’ (p. 703). Here the difference with Debord’s conception of spectacle is clear: in Debord, a theory of the image and of social time *are the same thing*, a linkage that strengthens the insight Marxist theory can provide between time, value abstraction and the aesthetic.

¹⁸ From the voiceover script to Debord’s 1979 film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*: ‘The cinema I am talking about is a deranged imitation of a deranged life, a production skillfully designed to communicate nothing. It serves no purpose but to while away an hour of boredom with a reflection of that same boredom. This craven imitation is the dupe of the present and the false witness of the future. Its mass of fictions and grand spectacles amounts to nothing but a useless accumulation of images that time sweeps away.’ Guy Debord, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2003) <<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord.films/ingirum.htm>> [accessed 9 June 2019].

commodity form, but why would publishers, all of whom seemed to be perpetually reorganizing, downsizing, scrambling to survive in the postcodex world, be willing to convert real capital into the merely symbolic?' He ventriloquises his agent, who thinks 'the larger houses were optimistic that their superior distribution could help a second book do much better than the first'. He links such prospective financial success directly to the temporal imperatives of realism, quoting the agent: "'Develop a *clear, geometrical plot*; describe faces, even those at the next table; make sure that the protagonist undergoes a *dramatic transformation*.'"¹⁹ He is thus enjoined to observe the primary strictures of realism in its organisation of narrative time. Such demands would seem to affect *10:04* itself at a formal level. Ben de Bruyn identifies the text as part of 'a shift from the textual acrobatics of postmodernism to a cautiously mimetic version of realism', and Mitchum Huehls describes it and *Atocha Station* as among a number of 'post-theory theory novels' that 'simply incorporates theory into a generally realist representational mode'.²⁰ Certainly realism, as a set of established representational codes and techniques, is an element at work in the text: for example, as privileged forms of description ('describe faces, even those at the next table'). But, as I have suggested so far, the text's temporal structure is not congruent with the demands of realism, with its necessary oscillation of kernel and satellite. Rather mimesis itself, which Huehls seems to suggest forms the novel's primary impulse, does not appear first and foremost in the form of realism, but subordinates realism as discourse and representational mode to itself. If the nominally fluid, differentiated temporality that realism (or narrative time more generally) related to is, as Jameson suggests, at an end, then for *10:04* the question must be what role realism and the novel play and how they must alter themselves in the unfolding of the text.

¹⁹ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 154; *ibid.*, p. 156, my italics.

²⁰ Ben de Bruyn, 'Realism 4. Objects, weather and infrastructure in Ben Lerner's *10:04*', *Textual Practice*, 31 (2017), 951-971 (p. 951); Mitchum Huehls, 'The Post-Theory Theory Novel', *Contemporary Literature*, 56 (2015), 280-310 (p. 282).

It is possible to see here a convergence with the dynamic described by Debord in the 'Spectacular Time' chapter of *Society of the Spectacle*. Pseudo-cyclical time produces an appearance of organic meaning in reified, abstract time by its production as a static image-object. Thus a generalised global instantaneity of time, of the sort we have already seen described by Jonathan Crary, is intertwined with the appearances of an everyday time of stasis and reified leisure. Of particular interest then, in this connection, is *10:04's* treatment of the everyday and the punctuating event in relation to the de-differentiation of narrative time that we have described above. As will become clear, the text, tethered to social and economic conditions that make the novel-form's existing mechanics of representation untenable, produces a number of strategies and devices to reorganise narrative or attempt to produce it as a reality-effect. These devices cluster around or exist in reaction to a limit-point of both stasis and meaning positioned outside the realm of narrative itself: the frozen closure of the commodity-image, of seeing as the ultimate locus of reality.

10:04 seems in part to exhibit a stalled or unmarked time similar to that described by Peter Boxall (as we noted in our Introduction), which 'has "lost its narrative quality"'.²¹ The time that the narrator inhabits through his everyday life as a writer is flattened and glazed, its condition exists outside of his subjectivity or practice. The novel must, perforce, address self-reflexively the form and temporality of the realist novel as a genre not only as a means of making sense of the representational dilemma this poses but in order to gesture towards the existential and social possibilities that may exist outside of this contemplative time of repetition and stasis.

3.1.iii Failures of Realist Time

²¹ Boxall, p. 27.

We have already remarked on the curious temporal positioning of the narrator of *10:04*: he does not seem to exist on a separate story level to the narratorial present but in the present of the fabula he is recounting. It seems significant that the crucial scene before the prolepsis I mentioned above is that of the signing of the contract for the novel itself. This scene both inaugurates the text as an object and, by acting as the moment that the narrative catches up to itself after the immediately following prolepsis, effectively acts as the beginning of its narratorial present. It thus at once intertwines the novel-form structurally with the question of commerce and builds into the text's organisation of narrative time a series of repetitions. In a later repetition of the opening scene, he ventriloquises his agent, who thinks 'the larger houses were optimistic that their superior distribution could help a second book do much better than the first'.²² Already in *Leaving The Atocha Station* the treatment of temporality had focused on what Lerner calls in a 2013 interview the "optical realism" of a bourgeois prose that pacifies readers into forgetting its own constructedness' in opposition to poetry, as written by the young narrator Adam Gordon.²³ Gordon reads Tolstoy's *War And Peace* whilst on a research fellowship in Madrid:

I came to realize that far more important to me than any plot or conventional sense was the sheer directionality I felt while reading prose, the texture of time as it passed, life's white machine. Even in the most dramatic scenes, when Natasha is suddenly beside him or whatever, what moved me most was less the pathos of the reunion and his passing than the action of prepositions, conjunctions, etc.; the sweep of predication was more compelling than the predicated.²⁴

²² Lerner, *10:04*, p. 154.

²³ Gayle Rogers, 'An Interview with Ben Lerner', *Contemporary Literature*, 54 (2013), 218-238 (p. 232).

²⁴ Lerner, *Station*, p. 19-20.

The novel, then, as an historical form is associated with the instantiation of a fluid time whose mechanics of temporal flow consist of the internal demarcations and linkages of elements of grammar. These matter 'far more' than a 'clear, geometrical plot' but are not clearly separable from such a construct, given the punctual presence of 'the most dramatic scenes' in his reading. There is, moreover, no clear hierarchy between modes of writing, with poetry opposed in Gordon's political hierarchy against novelistic flow: he puzzles over 'how my poems could be said meaningfully to bear on the deliberate and systematic destruction of a people or a planet, the abolition of classes, or in any sense constitute a meaningful political intervention [...] I could not imagine this, could not even imagine imagining it.' For Gordon, his own biographical experience seems to be composed of time 'possessed of no intrinsic content [...] the bland connective tissue between more eventful times'; for him such events or narrative kernels were themselves 'mere ligaments'. Such non-eventful periods exist in a constitutive antinomy, for Gordon, with literature. They possess some of the 'sense of directionality' of the novel's satellites, but this perception falsifies their 'dilated, detached' qualities. They are 'impossible to represent precisely because they were ready-made literature': the possibility that the novel-form holds out, of contact with such 'durationless periods', is negated by the novel itself which makes such periods into narrative kernels. The phrase 'life's white machine', repeated throughout the text, names this *time without events* that constitutes experience, that the novel-form depends upon but must subordinate to the event: 'Not the little lyric miracles and luminous branching injuries, but the other thing, whatever it was, was life, and was falsified by any way of talking or writing or thinking that emphasized sharply localized occurrences in time.' It is this antinomy between the 'durationless periods' of biographical time and the 'sheer directionality' of the novel that leads Gordon to claim '[e]ither way, I promised myself, I would never write a novel'.²⁵ The realist novel thus always

²⁵ Ibid, p. 44; *ibid*, p. 64; *ibid*; *ibid*; *ibid*, p. 65.

seems to subordinate the experience of a simultaneous, stilled time to the mechanics of narrative flow, to create an *appearance* of diachrony from synchrony.

In *Atocha Station*, then, Lerner struggles with two opposed orders of contemplation: on the one hand, the durationless time of biographical experience in late capitalism, a 'machine' that seems to operate without the subject; on the other, the 'mechanics' of a novelistic temporality that must always produce new events, set at a specific distance from the narrator. For Gordon, as Debord notes, the form of his experience is alien to him: '[w]orkers do not produce themselves: they produce a force independent of themselves. [...] the abundance it generates, is experienced by its producers only as an *abundance of dispossession*.'²⁶ To reclaim the durationless time of experience would seem, in this case, to require a different aesthetic form freed from contemplation, beyond any representational or mimetic relationship to the object-world. Gordon proposes one solution to this antinomy by identifying certain qualities of poetry as just such a form, opposing it to the novel. In John Ashbery's poems he finds a 'sense of harmony between the rhythms of a reproduction and the real'.²⁷ Rather than the opposition between form and the temporal experience of late capitalism implicit in the novel, Gordon finds that in these poems, 'one could experience the texture of time as it passed, a shadow train, life's white machine.'²⁸ In this Ashbery, at least in Gordon's account, disavows the historical function of poetry, which enacts the 'lyric miracles' already mentioned: '[i]t is as though the actual Ashbery poem were concealed from you, written on the other side of a mirrored surface', masking the temporal contours of form in favour of a contentless directionality—'while they used the language of logical connection [...] and the language that implied narrative development [...] such terms were merely propulsive; there was no actual organizing logic or progression.'²⁹ This suggestion of anti-poetic poetry as a solution to

²⁶ Debord, *Society*, p. 23.

²⁷ Lerner, *Station*, p. 90.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 91, 90.

Gordon's antinomy echoes Lerner's use of the concept of 'virtual' and 'actual' poems, which he attributes to the poet and academic Allen Grossman. The virtual, Lerner writes, is 'the abstract potential of the medium as felt by the poet', opposed to 'the "actual poem", which necessarily betrays that impulse when it joins the world of representation.'³⁰ The function of the actual poem at its best is producing 'a negative image of the ideal Poem which we cannot write in time.' The actual, as the unfolding of form in time, is not itself but the obverse of an unrepresentable potential or material that now appears as a 'merely propulsive' temporality unallied to structure. The temporal art of the novel is thus allied with the actual that, Lerner writes, 'it is the task of the poet and the poetry reader [...] to burn [...] off the virtual like fog.'³¹

The novelistic time of structured plot, flowing time and punctual transformation, of the form of the 'actual', in *10:04* is clearly in some sense continuous with the simultaneous time of the market and commodities embodied in the book contract. At the same time, such a 'sheer directionality' is for *10:04*'s narrator a non-contemporary phenomenon. Its embodiment as the bald actuality of realist form precisely cannot embody the unrepresentable time of late capitalism. The novel-form is sustained only in the abstract futurity of financial speculation, a time formed *a priori* by the indifference of exchange to be realised only in the future. The 'merely symbolic' capital of the novel is tethered to speculation on the form's own future: his agent tells him "your book proposal might generate more excitement among the houses than the book itself." [...] my virtual novel was worth more than my actual novel.'³² Finance impels time even as it reduces it to a frozen simultaneity. The narrator, placed in the immediacy of a synchronic present, cannot organise or structure time but only contemplate its unfolding in the financialised object of the realist novel.

³⁰ Lerner, *Hatred*, p. 8-9.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 37; *ibid*, p. 38.

³² Lerner, *10:04*, p. 155.

3.1.iv Ghost Poems, Virtual Novels

10:04 suggests a solution to Gordon's quandary by reversing the structuring antinomy at the heart of *Atocha Station*. Instead of proposing poetry as the structural resolution of the antagonism between the novel and biographical time, the text directly stages a confrontation between the financialised time of realism and the poem: having agreed with his agent, at the point that the novel's narrative restarts at the end of Part 3, to 'get to work' during his residency in Marfa, he proceeds to work: '[i]nstead of fabricating the author's epistolary archive, earning my advance, I was writing a poem [...] Having monetized the future of my fiction, I turned my back on it, albeit to compose verse underwritten by a millionaire's foundation.'³³ The narrator proposes a new solution to this antinomy: 'I decided to replace the book I'd proposed with the book you're reading now, a work that, like a poem, is neither fiction nor nonfiction [...] I resolved to dilate my story not into a novel about literary fraudulence, about fabricating the past, but into an actual present alive with multiple futures.'³⁴ In this context, the de-emphasis of the internal demarcations that structure the flow of novelistic time seems to assume a clearer function. The novel-form's overriding mimetic organisation of time into patterned, meaningful rhythms must be erased to allow an 'actual present' to emerge, in which the narratorial present is indissociable from the present of the fabula, in which all story levels constitute one surface. By masking any temporal displacement of the narrator from the events narrated, by refusing any sense of the narration existing in a retrospective position over the past, it allows the text to become a repository for 'futures'—the movement into the future tense of the novel's closing paragraphs would be the culmination of such a strategy. Following this assumption, the text's flattening-out of time would seem to perform a movement away from the diachronic mode of the novel, in which time flows

³³ Ibid, p. 170.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 194.

through a series of separated moments, to a synchronic present in which every part of the narrative exists on one spatialised level. This does not necessitate the entire abandonment of time—as Jameson cautions, the distinction between the two ‘is always accompanied by a label that warns us not to confuse the diachronic with time and history nor to imagine that the synchronic is static or the mere present’—thus allowing the text to produce new futures that may, like the historical moments the narrator surveys in the closing pages, be contained within the synchronic form itself.³⁵ The narrator effectively proposes biographical time as the ground that resolves the conflict between the novel and poetry.

I would like to argue, however, that the problem the novel addresses is more complex than the narrator’s account of the text suggests. At one level, we can see this return to a focus on the present of writing, of writing as a present, as analogous to the postmodern emphasis on *l’écriture*, on the writtenness of writing foregrounded as what Jameson calls the ‘schizophrenic disjunction’ of ‘pure and unrelated presents in time.’³⁶ But it is important to note that the material that the book thus structures centres quite explicitly on the value of individual biography or existential time—that is, not on the process that overwrites the subject (as a temporally continuous entity now split into unrelated presents of experience) but the subject itself. It is necessary though to note something about the counterintuitive manner in which this material is structured and how this structure acts, in relation to the two structuring oppositions that I have already outlined: between the biographical and the relentless but structured time of the novel; and between ‘everyday life’ and the real abstractions of financial production and a historical time after the end of history. For although the text flattens out time into what appears to be a synchronic homogeneity, it is as I mentioned above structured by certain repetitions. These would include not only the opening scene, which inaugurates this text biographically and materially, but of the storm that follows it several pages later. ‘An

³⁵ Jameson, ‘Temporality’, p. 698.

³⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 29, 27.

unusually large cyclonic system with a warm core' hits New York and the narrator waits it out with Alex, the friend he has agreed to artificially inseminate, watching *Back to the Future* (1985).³⁷ When, in the final section, a similar disaster occurs, the narrator treats it as a by-now routine occurrence: 'Again we did the things one does: filled every suitable container we could find with water, unplugged various appliances' and so on; 'we got into bed and projected *Back to the Future* onto the wall; it could be our tradition for once-in-a-generation weather'.³⁸ The exception, what should function as the turning-point of a classical realist plot, has already assumed the narrative form and language of routine, the everyday, the blank and cumulative texture of narrative peripheries. And indeed, in plot terms the storms have no impact: although, whilst confined to the apartment, the narrator becomes more intimate with Alex, it doesn't inaugurate their agreement, which they made beforehand; when, after the second storm, they walk back from Lower Manhattan to Brooklyn, she is already pregnant. All of the plot-determining material happens, as it were, in the segments between what would normally be the 'turning points' of plot, in flat, low-keyed scenes, texturally undifferentiated from historical disasters that the narrator notes are 'man-made'.³⁹ Pieter Vermeulen, in an argument that draws on the narratological work of Mark Currie and the philosophy of Roberto Esposito, argues that the text obviates the usual temporal structure of realist fiction, in which '[t]he lives we read [...] are constitutively split between an incomplete present and a postponed meaning', which will only be redeemed in the future that narrative's segmented duration leads inexorably towards. Instead, the text preserves a present in which 'experiences that remain unremembered'—in other words, those not subject to the usual retrospective narration of the realist novel—'can claim the[ir] intensity and vitality'.⁴⁰ Indeed, as we have seen, this is the text's avowed political project, replacing the novel with the unprocessed raw material of

³⁷ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 16

³⁸ Ibid, p. 230.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 220.

⁴⁰ Pieter Vermeulen, 'How Should a Person Be (Transpersonal)? Ben Lerner, Roberto Esposito, and the Biopolitics of the Future', *Political Theory* 45 (2017), 659-681 (p. 670); *ibid*, p. 671.

biographical time. But, as the inversion of the classic realist structure that we have observed suggests, there is a more complex formal problem underlying this self-declared purpose. It recalls the contradictory social rhythm of late capitalism described by Jameson: ‘the equivalence between an unparalleled rate of change on all the levels of social life and an unparalleled standardization of everything—feelings along with consumer goods, language along with built space—that would seem incompatible with just such mutability’.⁴¹ The specific tempo of late capitalism turns the eruption of qualitative difference into just another quantitative social fact, temporal change into the stasis of space. The contemplative rhythm of the classic realist narrative transfers, in inverted form, from ‘everyday life’ to historical time: everything happens to such an extent that nothing happens.

Such repetitions inscribe the formal linearity of narrative with its dedifferentiated material as a secretly cyclical time, writing movement into a time ostensibly without flow. We have already discussed the pure and functionless quality of the text’s opening analepsis. Nonetheless our discussion does not account for the choice to at least simulate a temporal movement that, as we have seen, organises time in the realist novel into pattern. The analepsis is immensely overdetermined, at once meaningful and obsolete and suggests that, in the dedifferentiated flatline of the narrative’s story, such overdetermination is what substitutes for meaning. Indeed, this is not the only implication of the flashback structure. The present evoked in the opening scene, which is narrated in the past continuous, is thus itself contained in a flashback structure, with the actual present being, effectively, the present of narration beginning after this section is repeated, itself superseded in the final two paragraphs of the text as the narrator moves into the future tense. This structure is prefigured in the opening pages with the insertion of a copy of Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* (1920), captioned with Walter Benjamin’s gloss that ‘[t]he storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is

⁴¹ Jameson, *Turn*, p. 57-8.

turned.⁴² The text opens up to the future, but this is dependent, as telegraphed from Benjamin's reading of the painting, on a past that the angel 'stares at' and 'seems about to move away from'.⁴³ That is, the image instantiates some relation between the various component parts of temporality the text's structure had thoroughly disconnected and homogenised, even if the figure of the angel cannot see the future but must keep his gaze fixed on the past. The text's self-declared political-aesthetic project then, of reclaiming narrative form as situated in and productive of a contingent present, is itself the effect of multiple, nested embedded instances of the past tense of the novel form. The text produces its own metonymic instances of this structure, as when the narrator, in the novel's third section, retells a story to a friend told by his father about attending a funeral in winter and returning via Penn Station: 'They had even added extra cars—I could see them and they looked archaic, like decommissioned cars from nineteenth century', to which he adds an anachronistic mental detail borrowed from artist and filmmaker Christian Marclay's video *The Clock*. The text produces a symbolic image for its own activity in the early pages, borrowing from art history: the narrator recalls looking at Jules Bastien-Lepage's naturalist painting *Joan of Arc* (1879), housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whose constructive "'failure" makes it one of my favorite paintings'. He lingers for half a paragraph on the painting's structure, in which its elements do not seem to quite align: 'It's as if the tension between the metaphysical and physical worlds, between two orders of temporality, produces a glitch in the pictorial matrix'. He relates this to Robert Zemeckis's *Back To The Future* (1985), in which the protagonist Marty McFly (Michael J Fox), stranded in the past of the 1950s, must produce his own present (the 'future' of the 1950s) in order to reinhabit it. At one point, Marty having meddled in the chain of events that will later lead to his own birth, 'he and his siblings begin to fade from the snapshot' he keeps from his own present. Such examples manifest a process of superimposing

⁴² Quoted in Lerner, *10:04*, p. 25.

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, *Writings 4*, p. 392.

or collaging material from different parts of a span of time. This does not however proceed as if all these temporal zones were flattened onto a single, spatialised and synchronic level, but with the text looking onto the past that, as the narrator comments, must dissolve as Joan of Arc is 'being pulled into the future'.⁴⁴ The past tense of the realist novel and the future of lived time must co-exist uneasily, in a manner that breaks the 'pictorial matrix' of fiction, with the novel-form making itself 'a presence, not an absence', as the narrator comments, precisely in its self-disappearance. The fact that the text offers pictorial representation as a figure for such processes is itself significant, and a point I will return to in the next section.

The novel thus persists as a ghostly form within this 'book you're reading now' that replaced the commodified object of the novel. If, against the abstract time of finance, the narrator offers the raw material of biographical time that the novel form would mediate and process into a meaningful unity, then it is faced with the paradox of its continuing dependence on a whole temporal structure related to that of the novel. During his residency, the narrator reads Whitman's *Specimen Days* (1882)—the only piece of biographical writing mentioned in the text—a memoir that, the narrator notes, presents the biographical material of someone who 'wants to be less a historical person than a marker for democratic personhood' and so 'can't really write a memoir full of life's particularities.' Whitman's evocations of moments of everyday life 'are general enough to be anyone's memory: how he took his ease under a flowering tree or whatever.' The very acme then of biographical time is the vacating of the biographical subject-position, that, in the quotation that forms the last line of the text, is 'with you, and I know how it is' before and after the present of narration.⁴⁵ This shift into a future-tense second-person address seems to suggest that the biographical subject-position is one that can be shared and is, unlike that of the novel, unfixed in time, perhaps precisely because of such voiding as Whitman performs. But this is further ironised: as Daniel Katz points out,

⁴⁴ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 141; *ibid*, p. 9; *ibid*; *ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 194; *ibid*, p. 168; *ibid*, 240.

the copy of Whitman that the narrator specifies reading ('the Library of America edition of Whitman, its paper so thin you could use it to roll cigarettes') does not in fact contain the line that Lerner uses as the closing point of the novel. '10:04 ends with a line', Katz notes, 'which was retrospectively made to fade out from the future it imagines, like Marty McFly's picture, only to find itself inserted into an edition of Whitman in which it doesn't exist. This creates a textual world like that suggested in the epigraph on the novel's threshold, about the world to come: "Everything will be as it is now, just a little different"'.⁴⁶ Biographical time cannot, then, provide a definitive solution to the text's structural antagonism, but constitutes instead one more element to parody.

In this sense, it is possible to suggest that *10:04* constitutes an analogue to the role of John Ashbery's poetry in *Atocha Station*: it is an approach to the *virtual novel*, to the pure potential of the form that constitutes itself and its possibility of producing a 'harmony between the rhythms of a reproduction and the real' by abolishing in itself everything that constitutes the novel's association with the actual. Its internalised remnants of the novel-form seem, as Gordon says of poetry, to be 'quoted in prose', out of place in the abstract medium that should be their home.⁴⁷ Out of the everyday, biographical time of narrative peripheries, it suggests a realist form that lies on the other side of the abstraction of its actual temporality. This begins to suggest the contours of the solution the text may propose to its central antinomy.

3.1.v Time as Image

The novel's answer, I would like to suggest, may lie with the question of an altered realism directly linked to the visual intertexts mentioned above. Ben de Bruyn suggests that what he

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 167; Daniel Katz, "'I did not walk here all the way from prose": Ben Lerner's virtual poetics', *Textual Practice*, 31:2 (2017), 315-337 (p. 329).

⁴⁷ Lerner, *Station*, p. 9.

calls *10:04*'s provision of a 'realism 4^o' directly links the problems of the novel's formal self-constitution to the planetary discourse of climate change.⁴⁸ Although the text's engagement with environmental discourses is outside of the scope of our argument, it is worth noting that for de Bruyn its engagement with realism in the conditions of catastrophic late capitalism, providing 'a glimpse of what memory and realism look like on a warmer planet' is dependent on an incorporation, not a renunciation, of the framing temporal and spatial conditions that realism usually must make invisible to function.⁴⁹ He highlights, drawing on Barthes' conception of *notatio* as an unfinished representational practice in *Preparation of the Novel* (2011), the 'strange weather' that fills *10:04*.⁵⁰ The 'light, syrupy scent of cottonwoods blooming prematurely, confused by a warmth too early in the year even to be described as a false spring' provides a direct mimetic link between a small detail of description, unaligned to the pseudo-cyclical time that, Debord writes, 'builds on the natural vestiges of cyclical time' such as the months and seasons, and the global transformation of the conditions that determine such detail, not least the alteration of the temporal conditions of realism itself.⁵¹ In such moments, de Bruyn writes, 'the reality *noneffects* of these haiku-like notations' (that is, their unfinished quality, which would distinguish them from the forms of description discussed in Barthes' 'The Reality Effect') 'are currently being undermined by *nonreality* effects.'⁵² In this sense, the forms of realism that persist in *10:04* exist as metonyms of the very transformation beyond recognition of the conditions that make realism possible. Transformed remnants of contemplation, in the form of what Jameson calls realism's affective present of description, instantiate realism's very negation. We can relate this directly to the text's treatment of temporality: in a general condition of simultaneous, contemplative time, the at-once meaningless and overdetermined contortions of narrative time indicate both the

⁴⁸ De Bruyn, p. 955.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 964.

⁵¹ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 108; Debord, *Society*, p. 111.

⁵² De Bruyn, p. 964.

exhaustion of existing realist codes and the manifestation of the transformed conditions of realism, of the *unreality* of the world that the novel represents.

It is in this light that the function of the use of pictorial figures for such processes becomes clearer. In the synchronic, flattened time of *10:04* the cumulative fluctuations of biographical time shadow the virtuality of the novel. We might see this state of narration, disarticulated but porous, as a spatialised series of layers. The narrator describes the text as ‘flickering between’ modes of fiction and nonfiction.⁵³ Thus, within an apparently stalled, synchronic text, shifts between genre substitute for temporal progression. The text’s ongoing dependence on the model of a certain novelistic temporality, then, not as a covert return to the novel but as the temporal aggregate or accumulation of a different sort of patterning. Historical, generic and metalinguistic layers from 19th and 21st century Brooklyn, Occupy Wall Street, the history of poetry, minimalist sculpture, the Challenger disaster and the institutional history of fiction overlap, like the borrowings the narrator points to in Joseph Gillespie Magee’s ‘High Flight’, which the narrator describes as a work of ‘palimpsestic plagiarism’.⁵⁴ While traces of the basic shape of the realist novel remain, the alternation of narrative kernels and satellites is replaced by different genres (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, biography), whose market divisions crack and fissure the surface of the text.

Another of the text’s allegories is pertinent here. The narrator’s current girlfriend runs a conceptual art project, ‘The Institute For Totaled Art’, which exhibits damaged artworks sequestered away by insurers. Her own figurative paintings depend on just such a breaking of the surface: in one, the figure ‘stares at the viewer as if from another century, the craquelure confusing genres’. In the ‘totaled’ artworks of the Institute, time—the before and after of slashing or water damage—is clearly visible, inscribed in the cracks of content’s surface. What interests the narrator, though, is an apparently undamaged but now worthless Cartier-Bresson

⁵³ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 194

⁵⁴ *Ibid* p. 114.

print: 'it was the same, only totally different. [...] a utopian readymade—an object for or from a future where there was some other regime of value than the tyranny of price.' This suggests something about how the novel form must end up disposing itself in *10:04*. Even as, in the collapse of its material's inner substance, it dwindles into stasis and is reconstructed on the new basis of generic collage, the novel form becomes a different sort of readymade: a form that suggests, immanent to itself, the possibility of a different, transformative and qualitative time, the before and after of a time different from the static time of disaster, in which the financialised world that realist fiction charts 'will be as it is now, just a little different'.⁵⁵

3.2 DeLillo's Time-Image

3.2.i Introduction

I will now turn to the work of Don DeLillo, specifically to the fictions that he has published since 2008: in this case, the novel *Point Omega* (2010). These works lie on the far side of a watershed in his oeuvre noted by a number of critics, marked by 2001's *The Body Artist*. Peter Boxall notes that, following the publication of *Underworld* (1997), an 827-page novel with a vast variety of overlapping narrative strands, there is a movement towards the other stylistic extreme: *The Body Artist* is less than a quarter of *Underworld*'s length, revolves around only one narrative and three characters and its prose is by comparison very minimal, relying on declarative sentences. Already, in *The Body Artist*, the narrative dramatises the experience of characters who 'lived in a kind of time that had no narrative quality'.⁵⁶ This formal quality Boxall links back to the post-war encroachment of a homogeneous late capitalist temporality visible in postmodernism. DeLillo's work lives through 'a suspension of the critical capacity,

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 134; *ibid*, p. 1.

⁵⁶ DeLillo, *The Body Artist* (New York: Scribner, 2001), p. 65.

[...] performing the way in which the struggle towards singularity [...] collapses repeatedly back into a vast, static uniformity, the kind of spatial and temporal sameness that is required and guaranteed by the globalisation of capital'.⁵⁷ The open and contingent time of potential futurity—what Lerner calls the 'virtual' and what Boxall identifies as a time bound up with 'death'—has seemingly disappeared in DeLillo's post-*Underworld* fictions: 'Time has become so present, has become so "like itself", that it seems as if there are no gaps, no breaches in the continuum.'⁵⁸ The temporal structures that, as we noted in our discussion of *10:04*, fictional realism requires to establish the 'reality-effects' of temporally extensive and stable psychology and action break down entirely in DeLillo's post-2008 texts. As Boxall observes, 'DeLillo's novels of the twenty-first century [...] speak an extraordinary lack of spatial or temporal awareness, a sudden and drastic failure of the bonds that hold us in time and space', governed by Paul Virilio's '*intensive present*' of the digital, 'which produces a different kind of time, a thin, simultaneous time in which it is hard to gain a narrative purchase'.⁵⁹ In *Point Omega* such depletion of duration from time dwindles further to a point of almost total stasis, a movement thematised by the text itself in Richard Elster's obsessions with Teilhard de Chardin's concept of the 'omega point', now inverted in the novel's title: 'Do we have to be human forever? Consciousness is exhausted. Back now to inorganic matter. [...] We want to be stones in a field.'⁶⁰ Similarly to *10:04*, the novel's narrative structure is determined—indeed, overdetermined—by its attempt to produce itself as narrative in these temporal conditions. The periodising difference in DeLillo's post-2008 work is that what Boxall calls 'the possibility of fiction' itself that the novels sustain can only be maintained through ceasing to be novels—giving themselves up to the bare abstraction that undergirds the ironised plot structures of

⁵⁷ Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Lerner, *Hatred*, p. 90-91; Boxall, *DeLillo*, p. 10, 228. DeLillo's most recent novel, 2016's *Zero K*, will not be discussed in this or subsequent chapters. This is partly for lack of space, partly because the work departs strongly from the developmental trajectory of DeLillo's post-*Underworld* work we have described. Indeed, the novel is much closer stylistically to texts such as *White Noise* or *Mao II* (1991) than any work after *The Body Artist*.

⁵⁹ Boxall, *Fiction*, p. 27.

⁶⁰ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 67.

DeLillo's previous work, passing through and internalising the static time of the image until, as we will see, it begins to produce its opposite (the shapes of character psychology, generic plot-structures) within the diachronic unfolding of the novel.

My argument will focus on three interlinked aspects through which the text focuses its efforts: the nature of the characters' psychology (or lack thereof); its treatment of space and its settings of New York and the Anza-Borrigo desert in southern California; and its focus on images, particularly the allegorical function of the artwork that presides over the novel, Douglas Gordon's film installation *24 Hour Psycho* (1994). The text's tripartite structure, I argue, with the main narrative inside a frame story whose temporal relationship to each other is ambiguous to the point of opacity, enacts the stasis, the durationless time, that the novel takes as its content. As Pieter Vermeulen suggests, this lack of narrative motion is related to the almost total depletion of realist character psychology from the text. The narrative itself becomes a frozen or congealed object in which the characters cannot act, only contemplate time's lack of movement. In this schema, *24 Hour Psycho* plays an allegorical role for the operation of the text as a whole: DeLillo gives extreme descriptive prominence to an artwork that slows down and silences narrative, that renders its narrative significance cryptic, and this very prominence of an ekphrastic language instantiates durationless time within narrative movement.⁶¹ As in *10:04*, time itself comes to be embodied as a depth-effect of static space—in this case, the space of the desert environment where the central narrative takes place. In this antinomic situation, I will argue, the allegorical image of *24 Hour Psycho* eventually performs the function of importing duration and psychology back into the text: its intertextuality, linking *Point Omega's* narrative to that of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), restarts narrative time, as the text is recast, following one character's disappearance, into a mystery novel.

⁶¹ Pieter Vermeulen, 'Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*, the Anthropocene, and the Scales of Literature', *Studia Neophilologica*, 87.sup1 (2015), 68-81 (p. 77); *ibid.*, p. 74. For the temporality of ekphrasis, see Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

Therefore, as in *10:04*, the image performs an intensely overdetermined role, at once inscribing in the text the failure and stasis of narrative time and acting, via the mode of visual allegory, as its motor. But this device is itself a form of contemplation, in which the passive focus on a visual image initiates an interaction between frame story and central narrative that the narrator of neither narrative can will or process into fully realised and meaningful literary form.

It may be useful, at this point, to give some indication of the place of images as narrative devices in DeLillo's work as a whole.

3.2.ii DeLillo's 'post-cinematic' novels

A number of critics have noted, from a variety of theoretical perspectives, DeLillo's relationship to visual media.⁶² In a 1979 interview, he cites the films of Jean-Luc Godard as an influence prior to any novelists:

Movies in general may be the not-so-hidden influence on a lot of modern writing, although the attraction has waned, I think. The strong image, the short ambiguous scene, the dream sense of some movies, the artificiality, the arbitrary choices of some directors, the cutting and editing. The power of images.⁶³

DeLillo suggests that this influence is linked to a more general shift in the relationship between media: 'It's movies in part that seduced people into thinking the novel was dead. The

⁶² See for examples: Marco Abel, 'Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future": Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11', *PMLA*, 118 (2003), 1236-1250; Frank Lentricchia, 'The American Writer as Bad Citizen', in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 1-6; Fredric Jameson, 'The Names and Richard A (review)', *Minnesota Review*, 22 (1984), 116-122; Eugene Goodheart, 'Some Speculations on Don DeLillo and the Cinematic Real', in Lentricchia 1991, pp. 117-130.

⁶³ Thomas LeClair and Don DeLillo, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo', *Contemporary Literature* 23 (1982), 19-31 (p. 25).

power of the film image seemed to be overwhelming our little world of print. [...] But movies and novels are too closely related to work according to shifting proportions. If the novel dies, movies will die with it.⁶⁴ This is a proposition that requires unpacking, and we will return to it in a moment. As Mark Osteen notes, the form and content of much of DeLillo's early fiction engages in a dialogue with film. His early short story 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.' bases its title on the form of a cinema marquee and 'with its vague characterizations and detached point of view, the story resembles nothing so much as a film scenario or "treatment"'.⁶⁵ The short story 'The Uniforms', published in 1970 and not reprinted in any of DeLillo's subsequent books, is an adaptation of sorts of Godard's 1967 film *Week-End*, itself an adaptation of a text by Julio Cortázar. Film features prominently in DeLillo's early novels as thematic content. *Americana* (1971) follows the attempt of protagonist David Bell, a television advertising executive, to make 'a long messy autobiographical-type film [...] a long unmanageable movie full of fragments of everything that's part of my life'.⁶⁶ As Osteen comments, Bell is similar to the protagonist of a classical *Bildungsroman*; but 'David's education is not literary but cinematic'. Like the narrator of the 'Anonymity' sections of *Point Omega*, fascinated by the figure of Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates in *Psycho*, Bell's 'identity has been shaped most dramatically by those "American pyramids" Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas'.⁶⁷ In *The Names* (1982), one character, a filmmaker, describes the landscape of Greece in terms of its capture by film: 'We've reached a certain point in the history of film. If a thing can be filmed, film is implied in the thing itself. [...] You have to ask yourself if there's anything about us more important the fact that we're constantly on film, constantly watching ourselves. The whole world is on film, all the time.'⁶⁸ This can be seen as a variation on Debord's claim that the

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 25-26.

⁶⁵ Mark Osteen, *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 9.

⁶⁶ DeLillo, *Americana* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 205.

⁶⁷ Osteen, p. 18; *ibid.*

⁶⁸ DeLillo, *The Names* (London: Picador, 1987), p. 200.

advent of the society of the spectacle ‘entails a generalized shift from *having* to appearing: all effective “having” must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate *raison d’être* from appearances.’⁶⁹ Things are saturated with their visibility, their enmeshment in a system of exchange that manifests only appearances. This moment in *The Names* is also a nascent version of the well-known scene in *White Noise* (1985) in which two academics visit ‘the most photographed barn in America’: ‘They are taking pictures of taking pictures.’⁷⁰

Few, if any, of the extant critical analyses of DeLillo’s links with film, however, have pursued this question at the level of form. John Johnston links this focus on film and mediation to DeLillo’s plots. Where DeLillo’s novels often derive from particular subgenres of fiction—for example, *End Zone* (1972) from the sports novel, *Running Dog* (1978) from the popular thriller, *White Noise* from the campus novel—‘normal or conventional expectations are short-circuited and attention directed elsewhere.’ This is because, Johnston suggests, the plot action, events (what we have been calling narrative kernels) and relationships typical of such subgenres are not DeLillo’s primary narrative material: ‘DeLillo works with words, images, and representations as his primary material—not with people and their individual dramas, which are always defined by and in relation to word and image.’ For Johnston, DeLillo’s characters and the narratives they participate in exhibit ‘a style of perception that might be called post-cinematic’. In this form of perception, the world and its representation in language ‘suggest[s] in some way that everything now appears as an image of itself [...] Post-cinematic perception can be described as a state in which the world seems to have lost all substance and anchoring or reference points, except in relation to other images or what are also conceived as images.’ He posits, via Gilles Deleuze’s re-reading of Henri Bergson’s philosophy, that for DeLillo ‘one image is framed by another, and “subjectivity” is simply the relationship between the two.’ The forms of character action and narrative kernels—that is, the organisation of

⁶⁹ Debord, *Society*, p. 16.

⁷⁰ DeLillo, *White Noise* (London: Picador, 1985), p. 12-13.

narrative time—that would normally emerge as the consequence of intersubjectivity between characters instead appears as the effect of the interrelation of representations.⁷¹ This can be seen for example in *Players* (1977). Early in the novel one of the main characters, Lyle, watches television:

Sitting in near darkness about eighteen inches from the screen, he turned the channel selector every half minute or so, sometimes much more frequently. He wasn't looking for something to sustain his attention. Hardly that. He simply enjoyed jerking the dial into fresh image-burns. He explored content to a point. The tactile-visual delight of switching channels took precedence, however, transforming even random moments of content into pleasing territorial abstractions. [...] The repetitive aspect of commercials interested him. Seeing identical footage many times was a test for the resourcefulness of the eye, its ability to re-select, to subdivide an instant of time.⁷²

Lyle's agency is a reflex of the image-medium itself: he changes channel (already limited to a specific action) not to produce new content but the form of 'fresh image-burns'. His will and perception take the form of a 'tactile-visual delight' in the image and its transformation by the perceptual apparatus and nervous system ('the resourcefulness of the eye'—note he refers only here to anatomy rather than the mental operation involved in seeing, a point that, as we recall from Chapter 2, Crary stresses is central to the account of seeing early in the history of the spectacle). Time becomes for him the effect of 'seeing identical footage': as Nicholas Manning points out, the '[m]arkers of time and distance initially appear scientific, positivistic, even overly precise, but are on closer inspection unusually vague', so that the image-operation

⁷¹ John Johnston, 'Generic Difficulties in the Novels of Don DeLillo', *Critique*, 30 (1989), 261-275 (p. 262); *ibid*, p. 274; *ibid*, p. 268; *ibid*; *ibid*, p. 269; *ibid*, p. 271.

⁷² DeLillo, *Players* (London: Picador, 1991), p. 16.

subdivides time into ‘every half minute or so’. The mechanical division of ‘every half minute’ dissolves into ‘or so’, producing the sense that this division does not consist in the image itself, nor necessarily in Lyle, but rather in a relay constituted by the image-switch itself. As Manning comments, ‘his absorption is created to make time flow, but [...] this disappearance of time itself is also, by extension, the distancing of temporal history behind the simulacra of its image.’⁷³ The action that organises time for Lyle is one of looking, engaging with the image; but this is precisely not an action that consists in ‘sustain[ing] his attention’. As Jonathan Crary points out, attention as the direction of vision on particular objects ‘was in fact continuous with states of distraction, reverie, dissociation, trance. [...] attention imperceptibly mutates into a state of trance or even autohypnosis.’⁷⁴ For Crary, as we have seen, ‘spectacular culture’—that is, the formation of the forms of visibility and subjectivity that govern the society of the spectacle, predating the post-war advent of that social formation itself—‘is not founded on the necessity of making a subject *see*, but rather in which individuals are isolated, separated, and *inhabit time* as disempowered.’⁷⁵ Subjects, produced as individuated contemplators by the apparatus of the spectacle, are defined by their orientation towards the image and its form of time (what Debord, as we explored in the last two chapters, called ‘spectacular time’). And as Johnston suggests, the contemplative temporality of Lyle’s ‘post-cinematic’ perception here is the microcosmic form of the macrocosm of narrative time in the text as a whole: the narrative payoff of ‘[t]he telephone call that will answer questions’ the narrative raises ‘never comes’ and the main characters’ various relationships merely disintegrate.⁷⁶

There is of course some distance between the ‘post-cinematic’ as Johnston defines it and Debord’s critical re-reading of Marxism in the spectacle thesis. For Johnston the shift in

⁷³ Nicholas Manning, “‘The uses of boredom’: affect, attention and absorption in the fiction of Don DeLillo”, *Textual Practice*, 33 (2019), 155-173 (p. 163); *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 46-47.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁷⁶ Johnston, p. 268

DeLillo's fiction from the stylistic dominant of language (which he identifies in the novels up to 1976's *Ratner's Star*) to that of the image and cinema is linked to postmodernism: in the later novels 'experience seems "always already" framed, multiply mediated, and only available through sets of competing and often contradictory representations.' It would seem that for Johnston the status of the image or representation is purely mediatic or cultural: he describes the relationship between language and film as 'between [...] two media'.⁷⁷ As we saw in the last chapter, for Debord the framework of the spectacle analysis is rather wider, encompassing the totality of social production that the spectacle arises from and supplants. It is not in the scope of this section to rehearse the disagreement between the SI's reinterpretation of Marxism and postmodernist theory.⁷⁸ But it will be useful in what follows to note, whilst retaining Johnston's account of the 'post-cinematic' in DeLillo, the connection, ever-present in Debord, to the post-war temporality of the commodity that has remade the globe in its image. For one of the contentions of this section is that, as DeLillo's fiction enters his post-2008 period, the nature of that 'post-cinematic' perception, in terms of subjectivity and narrative temporality's formal response to it, becomes ever more fraught and problematic as it approaches Bauman's 'advent of instantaneity'.⁷⁹ What follows from this, as in *10:04*, is the narrative's assumption of a *contemplative* relationship to time, in which the mediating function of images forms the subject and narrative's only point of access to temporality as such: the frozen synchrony of seeing, of a denarrativised time of visibility, becomes the appearance of the temporal depth realism relied on. As the narrative becomes, like *10:04*, increasingly temporally confused and undifferentiated, the only means of restoring narrative time to the text is through the image's intertextual function, with both Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*: flowing time must rely on stasis. But this new temporality, mimetic of simultaneous

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 274; *ibid*, p. 268.

⁷⁸ For overviews of this debate, especially on the relationship between Debord and Jean Baudrillard's theories, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York/London: The Guilford Press, 1997); and Plant, *Gesture*, esp. pp. 150-187.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Boxall, *Fiction*, p. 6.

global time whilst giving access to narrative movement, may itself be another instance of spectacular pseudo-cyclical time, its narrative rhythms and psychological depths acting as a mere contemplative appearance of realist time.

3.2.iii Narrative Non-Events

This shift in temporality and the nature of the subject is displayed most starkly in *Point Omega*. The text is structured around four central chapters, narrated in the first person by Jim Finley, an artist planning to work on a film centred on Richard Elster, who was employed ‘to conceptualize [...] to apply overarching ideas and principles’ in the 2003 Iraq War.⁸⁰ Bookending these chapters are two sections, titled ‘Anonymity’, using for the most part a close third person narration. These sections, occupying the usual structural position of a frame story, centre around a nameless male figure watching, on two consecutive days, Douglas Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho* during its display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in summer 2006. In chapter 2 of the central narrative, Elster’s daughter, Jessie, arrives at his house in the Colorado Desert of southern California and, in chapter 3, disappears whilst Elster and Finley are out buying groceries. In chapter 4, they search for Jessie and find ‘a knife’ in the desert, the blade ‘free of blood’; when more information does not emerge, Finley and the traumatised Elster drive back to New York.⁸¹ What appears to connect these parts at the level of plot is not an easily recognised hierarchy of story levels but the occluded presence or absence of characters, clues to which appear at intervals throughout the text. Thus, Elster and Finley seem to make a cameo in the opening ‘Anonymity’ section: ‘He watched two men enter, the older man using a cane and wearing a suit that looked traveled in [...] and the younger

⁸⁰ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 23.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 114-5.

man in a casual shirt, jeans and running shoes, the assistant professor, lean, a little nervous.’⁸² The young woman who appears in the final section and talks to the protagonist can be identified with Jessie, even though she is not described in any way that would confirm such an identification, except that ‘[h]e was taller than she was [...] He wasn’t looking at her but knew he was taller, somewhat, slightly.’⁸³ When Finley describes to Jessie taking Elster to see *24 Hour Psycho*, she responds that she saw it herself the next day, a detail of timing that would seem to fit the ‘Anonymity’ sections’ chronology. This schema for reading the text’s plot-events would thus in turn identify the focaliser of the ‘Anonymity’ sections with the figure that Jessie’s mother knows as Dennis. Elster comments that ‘her mother has certain ideas concerning his designs or just his general manner or his appearance or something’, and that ‘when she sends the girl in my direction, yes, it means something’, but that he is ‘not a stalker [...] Maybe persistent, that’s all. Or stutters.’⁸⁴ The conclusion that this figure is responsible for Jessie’s disappearance is one that Finley certainly entertains, brusquely asking the mother about him.⁸⁵ But, as most of the commentators who follow this reading admit, the novel never sanctions or gives conclusive proof of this solution. As David Cowart notes, ‘[t]he maker of a suspense film would eventually answer such questions. [...] [c]onversely, if one sees little [...] one must not allow expectation to dictate false discovery or conclusions.’⁸⁶ The plot or fabula that these conjectures would imply hinges on remarkably few narrative kernels: Dennis’s meeting with Jessie at MoMA; Finley’s arrival in the desert; Jessie’s arrival; her disappearance (and presumably death); Elster and Finley’s return to New York. Elster and Finley’s visit to MoMA does not exert any significant force on plot-events. The status of the meeting in ‘Anonymity 2’ as a narrative kernel relies on a series of assumptions outlined above. Even one

⁸² Ibid, p. 9.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 134.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 72-74.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 110.

⁸⁶ David Cowart, ‘The Lady Vanishes: Don DeLillo’s *Point Omega*’, *Contemporary Literature* 53:1 (2012), 31-50 (p. 36).

of the certain narrative kernels, Jessie's disappearance, is, like the pivotal events in *10:04*, recessed or defined negatively: there is no scene of disappearance, only the single-sentence paragraph declaring that 'When we got back to the house she was gone'; her death, if it can even be assumed as such, is never depicted.⁸⁷ The entire central narrative, therefore, is premised on, at most, three narrative kernels, with a fourth occurring in a frame story that is only very ambiguously related to it. The narrative is therefore almost entirely composed of satellites appended to a very small number of kernels; narrative time is almost nothing but flat accumulation, a form of almost total stasis.

Pieter Vermeulen suggests that *Point Omega's* narrative stasis 'can be read as an attempt to overcome the reliance of the novel form on distinctive events and identifiable individual agents'. For Vermeulen these constituent parts of the historical structure of the novel form 'can be considered as limitations on the novel's ability to abandon conventional realisms and imagine the geological ramifications of culture' in the Anthropocene.⁸⁸ His argument adapts Peter Boxall's reading of *Point Omega* as articulating a crisis in traditional 'mechanics of narrative' in the wake of the unprecedented time-space compression of the 21st century, as we have outlined above. For Boxall, the realism of the novel-form posits a relational set of scales: the subject of modern capitalist individualism, which for Ian Watt was the paradigmatic object of the novel, was related to 'the newly emergent time and space of modernity' via the novel, by whose narrative it 'will be measured and mapped. [...] The history of the novel, over this time, is intimately entwined with the procedures by which we have fashioned our idea of the world.' In *Point Omega*, Vermeulen suggests, that relation fails: the text confronts a global framework of space and time which presents itself as a 'vast anonymity' that 'has overwhelmed the bare outlines of a human plot, and come to assert itself as a blockage on the human scale it

⁸⁷ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 95.

⁸⁸ Vermeulen, 'Scales', p. 77. For an overview of the Anthropocene as a concept, see Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

encompasses'. Consequently, the narrative stasis of *Point Omega*, Vermeulen argues, emerges from a 'depsychologizing operation in the novel form', one which shifts the scale of the novel away from the focalising point of the individual subject towards that of cosmic or geological time.⁸⁹ Like *10:04*, the differentiated narrative structure proper to the realist novel fails under the weight of a form of time with which it is incommensurable. The 'illusion of depth' that Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth associates with realism's forms of temporal organisation disappears.⁹⁰

Like the visual figures in *10:04*, *24 Hour Psycho* performs an allegorical role in *Point Omega*: as Vermeulen argues, it makes itself a figure for the text's own operations. Premiered in 1993, the film re-presented Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), slowed down from 24 frames per second to 2, such that its running time stretches from 1 hour and 49 minutes to 24 hours. Although Hitchcock's original film was first distributed in 35mm prints for projection, Gordon's artwork, as the narrator of 'Anonymity' acknowledges, manipulated the playback of a VHS copy ('this wasn't truly film, was it, in the strict sense. It was videotape. But it was also film.')

⁹¹ This projection technique also cuts out the film's soundtrack, thus literally silencing and removing key sections of narrative information from the film. *24 Hour Psycho* thus, through its movements of adaptation (what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have called 'remediation') of Hitchcock, becomes a figure for *Point Omega*'s own narrative technique: slowing down narrative time, making it static, until it is alien to the temporality required for realist narrative; it defamiliarises and evacuates the forms of character subjectivity proper to the classic realist text.⁹²

⁸⁹ Boxall, p.20; Vermeulen, 'Scales', p. 11; *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹⁰ Deeds Ermarth, p. 4.

⁹¹ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 14.

⁹² Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). It may be worth noting that James Gourley sees in *Point Omega* the influence of rather different figures in the history of cinema, the Soviet director and montage theorist Sergei Eisenstein and German art theorist Rudolf Arnheim, via Samuel Beckett's *Film* (1965). See Gourley, *Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 85-94. The effect of this is to manoeuvre the context of the film in *Point Omega* towards Arnheim's psychologistic and formalist account of art focused on 'technical temporal manipulation' in *24 Hour Psycho* (p. 93). However, Gourley's inference of such influences on the novel

I will return to the question of the subject in the next section. For the moment, I will focus on one more point about the text's handling of narrative temporality. The relationship between frame story (the site of *24 Hour Psycho*) and central story is, as noted above, at best temporally ambiguous. The date '2006 LATE SUMMER/EARLY FALL' prefaces the first 'Anonymity' section, but given the change in narrator between this and the central narrative, whose chapters restart their numbering, it is not clear that this chronological dating applies to the whole narrative. Although the two 'Anonymity' sections are dated precisely, as 'September 3' and 'September 4', the central narrative contains no such chronological markers. The fabula outlined above relies on a chain of inference that the text invites but does not give clear sanction. The central narrative is thus chronologically unmoored. There is no clear hierarchy of story levels: nothing signals an analeptic transition between the first 'Anonymity' section and the central narrative, which would have marked the former as a flashback, supplying information related to the kernels of the later central narrative. The relation between story levels, which might otherwise indicate a clear chronological progression to the fabula, is rendered nugatory: story time is flattened, made non-durational. The narrative undergoes the same transformation as *Psycho* itself, contradicting the durational content of language, as described by the protagonist of 'Anonymity': 'They had to think in words. This was their problem. The action moved too slowly to accommodate their vocabulary of film.'⁹³

3.2.iv Borrowed Depths

At the centre of the text stand two narratorial subjects: the focaliser of 'Anonymity' who watches *24 Hour Psycho* and Finley, the first-person narrator of the central narrative. In one sense, the collapse of realist time in the text renders both useless, a process that *24 Hour*

remain rather less plausible than those (primarily that of Hitchcock) the novel itself presents on its surface.

⁹³ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 1; *ibid*, p. 3, 127; *ibid*, p. 13.

Psycho allegorises. As Mark Edmundson notes, DeLillo's characters confound E.M. Forster's distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters: they are neither 'constructed round a single idea or quality' nor have 'the incalculability of life' in their development across the course of the plot.⁹⁴ Rather, '[t]hey are recording and transmitting devices, not characters in Tolstoy's mode, not even Freudian psyches. [...] they aren't, strictly speaking, present at all', but imprints of their media environment.⁹⁵ As Johnston observes, characters frequently 'give the impression of speaking out directly to the reader', a technique he links to the frontally-shot monologues of Godard's films; these speeches often consist of non-sequiturs that do not seem to reflect a previously-known inner life but rather construct it: Johnston comments that the behaviour associated with characters' speech does not imply particular forms of psychology, but the latter is 'treated as an effect rather than a cause.' Moreover, such effects are not limited to DeLillo's characters: it is often difficult to distinguish between the tone of character dialogue, free indirect narration and omnipotent third person narration. Rather, as Edmundson describes it, the narrative 'voice tends to be arch, merging in complexly ironic ways with the voice of the characters', meshed together in a single field as '[i]t penetrates everywhere, sees all, and defines each character by expeditious reporting—as though the relevant computer file were on hand—of his or her secrets.'⁹⁶

In Vermeulen's account, by vastly slowing down the film to a temporality 'beyond human boundaries', Gordon 'takes up a film that is often seen as a paradigmatic illustration of Freudian psychoanalysis, only to remove the model of subjectivity that underlies it.'⁹⁷ The character Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) exhibits a split personality, the incarnation of his deceased mother, that drives him to murder Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), as a result of the possessive sexual jealousy the mother-personality feels over her son. Bates thus seems to be

⁹⁴ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1927), p. 68, 78.

⁹⁵ Mark Edmundson, 'Not Flat, Not Round, Not There: Don DeLillo's Novel Characters', *The Yale Review*, 83:2 (1995), 107-124 (p. 119).

⁹⁶ Johnston, p. 264, 265; Edmundson, p. 118.

⁹⁷ Vermeulen, p. 73.

shaped, in simplified fashion, according to several of Freud's theories of subject-formation and family relations, most obviously the Oedipus Complex and his analysis of grief in 'Mourning and Melancholia'.⁹⁸ Whilst we can contest Vermeulen's account of *Psycho*—psychoanalysis only enters the film as a discourse in its closing minutes, as a psychiatrist (Simon Oakland) explains Bates's condition, providing a hermeneutic lens for the film's preceding violence—it seems correct that *Point Omega's* narrative stasis proceeds from a recapitulation of this radical flattening and dispersal of subjectivity. The protagonist of 'Anonymity' feels himself to be unstable, prone to a breakdown of his subjecthood: he speculates 'how many weeks or months before the film's time scheme absorbed his own', as it had 'subsumed' the 'broad horror of the old gothic movie'? That is, he feels that he cannot exist as an autonomous subject in time: he draws a direct link between narrative and selfhood, as one's boundaries dissolve in the vast increase in duration of *24 Hour Psycho* so the other collapses, flowing into the film's form of time, normally alien to the subject. On the novel's final pages, as the setting returns to the installation room, he 'waits to be assimilated, pore by pore, to dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates'—but not quite the Bates of *Psycho*, which he feels he cannot now ever see again in the same way: '[t]he original movie was fiction, this was real.' Time has destroyed the very fictionality of the film in which Bates had functioned as an exemplary subject of psychological depth. He exists as a subject only in relation to the film's static time scheme, in a generalisation of contemplation over narrative subjectivity. Like Lyle in *Players*, the temporality of his action and perception is determined by media, rendered contemplative: he thinks of looking as an active exertion, '[t]o see what's there, finally to look and to know you're looking, to feel time passing, to be alive to what is happening in the smallest registers of emotion.'⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI (1910)*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 163-176; Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. by Shawn Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 201-218.

⁹⁹ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 7-8; *ibid.*, p. 148, 17; *ibid.*, p. 7.

This situation, in which the subject relates to the object-world purely through seeing filmic images, is not isolated to 'Anonymity'. This absorption in 'post-cinematic' perception extends to Finley in the desert, for whom time itself becomes something visible: 'I keep seeing the words. Heat, space, stillness, distance. They've become visual states of mind [...] That's the other word, time.'¹⁰⁰ Elster contemplates with closed eyes the diachronic spread of time as synchronic images: 'silently divining the nature of later extinctions, grassy plains in picture books for children, a region swarming with happy camels and giant zebras, mastodons, sabretooth tigers.'¹⁰¹ Finley's film projects focus on this form of cinematic time, expanded to the point that it overwhelms narrative. His planned film with Elster would consist of '[o]ne continuous take', which he describes with reference to Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002): 'A single extended shot, about a thousand actors and extras, three orchestras, history, fantasy, crowd scenes, ballroom scenes [...] Ninety-nine minutes.'¹⁰² The camera in Sokurov's film, which Finley sees as encompassing a vast swath of time and material, is however notably mobile, as opposed to the static shot of Finley's film: 'Just a man and a wall. [...] The man stands there and relates the complete experience, everything that comes to mind [...] A simple head shot.'¹⁰³ The seemingly arbitrary nature of filmic duration for Finley is demonstrated by his description of his first film. A collage of 'documents, old film footage, kinescopes of TV shows from the 1950s' of performances of comedian Jerry Lewis, the film is at once a historical insight into 'another civilization, midcentury America' and a work that 'place[s] Jerry outside the moment, in some larger surround, ahistorical'.¹⁰⁴ For Finley the temporal component of filmic seeing is thus at once freighted with meaning and evacuated: attempting to edit the film, 'I tormented myself over the running time, settling finally on a freakish fifty-seven-minute movie [...] It could have been a hundred and fifty-seven minutes, could have

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 27.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 26-27

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 33.

been four hours, six hours.¹⁰⁵ Film as a form of seeing is thus deeply overdetermined: essentially contemplative (static and passive, rearranged only by editing) it is nonetheless burdened by being Finley's only tool for meaningfully composing time. Notably Finley in turn sees Elster's landscape of sedimented time in terms of film: looking out from 'remote trailheads' he sits 'in the car, conjuring the film, shooting the film, staring out at sandstone wastes.'¹⁰⁶ This look on to landscape itself forms an intertext: the desert has a privileged place in the history of Hollywood cinema, exemplified by John Ford's paradigmatic Westerns filmed in Monument Valley on the Arizona-Utah border.¹⁰⁷ Deserts, as Jean Baudrillard noted, came to constitute an image of filmic vision as such, a designation altered by the forms of narrative of revisionist films of the 1960s and 70s.¹⁰⁸ Films such as Samuel Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), Monte Hellman's road movie *Two Lane Blacktop* (1971), Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975), filmed partly in the Sahara, all culminate with the disappearances or deaths of characters in the desert.

This thematic mirroring between frame and central story forms the main point of contact between the two, mediated by the post-cinematic vision of the narrator of 'Anonymity' interfacing with *24 Hour Psycho*. The presumed meeting between Jessie and the figure known as Dennis that would initiate the events of the fabula occurs here in an act of mutual seeing of the film. At the hermeneutic centre of the text, the point through which the narrative loops, is a denatured image of digital time, the organising narratorial subject dispersed and absorbed into 'pure film, pure time'. This is, however, only one half of the text's effort. For here the image—and this may be the mechanism that underpins the 'tentative' nature, as Vermeulen sees it, of the text's 'innovations'—enacts a formal double-bind: even as it performs the narratorial subject's dispersal, reduction, atomisation, it relies on the pre-existing formal codes of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 33-34.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁰⁷ See in particular *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *The Searchers* (1956).

¹⁰⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), p. 1, 5.

narratorial subjectivity it negates—namely, the figure of Norman Bates and the intertext of *Psycho*.¹⁰⁹

This, then, is *24 Hour Psycho*'s dialectically opposing function within *Point Omega*. In the same movement by which it disintegrates identity, it instantiates or forms it, by bringing buried narrative kernels or intertexts as narrative material. In the first 'Anonymity' section, the very first description of the chapter's focaliser states that he is 'standing against the north wall, barely visible', his first visible action being that he 'moved a hand towards his face, repeating, ever so slowly, the action of a figure on the screen.' He moves to the other side of the screen—and this is the first instance of free indirect discourse in the novel, the point where he moves away from being seen purely externally, into his subjectivity—to 'watch the same action in a flipped image': '[h]e knew it' would appear flipped 'but needed to see it [...] what made this side of the screen any less truthful than the other side?', he asks. Looking, then, becomes an epistemological or subjective operation whose content is flat or arbitrary but nonetheless possesses a privileged force within the narrative economy of dedifferentiation (between story levels, between Finley and the 'Anonymity' narrator) that we have seen operating within *Point Omega*. Things *are* only insofar as they *appear*. Similarly, although the subject of the 'Anonymity' sections thinks of real life as 'the strange bright fact that breathes and eats out there, the thing that's not the movies', what seems to pursue the characters in the novel is film narrative itself, specifically the plot of *Psycho*. The central chapters' narrative structure of multiple and overlapping flashbacks set against a static present inscribes a movement between urban space and the desert that mirrors that of *Psycho*, whose pivotal deaths occur after Marion Crane travels from Phoenix out into the trackless desert ("Then the locale changes. California, I think", as the 'Anonymity' protagonist speculates).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 7; Vermeulen, 'Scales', p. 3.

¹¹⁰ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 3-4, 4-5; *ibid*, p. 137.

Although it is this figure who seems most obviously to echo Norman Bates—we learn that ‘his mother had passed on’—it is Finley who ends up, in a parallelism informed by the formal juxtaposition of story levels, taking on the role.¹¹¹ The opening section’s triangulation of voyeurism, in which the protagonist is ‘watching the two men [Elster and Finley], they were watching the screen, Anthony Perkins at his peephole was watching Janet Leigh undress’ is condensed down into Finley’s fascination with Jessie: in the scene before she disappears, he imagines the two of them in separate spaces, ‘only a meter away’, connected as if by montage, and comes to look into her room, only to realise ‘that she was looking at me’.¹¹² This sequence of disconnected looking follows that of *Psycho*, which moves straight from a perpendicular close-up of Bates to a POV shot; the sequence directly precedes the moment of revelation of the shower scene. (See fig 5 and 6.) Murder, as an instrument of realist plot, enters the central narrative through an osmotic transfer of subjectivity at the scene of the ‘Anonymity’ sections. As we have seen, at the centre of the text is an identification between the narratorial subject position and the technologised image, in which looking becomes ‘passing from this body into a quivering image on the screen’, a unification with that in which ‘it was impossible to see too much’. Even in the absence of narrative movement of the sort that realism requires, plot reasserts itself in a form of contemplative automatism, as what, in the words of the narrator of DeLillo’s *White Noise*, Jack Gladney, ‘move[s] deathward’.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 11.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 10, p. 92-93.

¹¹³ DeLillo, *Noise*, p. 26.



Figure 5-6: stills from *Psycho* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount Pictures, 1960)

If Finley takes on the persona of Norman Bates, as narrative psychology is imported into the central narrative from a story level that this movement reveals as separate, then Jessie is re-formed as Marion Crane, whose murder halfway through the film's narrative forms its hinge. But this leaves her functionally unchanged: as the subject of the 'Anonymity' sections notes, '[e]verybody remembers the killer's name, Norman Bates, but nobody remembers the

victim's name. Anthony Perkins is Norman Bates, Janet Leigh is Janet Leigh.' Finley emphasises her nondescript and insubstantial nature throughout his descriptions. She is physically middling, 'pale and thin, mid-twenties, awkward, with a soft face, not fleshy but roundish and calm'; she leaves no trace of herself but '[a] small airline kit', and is 'sylphlike, her element was air. [...] She moved through places in a soft glide, feeling the same things everywhere'. He notes that 'she seemed to be attentive to some interior presence', and that at moments she seems not to register the gaze of others, because '[s]he was missing, fixed tightly within', suggesting a strong psychological depth whose contents are never disclosed.¹¹⁴ Like Janet Leigh, she does not take on any further psychological definition (as 'Marion Crane') but remains the product of what her surface discloses: as Michael Jones notes, characters in late DeLillo 'withdraw behind the gauze of possible definitions, possible lives'.¹¹⁵ Likewise, as Elster loses his psychological stability, becoming nearly speechless after Jessie's death, this seems related to his lack of an analogous role in the narrative of *Psycho*. If Norman Bates exemplifies the Oedipus complex as a psychological formation, then Elster, in his function as the father, occupies an absent place: Bates' own father, who should in theory supply a crucial part in that symbolic drama, goes unmentioned in the film. As contemplation imports psychology into the stalled, flat time of the text, subjectivity is temporally activated but only as an automatised role for the subject to enter. The narrative time of a psychologised realism appears, but only in a pseudo-cyclical time, as the subject enters a contemplative position prepared for them by the spectacle.

The text's overall narrative movement, as a series of seemingly static scenes propelled internally only by the rigid exchange-structure of dialogue, admits many individual moments when perspective shifts from the dominants (free indirect discourse, first-person) to a more free-floating pictorial style. The most notable examples are those that open and close the text:

¹¹⁴ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 7; *ibid.*, p. 50, 62; *ibid.*, p. 76; *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹⁵ Michael Jones, 'The other side of silence: realism, ecology and the whole life in Don DeLillo's late fiction', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1345-1363 (p. 1361).

the first four and a half paragraphs essay a distant (though seemingly not omniscient) third-person; in the last section, directly after the moment of longing for merging quoted the text finishes with three paragraphs in which it is impossible to tell if the subject 'he' is the protagonist or Norman Bates. These shifts suggest that one is an aspect of the other: narrative itself becomes a 'fort-da oscillation' (as Graley Herren terms it) or modulation within an essentially static system, as the text cycles back to its fatal centre.¹¹⁶ Like *10:04*, it reunites the diachronic—the novel-form's production of itself in time—and the synchronic—the immobility of the image allegorising abstract global time—in a new form borrowed from contemplation itself. Both novels overcome contemplation's frozen temporality precisely through an attempt to unite with the image, to enter wholly into its stasis. Unlike Lerner's novel, which (perhaps ironically) portrays this new contemplative time as a utopian temporality beyond and within the novel-form itself, *Point Omega* makes the image ambiguous and uneasy. For Finley the image is the bearer of time, but for Elster time itself is not growth or diachronic production but entropy: 'Time falling away. That's what I feel here [...] Time becoming slowly older [...] Our lives receding into the long past [...] We pass completely out of being. Stones. Unless stones have being.'¹¹⁷ What I have tried, in conclusion, to suggest in this analysis is that the complex set of mediations through which the narrative machinery of *Point Omega* moves reconfigure the narratorial subject as what Crary, writing of the contemporary instantiation of the spectacle, calls a 'hallucination of presence': presence and absence in one, the pseudo-cyclical time of the commodity's ontology of visuality.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Graley Herren, 'Don DeLillo's Art Stalkers', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 61 (2015), 138-167 (p. 139).

¹¹⁷ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 91.

¹¹⁸ Crary, *24/7*, p. 29.

Chapter 4: Allegories of Spectacular Time

4.0 Introduction

In the last chapter, I examined the increasing stasis and flattening of narrative time in the work of Ben Lerner and Don DeLillo, and their texts' compensatory turn to a focus on the visual and seeing, in the terms of Guy Debord and the Situationists' theory of spectacular time—that is, of the fabric of socialised time as increasingly inaccessible except in the form of a commodity-object to be contemplated. In the current chapter, I turn to the work of Tom McCarthy, who perhaps poses these questions most starkly and self-consciously out of all the authors considered in this study. My discussion will focus on three novels published since 2005: *Remainder* (2005), a first-person narrative set in the contemporary period; *C* (2010), an historical novel set at the beginning of the 20th century; and *Satin Island* (2015), the first-person narrative of an anthropologist known as U., who has been tasked by his superiors in the corporate marketing firm he works at with producing 'the Great Report' on contemporary society's knowledge.¹ These works dramatise contemporary questions around time, representation, finance capitalism, technology and the place of writing. In this sense, they continue the focus that McCarthy has staked out in his extensive theoretical and fine art work. These writings often centre on the issue that part of our last chapter concerned itself with—namely, realism. As he writes in a 2014 essay, McCarthy sees 'an error at the source of realism itself', and his novels notably diverge from many aspects of contemporary forms of realist fiction.² Indeed, the distinction between fiction and the meta-discourse of theory is sometimes unclear in McCarthy's work: all of his novels utilise long passages of philosophical and

¹ McCarthy, *Satin Island* (Jonathan Cape: 2015), p. 56. McCarthy's intervening work *Men In Space* (2007), will not be discussed here—though not published until later, it was written in the 1990s and hence does not fit with the period of texts we are examining here.

² McCarthy, 'Machines', p. 21.

literary-critical discourse, invoking many of the same philosophical sources as his non-fiction, while some of McCarthy's non-fictional writing incorporates material directly from his fiction. Part of the question this chapter, then, attempts to answer is how the novels *exceed* their theoretical programmes, through their means of illuminating the specific form taken by socialised time in a late capitalist society. Notably, these works' narrative temporality and their focus on description constitute a site of overdetermination surrounding the relationship between the image and time, that belies the (overtly stated) thematic concerns of the work. The problems that McCarthy explores through form take as their focus a number of visual figures, which often emerge from digital image technologies (most notably, as I analyse in section 4 of this chapter, a buffering circle on a PC screen). In this way, McCarthy marks a shift in image technologies that, as we saw in the last chapter, DeLillo also attends to in *Point Omega*, through the formal role of *24 Hour Psycho* in that work. McCarthy thus gestures towards a decomposition of the novel-form in the era of digital networks and their forms of simultaneous time, suggesting its recomposition as a *mixed-media* form. But, as I will argue, McCarthy utilises these image technologies less as part of an enquiry into the historically shifting forms of media, but as figures that mediate a preceding abstraction of social time and space, of the sort that I described in the Introduction. And whilst McCarthy's own account of the relationship between his work and realism is remarkably ahistorical, folding what we called, in the Introduction, 'discourses of the end of the novel' back into the history of the novel itself, the texts' forms suggest the possibility of historical development for the novel-form in concert with the image, even as they deny any straightforward access to a politics of the image that is not defined negatively, in terms of the dialectical interdependence of the dimensions of space and time in the novel-form.

This chapter's argument will first of all examine the condition of McCarthy's overtly anti-psychological, anti-realist narrative, relating it back to his theoretical conception of narrative

and writing. In particular, I will refer to his reading, in the non-fiction text *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* (2006), of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's re-reading of Sigmund Freud's Wolf-Man case as a model of spatialised narrative. McCarthy insists, drawing on Abraham and Torok, that in Hergé's *Tintin* books subjectivity and psychology—which, as we saw in the last chapter, realist fiction conceives of as premised on temporal depth and continuity—instead appear as a space in which the plots, 'framed by enigmas', never really advance, 'display[ing] an after-the-crime logic, poring over the scene of events'. The logic of the plots is not one of the production of new narrative kernels, but endless self-correction and 'misreadings', displayed in one 'brilliantly allegorical scene' where two characters drive in the desert and pursue their own tracks in circles. Characters, documents and narrative information circulate through the texts but are often far from being integrated into patterned, meaningful time, becoming instead a kind of dirt or waste—the desert scene itself ends, McCarthy comments, with 'a ferocious sandstorm that soon wipes all tracks away. [...] As Tintin huddles, despondent, endless grains of sand hit his eyes and mouth, like so many illegible tracts.'³ In *Remainder*, *C* and *Satin Island*, the emptying of conventional character psychology accompanies a form of narrative time that does not progress through instances of psychological change to a temporally continuous individual who provides a point of view onto the plot-events, but instead mobilises spatial movement, repeating the same narrative kernels in loops. This spatial ground to narrative, which freezes and empties the novel of temporal and psychological depth, reappears in what Camilla Weaver has identified as McCarthy's focus on 'visuality' as a vector for narrative subjectivity in his work: '[p]attern' recurs in the novels, a 'fundamentally [...] visual arrangement' as she comments.⁴ In a number of texts, he describes narrative and aesthetic form more generally as being constituted by *mediation* rather than any

³ McCarthy, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* (London: Portobello Books, 2006), p. 18; *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴ Milly Weaver, 'Restricted Action: McCarthy's Modernist Legacy?', *Tom McCarthy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Dennis Duncan (London: Gylphi, 2016), pp. 95-119 (p. 99).

form of originary inscription—he refers, for example, to James Joyce, Jean Cocteau, Georges Bataille, Alexander Trocchi and, as we will see, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* (458 BC), reading these as anti-subjective and anti-temporal texts.⁵ From this perspective, the spatialised, static loops of these narratives lay bare the mechanisms that underlie realist narrative time, revealing such temporality as what we have called, drawing on Marx and Debord, an ‘appearance’. Such an understanding of narrative is made manifest in the texts’ repeated focus on circular motifs, from the figure-eight of *Remainder* and disc of the sun in *C* to the buffer circle the narrator scrutinises in *Satin Island*. Such symbols, which appear as drab, anti-symbolic objects, foci of narrators’ or characters’ discourse, or metaphors, are notable for McCarthy’s insistence on their spatialised *flatness* that recalls the discourse on surfaces and opticality that I outlined in Section 2.3.

I want to suggest, however, that the form of McCarthy’s texts is more complicated than his own critical account suggests. I will address these in Sections 3 and 4 of this chapter. Firstly, as Pieter Vermeulen notes, although McCarthy breaks ‘with three crucial features of the traditional realist novel’, namely psychology, a diegesis that reproduces ‘available social or existential meanings’ and ‘thematic depth’, he nonetheless appropriates certain features of such works—for example, in *Remainder*, the genre of ‘trauma fiction’, or the *Bildungsroman* in *C*.⁶ This very appropriation, which continues certain attributes of realist narrative form whilst vacating crucial components, estranges the novel form even as it is displaced internally by a different, spatialised register of the visual. Secondly, this model of conflicting media registers presupposes too pure and differentiated a conception of media types. Justus Nieland describes McCarthy’s references to other media, particularly in relation to the modernist intertexts his novels refer back to, as directed precisely against modernism’s ‘notorious insistence on medial

⁵ McCarthy, ‘Ulysses’; McCarthy, *Transmission and the Individual Remix: How Literature Works* (New York, Vintage, 2012), unpaginated; McCarthy, ‘Machines’, p. 22.

⁶ Vermeulen, ‘The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*’, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 58 (2012), 549-568 (p. 553).

specificity or purity', forming instead a 'sustained investment in dirty media—the constitutive impurity, otherness, or heterogeneity of media, its way of being technically contaminated by alterity, noise, and the stochastic'.⁷ In this sense, in McCarthy's texts the novel becomes a form in which media logics butt up against one another. The novel is confronted with its medial others, but they themselves are internally differentiated, subject to operational logics that do not run perfectly, but collide with what the narrator of *Remainder* calls 'leftover fragment[s], a shard of detritus'.⁸ They thus come to constitute a returned form of time, but now as what Josh Cohen calls the 'allegorical' time of the visual, which is arbitrary rather than ordered, and 'discontinuous, anti-dialectical [...] not linear diegesis, so much as the process by which diegesis is frustrated, unable to proceed'.⁹ This complicates McCarthy's implicit model of the novel. Realist narrative and temporality is not conjured away even as the texts emphasise the spatialisation in which they are grounded, with images and the visual instantiating that anti-symbolic space. Rather, narrative temporality itself could be seen as a *remainder* of the unfolding of the processes of the different temporalities that structure the world of the texts.

4.1 'Transmission': Disenchantment and Lyrical Realism

The extent to which the treatment of temporality and space in McCarthy's works diverges from much contemporary fiction was already clear from his first novel, *Remainder*. In a significant 2008 essay Zadie Smith hinged her opposition between *Remainder* and what she called 'lyrical realism' in the contemporary novel on precisely these categories. Comparing it to the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet, she writes that it 'makes you preternaturally aware of space [...] It forces us to recognize space as a non-neutral thing—unlike realism, which often

⁷ Justus Nieland, 'Dirty Media: Tom McCarthy and the Afterlife of Modernism', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58 (2012), 569-599 (p. 572).

⁸ Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (Richmond: Alma Books, 2006), p. 9.

⁹ Cohen, p. 19.

ignores the specificities of space. Realism's obsession is convincing us that time has passed. It fills space with time.' For Smith, this manifests as a displacement of attention from what we have, in the last chapter, identified as the realist novel's particular temporality, organised around a successive alternation of narrative kernels and peripheries, to the spaces in which the narrative takes place. This is most evident in several important descriptive passages (in particular, one concerning a murder scene in *Remainder*), to which I will return later. In the most literal sense, the novel's narrative pivots around successive attempts to produce a series of spaces, corresponding first to the narrator's memories and subsequently to his emergent experiences and future events, a process whose stages the narrator describes in details that are flat, clinical or glib in tone. Consequently, *Remainder* does not progress from one narrative turning-point to another, with their accompanying shifts in style for emphasis, but becomes a movement through narrative space that 'works by accumulation and repetition, closing in on its subject in ever-decreasing revolutions'.¹⁰

That this accords with McCarthy's own conception of the formal history of the novel is a point Smith emphasises, writing that 'its theoretical foundations prove no obstacle to the expression of a self-ridiculing humor. In fact, the closer it adheres to its own principles, the funnier it is.' Those principles, codified in McCarthy's non-fiction work, have recurred in differing forms in his subsequent fictions. This section will examine the spatial focus of McCarthy's works in the light of his theories, as the epiphenomenon of a frozen temporality, instantiated in the form of visual patterns. This spatiality can also be compared to that which I identified in Chapter 1 in Debord's theory of spectacle. For Debord, the planetary reach of the spectacle, which 'covers the entire globe, basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory', unites the world in a single form of time that, as Jonathan Crary has postulated in the context of the 21st century, forms 'a time without time, a time extracted from any material or

¹⁰ Smith, *Mind*, p. 73; *ibid*, p. 95; *ibid*, p. 83.

identifiable demarcations, a time without sequence or recurrence.’¹¹ Time converts into a static space of social commodities. And whilst the various relationships between theories of image culture and technology, McCarthy’s own critical work, and the tradition of Marxist criticism have proven remarkably ambiguous, it is the intent of this section to suggest how the spatial moment in McCarthy’s work instantiates an imagistic logic derived from the spectacle.¹² For this spatiality is not merely a matter of the diminution of narrative time, it is also marked by an increasing emphasis on visual description and an enlarged role for the act of looking, in which narrative time dilates and threatens to disappear. In one sense, narrative time becomes a frozen and simultaneous space of the visible.

For McCarthy the work of art is not, as we have seen Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth describe the realist novel in the last chapter, a structure in which psychological subjectivity is guaranteed by the dimension of time. Instead, McCarthy posits as the originating gesture of literature the opening of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, namely ‘a signal crossing space’, the beacon chain that indicates the fall of Troy to the Greeks.¹³ The subject of narrative is itself a spatial element for McCarthy. In *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*, he highlights the space of tombs and crypts in Hergé’s *The Adventures of Tintin* (1929-83), drawing on the literary and psychoanalytic criticism of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok. In their most significant work, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word* (1976), Abraham and Torok re-read Freud’s case study of Sergei Pankajev, whose biography will later form the basis for the character of Serge in McCarthy’s *C*. McCarthy points out that Freud conceives of Sergei’s subjectivity in architectural terms: ‘[t]he surfaces of Sergei’s mind are like the walls of a pyramid—the inside walls, covered in hieroglyphs that are both visible and inscrutable at the same time.’ This conception of the mind in terms of flat

¹¹ Ibid, p. 93; Debord, *Society*, p. 15; Crary, *24/7*, p. 29.

¹² McCarthy has referred to the Situationists a number of times in theoretical writings and interviews, though only in relation to their practices of *détournement* and recuperation, rather than their critical social theories or the spectacle thesis. See for example Tom McCarthy, James Corby and Ivan Callus, ‘The *CounterText* Interview: Tom McCarthy’, *CounterText*, 1:2 (2015), pp.-153 (p. 150).

¹³ McCarthy, *Transmission*.

surfaces emphasises an aspect of temporal simultaneity: he notes that Freud ‘compares Pankajev’s mental life to the culture of ancient Egypt, which “preserves the earlier stages of its development side by side with its end-products, [...] and thus, as it were, spreads out upon a two dimensional surface what other instances of evolution show us in the solid”’.¹⁴ The reference to ancient Egyptian art and the pictographic writing systems used on the walls of their tombs is crucial: to apprehend the substance of consciousness, to ‘read’ it as McCarthy suggests Tintin’s characters do the content of the narratives they occupy, is to engage with hieroglyphs that can only be decoded visually.¹⁵ The very core of the Wolf-Man’s psychology becomes what Abraham and Torok call a ‘crypt’. Jacques Derrida, in his foreword to their text, comments that the crypt is ‘not a natural place, but the striking history of an artifice, an *architecture*, an artefact: of a place *comprehended* within another but rigorously separated from it, isolated from general space by partitions’.¹⁶ The subject itself is thus not just spatialised but structured by a space that does not belong to it, by a core of the non-natural or artificial. Moreover, this spatiality articulates itself, for McCarthy, as a time without time. ‘Sergei’s mind’, he comments, ‘is like the Caribbean Sea in [Hergé’s] *Red Rackham’s Treasure*, with more than one time-zone overlaid in strange simultaneity’, a space that unfolds in both the life of the subject and narrative time as ‘a field of almost abject repetition’.¹⁷

To return to McCarthy’s comment on the *Oresteia*, for him the situation of the subject described above becomes here a philosophy of writing or narrative. Abraham and Torok focus on the role of certain key words in Freud’s analysis, what they call ‘cryptonyms’, words that Pankajev could not speak but which were nevertheless suggested by his actual word-choices and parapraxes, which contain behind their apparent lack of connection to the actual spoken

¹⁴ McCarthy, *Tintin*, p. 78; *ibid*, p. 77-78.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, ‘Foreword’, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. xi-ii (p. xiv).

¹⁷ McCarthy, *Tintin*, p. 79.

word an ‘allusion to a foreign or arcane meaning’.¹⁸ The crypt at the heart of the subject is thus a source of language: McCarthy writes that ‘[i]t buries and, in doing so, generates noise, coded speech [...] The crypt’s walls are broken; it oozes; it *transmits*.’ Accordingly, McCarthy takes Tintin’s narratives, riddled with crypts and tombs, as a model of a depsychologised, detemporalised narrative of such a mechanism of cryptic transmission. They never progress but rather the narrative’s logic is that ‘it keeps forming crypts. If Tintin busts one gang, finds one transmitter, the crypt just relocates and starts transmitting elsewhere.’ The narrative’s development is one of a ‘set of overlayings and cross-encodings, [that] pulses out sequences that resonate at levels far beyond that of any individual’.¹⁹ In this sense, narrative itself is not, for McCarthy, an independent object, but rather the effect or epiphenomenon of such a process of spatial transmission or pulsing. In a later theoretical text, *Recessional, or the Time of the Hammer* (2016), he hinges his analysis on moments of ‘[a]rrest’ and ‘pause’, of ‘[t]ool-downage, implements (*instruments*) idle, waiting’, in certain modernist fictions. For him this ‘time-out-of-time that will never be measured on [the] clock-face’, a ‘suspended or abstracted beat’, forms ‘the time of fiction’ as such: glossing Jacques Derrida on Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés* (1897), he claims that such a suspension, a ‘baffling dislocation[,] [...] sets up “the pure medium of fiction”. *Fiction* would not be un-truth [...] nor would it be story, in [Thomas] Mann’s sense of the unfolding of narrative around temporal flow’, but rather it would only exist in a recess or space outside of time as defined by events.²⁰ Such crypt-like spaces form central preoccupations of McCarthy’s protagonists, towards which the teleology of the narrative tends. There is for example the apartment building from the memories of *Remainder*’s narrator, reproduced as a solution to his feeling ‘artificial [...] plastic’; the family crypt in *C*, in which the body of the sister with whom Serge had an incestuous relationship is

¹⁸ Abraham and Torok, p. 18.

¹⁹ McCarthy, *Tintin*, p. 83; *ibid*, p. 89-90.

²⁰ McCarthy, *Recessional, or the Time of the Hammer* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2016), p. 22, 29; *ibid*, p. 27-28.

buried, echoed in the Egyptian tomb where he contracts the disease that will kill him; and the dream landscape of *Satin Island*, which the narrator U. sees as an answer to the task that occupies him throughout the course of the text, the creation of a total anthropological document of the present.²¹ The repetition of motifs related to these spaces, often—crucially—focusing on visual details or presented as images seen by the protagonists, bare of any other context, forms a far more prominent presence in McCarthy's narratives than conventional narrative kernels. In this sense narrative time, the passage of the syuzhet, is radically de-emphasised and these spatialised components of narrative correspondingly emphasised. McCarthy's treatment of such problems—the spatialisation of the subject and consequently the spatialisation of narrative—tends to remain more at the level of theme and motif than that of form. This section will therefore begin by outlining the overt concerns of McCarthy's texts with space and their consequences for narrative. His narrators fixate, through their anti-psychological concern with space, on the visual. In one sense, as the next section will point out, this division between overt subject-matter or theme and form corresponds to one between space and time: narrative time actualises itself as the remainder that the spatialisation of narrative into static images cannot process.

4.2 Spatialised narrative

McCarthy's protagonists find themselves in experiences of space and time in which these two dimensions tend to disarticulate. The narrator of *Remainder*, the beneficiary of an £8.5 million settlement over an 'accident' that 'involved something falling from the sky', watches footballers attempt goals. As they kick, 'time expand[s]. That's what all good sportsmen do: fill time up with space.' By this he means that their movements cover more in the way of space in

²¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 23; McCarthy, *C* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), p. 294-297; McCarthy, *Island*, p. 130-132.

a particular temporal interval than other athletes. Space, as the crucial dimension of athletic performance, is injected into time, becoming its content. The narrator uses a spatial metaphor for this process itself: 'they're expanding every second, every half-second, as though the moment were a cylinder around them and they were pushing its edges outwards so it takes in [...] more for them to run down before they reach the second's edge.' Time itself becomes a portion or plot of space in which the subject exists, moving through that dimension rather than articulating itself through the temporal scale of seconds, minutes, hours and so on. The second—note that the narrator specifies the quantitative unit—becomes a function of space, which in turn assumes the qualitative narrative role (he does not mention particular units to measure the distance). The narrative is punctuated by a number of moments in which time ceases to function as a medium in relation to which the characters can exist and act, and instead slows to a point at which the only dimension the narrative notes is how they move, think or place themselves spatially inside it. The narrator seeks out such moments: at the beginning of the text, after receiving his compensation, he stands outside Victoria Station and adopts the position of 'a beggar, holding his hands out, asking passers-by for change', which brings on in him the feeling that 'I just wanted to be in that particular space, right then, doing that particular action. It made me feel so serene and intense that I almost felt real.' An encounter in the following chapter with a crack in a bathroom wall leads him to seek to reconstruct a 'remembered building' in which 'my movements had been fluent and unforced', in order that 'I could feel real again'. Once the space and its remembered details has been remade, he finds himself entering again a zone in which '[t]he moment I was in seemed to expand and become a pool—a still, clear pool that swallowed up everything in its calm contentedness'.²² Likewise, Serge in *C* finds that, taking morphine whilst airborne, 'everything slows down and seems to float [...] The sky takes on a timeless aspect too: the intersecting

²² McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 5; *ibid*, p. 221; *ibid*, p. 40-41; *ibid*, p. 62; *ibid* p. 138.

lines of ordnance residue and exhaust fumes form a grid in which all past manoeuvres have become recorded and in which, by extension, history itself seems to hang suspended.' In *Satin Island*, U. considers the interval of a parachutist's fall whose equipment had been sabotaged: his consciousness is 'merely [a] side-effect[...] of a technical delay, a pause, an interval [...] the hiatus created by the passage of a command down a chain, the sequence of its parts; the interim between an action and its motion, like those paralytic lags that come in hideous dreams.'²³

The paradox here is that these static moments represent, for the protagonist, precisely the point at which he is no longer static but can enter a fluid form of movement. His model for such movement, he establishes early on in the text, is Robert De Niro in Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973):

Every move he made, each gesture, was perfect, seamless. Whether it was lighting up a cigarette or opening a fridge door or just walking down the street: he seemed to [...] live it, to merge with it until he was it and it was him and there was nothing in between.²⁴

By contrast, the narrator's movements are 'all fake. Second-hand.' An ontology of presence or first-handedness, then, is coterminous with movement itself, the way the subject is contiguous with or 'flows into' it without gaps or remainders. But it is either the case that, for the narrator, time no longer has any discernible relation to movement or ontological presence itself has become decoupled from the dimension of time. Notably, for the narrator this process of entering into presence or immediacy is fixed to a slowness that forms its opposite, constituted as a form of mediating analysis. He wishes to get past the phase of re-learning how to move

²³ McCarthy, C, p. 158; *Satin*, p. 56.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 23.

after his accident, which required de-naturalising actions he had previously understood, learning for example the 'seventy-five movements involved in taking a single step forward'.²⁵ After entering the recreated building and starting to undergo these moments of slowed-down time, he compels his employees, who are recreating the gestures and speech of former inhabitants, to

break the sequence down to its constituent parts [...] we spent a whole morning going back and back and back over the moment at which her face switched from addressing me with the last word of her phrase, the *up*, to cutting off eye contact, turning away and leading first her shoulders then eventually her whole body back into her flat. Another afternoon we concentrated on the instant at which her rubbish bag slouched onto the granite of the floor, its shape changing as its contents, no longer suspended in space by her arm, rearranged themselves into a state of rest.²⁶

Time as a continuity is denatured and broken into intervallic, quantitative fragments. The narrator in turn 'relished each of them, then put them back together and relished the whole—then took them apart again.' In other words, time is only available in the form of a disarticulated collection of spatialised, quantitative moments, of the sort that, as we saw in Chapter 1, Marx, Lukács and Debord see as being embodied in the commodity-form and its structuration of abstract labour-time. These become the privileged vehicle for access to presence and the real. Conversely, movement that actually does exist in time becomes secondhand, mediated, unreal: for example in the opening chapter, the narrator must mimic what he thinks of as the movements involved in making 'an informed decision. I even brought my finger into it, the index finger of my right hand.' His own processes of thought and

²⁵ Ibid; *ibid*, p. 21.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 151.

movement are so leached of reality that he must put on ‘a performance for the two men watching me, to make my movements come across as more authentic.’²⁷ He can thus only engage in movement that is effectively generic, that will be received by others (not himself) as having the appearance of the real, what Barthes called the ‘reality effect’. In turn, the narrator takes this denaturalisation as the basis for a further push into stasis. Having broken down their movements, he demands that they ‘slow it down [...] That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do your things, perform your actions. I want you to be performing them, but to be performing them so slowly that each instant... that each instant... as though it could expand—and be... if each instant was—well, that bit doesn’t matter’. Here, movement is to be preserved—indeed, can only be enacted authentically—in a slowness so total that the paradox cannot be accommodated by sequential explanation, by language or narrative. These processes of decelerating movement themselves exacerbate the slowness he luxuriates in, producing his desired ‘trances’, in which he seems to engage with space rather than time—‘I felt myself beginning to drift into them, these surfaces’. He refers to these forms of analytical breakdown, lingering and repetition of flowing sequences of time as ‘kinking’, a term he repeats in conversation with the ex-convict hired to conduct his final re-enactment, that of a bank robbery: “‘You use their shock to create a... bridge, a... a suspension in which you can operate. A little enclave, a defile.’ [...] ‘A defile in time,’ I said. ‘A kink.’” The repeated series of escalating re-enactments that constitutes the plot—from remembered home to auto malfunction to shooting to robbery—reproduces at a macro level the microcosm of such narrative ‘kinks’, such spatialised instances of time. And as Zadie Smith notes, the repetitive quality of the narrative, which essentially details the same event with variations, means that space itself is not transcended or escaped in the course of the narrative’s development.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid, p. 15.

²⁸ Ibid; *ibid*, p. 207; *ibid*, p. 209-210; *ibid*, p. 210; *ibid*, p. 233; Smith, *Mind*, p. 83.

The source of *Remainder's* plot, feeding into this series of spatial interventions, is taken directly from a French post-war philosophical discourse, on simulations and representation, in which Debord's problematic of the image played a prominent part (although McCarthy does not allude directly to Debord).²⁹ The protagonist finds that his identity, wiped by the accident, comes coded in the form of images, but that very form diffracts said identity in opposing ways. Lying in hospital, his 'memory had come back to [him] in moving images [...] like a film run in instalments, a soap opera, one five-year episode each week or so.'³⁰ But his actual encounter with the moving image places him on the outside of the image itself: in the passage, quoted above, about Robert de Niro in *Mean Streets*, he finds that, whilst de Niro's artificial representation of a character 'stamped onto a piece of film and that' constitutes 'just being', he himself is 'inauthentic', his own experience appearing as the product of a film:

if I'd been walking down the street just like De Niro, smoking a cigarette like him, and even if I had lit it first try, I'd still be thinking: *Here I am, walking down the street, smoking a cigarette, like someone in a film.* See? Second-hand. The people in the films aren't thinking that. They're just doing their thing, real, not thinking anything.³¹

His life and thoughts, his very gestures, are a re-presentation of the image, the first-order reality that he has badly reproduced. He encounters London as a space 'coloured' by a 'feeling of exclusion' linked directly to the form of the image: seeing a city crowd, '[t]hey reminded me of an ad—not a particular one' but rather the *form* of the advertisement. 'In their gestures and their movements they acted out the roles of the ad's characters', but it is only by this inclusion within the second-hand, the artificial—the people the narrator refers to are, notably, pushing a

²⁹ Arne de Boever links the movement of *Remainder's* plot to a thought experiment in Jean Baudrillard's *Simulation and Simulacra* (1981), involving a staged bank heist. See de Boever, *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and Novel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 133.

³⁰ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

screen—that they can become something other than passive participants in the act of *seeing*: they glow with ‘a jubilant awareness that for once, just now, [...] they didn’t have to sit in a cinema or living room in front of a TV and watch other beautiful young people laughing and hanging out’.³²

These observations tally almost directly with Debord’s statement that, in the spectacle, ‘the individual’s gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone who represents them to him.’ To be one with the image defined by a constitutive exclusion of the subject is the unattainable ideal of the society of the spectacle, an antinomy made newly literal by McCarthy’s damaged narrator. Moreover, this vision of life inside the image receives confirmation in Giorgio Agamben’s own development of Debord’s thought for the last decade of the 20th century, as quoted in our Introduction: ‘[n]othing resembles the life of this new humanity more than advertising footage from which every trace of the advertised product has been wiped out.’³³ The space of the image, which is defined by its function of exclusion and inclusion, is one in which all that remains of the advertisement is its form, the gestures that once defined subjects in relation to products that are no longer part of the space they structured—the only product left, as in the society of the spectacle, is imagehood itself.

The authenticity the narrator craves is only one among a number of values or objects that motivate the narratives of McCarthy’s novels—phenomena that often serve no other purpose than to motivate or enable the production of new narrative kernels, in a manner analogous with the narrative device Alfred Hitchcock called the ‘MacGuffin’.³⁴ Take for example the sense of synoptic perspective that Serge attains through wireless radio and later through aeronautics, encountering light and sound that ‘seem to contain all distances, envelop space

³² Ibid, p. 48; *ibid*, p. 50.

³³ Debord, p. 23; Agamben, *Community*, p. 64. Given his admitted penchant for following certain literary and philosophical sources quite closely—see for example his claim that he ‘lifted’ the climax of *Satin Island* ‘more or less [...] straight from Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*’, in *Recessional*, p. 57—it is possible that McCarthy is adapting Agamben’s work quite directly here.

³⁴ François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, trans. by Helen Scott, 2nd edn (London: Paladin, 1978), p. 157-158.

itself, curving round it like a patina, a mould.’³⁵ Or, in a more problematic form, the ‘Great Report’ from *Satin Island*. The latter shows how such devices quickly come to demonstrate their own lack of effectivity: beginning as an interdiction from U’s boss, the problem of how to write it quickly shifts to the solving of other problems that he compiles dossiers on, from the mystery of parachutists in fatal accidents to buffering of the Company’s PCs to the title phrase itself, which occurs to him in a dream. In each case, the narrative information required to solve the problem turns out to be pointless, ‘profoundly meaningless.’³⁶ In this sense, such motivating devices for narratives are analogous to the ‘secret’ that Abraham and Torok claim are buried in the spatialised crypts of the subject. But it is notable that this hermeneutic relationship to narrative information—between the subject and object of narrative—even as it hypothetically produces new narrative kernels, slows down or spatialises narrative into visual description. The most obvious example of this comes late in *Remainder*. The narrator is throughout concerned with spatial pattern: ‘[p]osition has been important to me ever since [the accident] [...] I was hit because I was standing where I was and not somewhere else’. His attempt to find the building he wishes to use for reenactment requires dividing London through a grid system, which he takes more pleasure in than any actual outcome: ‘I liked the process, liked the sense of pattern. There were people running through the same repetitive acts [...] six beaters advancing in formation, beating to the same rhythms, their movements duplicating each other.’³⁷ Likewise, Serge in *C* sees the Western Front’s battlefields as ‘pure geometry’, in which the various points, himself and an artillery shell for example:

are interchangeable, just like the radians and secants on his clock-code chart, the smoke-and-vapour-marked points and trajectories around him, the angles of his holding pattern’s quadrant [...] the shell’s a pencil drawing a perfect arc across a sheet

³⁵ McCarthy, *C*, p. 67.

³⁶ McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 37, 67, 130-132; *ibid*, p. 170.

³⁷ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 59; *ibid*, p. 91.

of graph paper [...] he *is* the lead smearing across the paper's surface to become geometry himself...³⁸

This process of experiencing the world as pure space has its own correlate in another visual object, the film system that Serge's colleagues use to detect the position of enemy batteries on the Western Front. He discovers 'a huge square harp whose six strings are extended out beyond their wooden frame by finer wires that run through the hut before breaching its boundary as well', connected to microphones scattered across the landscape. These strings correspond to 'dark lines' on a developed film strip, which are 'for the most part flat; occasionally, though, they erupt suddenly, and rise and fall in jagged waves, like some strange Persian script'. They represent the loud sounds of artillery fire, while '[o]n the film's bottom edge, beside the punch-holes, a time-code is marked, one inch or so for every second'. The space is thus united and delineated within the form of infrastructure, which assumes in turn the form of a flat, visual miniature. When Serge inspects the use that is made of these charts, his colleague insists that 'the film strip knows no difference' between 'time, or space [...] You could say either.'³⁹ Technological reproduction and visual media—the very place and material of the secondhand and spectacular—makes space and time coextensive and indistinguishable in terms of their particularities, mapped instead to flat extension through space. The narrator transforms the diegesis of the text into spaces governed by patterns, from an initial effort of visual transcription: the very legibility of the world to McCarthy's protagonists, their totalised understanding of it, proceeds through pattern apprehended at once, visually. But this apprehension, as an instance of what Jameson called the scenic impulse in realist fiction, in fact slows down narrative.⁴⁰ Late in *Remainder*, the narrator visits the site of a murder incident, where these abstract patterns continue to underlie and even reinforce a

³⁸ McCarthy, *C*, p. 142-143.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 153; *ibid*, p. 154; *ibid*, p. 155.

⁴⁰ Jameson, *Antinomies*, p. 11.

welter of detail, which he describes in terms of differing modes of easel painting: ‘If the diagrams had been like abstract paintings, then the road itself was like an old grand master—one of those Dutch ones thick with rippling layers of oil paint.’⁴¹ He then enumerates its ‘sensational’ surfaces and markings exhaustively, the passage covering more than a page. But these pieces of actuality are themselves, as I have remarked, conceived as a reproduction, a well-constructed representation but not a piece of first-order reality: ‘water and dirt had been skilfully mixed to form muddy, pockmarked ridges [...] large clouds of mud hemmed in by borders that turned rusty and then clear as though the artist had used them to clean his brush.’⁴² This conglomeration of crude matter is itself undergirded by the abstract form of the grid: he remarks that ‘[i]f you were to cut out ten square centimetres of it like you do with fields on school geography trips [...] you’d find so much to analyse, so many layers, just so much *matter*—that your study of it would branch out and become endless until [...] [you] announced to whatever authority it was you were reporting to: *There’s too much here, too much to process, just too much.*’⁴³ He notes that the road surface is riddled with ‘cracks branched out into a cell-like pattern of repeating hexagons’ and punctured by power and water outlets ‘to tubes and pipelines, outlets and supply points, connections feeding back to who knew where’, drawing the setting into a wider geometry of imagined space.⁴⁴ Space replaces the time of the body and mind that ‘resolved themselves into pure stasis’ and, when he later recreates the incident, with himself in the victim’s role, he finds himself being placed in an explicitly spectatorial relation to the actions themselves: ‘all these made our actions passive. We weren’t doing them: they were being done.’⁴⁵ We can already begin to see, in this collapse of narrative’s rhythm of new events into description, a slide from a pure space to a frozen time of the image—which will be the subject of our next section.

⁴¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 187.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187-188.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189; *ibid.*, p. 185, 201.

4.3 Perpetual Presents

I would like, in what follows, to show that McCarthy's spatialisation in the form of the image does not, in fact, fully negate time in the narrative. Rather, narrative temporality continues to exist as an unacknowledged presupposition, a vanishing-point towards which the texts' concerns with static or slowed conditions of time necessarily tend, a tendency instantiated in the form of a number of formal devices. Firstly, narrative time, I will argue, persists in the form of plot elements generic to the realist novel that continue in McCarthy's texts in decontextualised and ironised form: the 'post-traumatic' novel, in Pieter Vermeulen's phrase, in *Remainder*, the historical novel in *C*, and anthropological narratives in *Satin Island*.⁴⁶ The apparently atemporal, spatialised focus on the present of narration, separating *syuzhet* from *fabula*, is belied by the use of these tropes, which produce temporal plot-structures, forms of past and future towards which the present must orient itself. The protagonists of McCarthy's texts, for all their lack of interest in the forms of temporal differentiation that are central to the realist novel, nonetheless attend very closely to the reconstruction of the past of the *fabula* and, in some cases, the construction of its future. As Mark Currie notes, in the retrospective narration typical of the realist novel, the present of narration (for the reader) 'is tensed as the past, in what the French call the *preterite*, a tense otherwise known as the past perfect or the past historic', a state to which the necessary obverse is that 'in which the present is experienced in a mode of anticipation.'⁴⁷ Currie links these orientations with the formal movements of retrospective narration and *prolepsis* respectively, features which he relates in turn with the temporal conditions of postmodernity as outlined by Jameson ('time-

⁴⁶ Vermeulen, 'Trauma', p. 562. For an overview of the 'trauma novel' as a genre see Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 87-116.

⁴⁷ Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 5.

space compression' and 'accelerated recontextualisation').⁴⁸ In a novel whose temporal structure is defined by prolepsis, the present of narration is related to the future by 'the mode of continuous anticipation in which we attach significance to present moments', imagining the future in which they will have meaning as past events.⁴⁹ The present of narration therefore necessarily prompts questions about its location in a diachronic temporal structure even if, as in the postmodernist novel whose time-sense Jameson described in terms of 'a series of pure and unrelated presents', these remain unanswered by the organisation of narrative form that Currie describes as integral to the novel's time.⁵⁰ McCarthy's narrators dwell in the spatialised present: the consciousness of the narrator of *Remainder* is not informed by events in the past, having lost his memory in the accident before the start of the narration, so that his actions in the present and his reactions to new narrative information, down to '[s]imple things, like lifting a carrot to your mouth', take place in a perpetual present.⁵¹ The escalating premises of the novel's reenactments—from a block of flats to a garage to a murder scene to a bank robbery—do not flow as cause-and-effect from past events, but arrive suddenly and without context. To give one example, when the narrator has the windscreen washer reservoir in his car refilled, the liquid disappears in a freak accident caused by an unexplained leak, and then reappears: 'a torrent of blue liquid burst out of the dashboard and cascaded down. It gushed from the radio, the heating panel, the hazard-lights switch and the speedometer and mileage counter.'⁵² Although the narrator has previous problems with his car, none are of this type: it is out of place in the realist schema of narrative causation in the same way that the parts of the broken escalator he sees at Green Park station are, 'dis-articulated, [...] lying around messily. They looked helpless, like beach fish.'⁵³ He interprets this accident with the liquid as 'a miracle:

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 6, 13.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 27.

⁵¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 19.

⁵² Ibid, p. 160.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 17.

matter—these two litres of liquid— becoming un-matter—not surplus matter, mess or clutter, but pure, bodiless blueness’, which must form the basis for a whole new set of repetitions.⁵⁴ Thus the very progress of the narrative is one of what he calls ‘rerouting [...] finding a new route through the brain for commands to run along’.⁵⁵

This focus on the narrated present, I argue, is deflected into the devices of collaged plot-elements. As I argued in the last chapter in relation to *10:04*, the narrative innovations of McCarthy’s texts exist alongside structures of the novel that persist in partial, fragmentary or ironised form. In Lerner’s work they operate as instances of the form of contemplation—the rigid opposition of subject and object that holds the world of social time at arm’s length—the spectacle instantiates, and which forms a part of the realist novel’s very impression of realism, its ‘reality effect’. They can, as we recall, be seen as instances of Debord’s pseudo-cyclical time, naturalised forms of appearance for time that distort the actually deracinated, contentless abstraction beneath. But in McCarthy’s work such structures—the motivating devices of the quest or detective narrative, for example, or the moments of anti-linear temporal sequencing in the post-trauma novel—can only be received as rigidified, readymade objects, not as the indicator of actual forms of narrative time, but only as surfaces that testify to the unreality, the secondhand or simulated nature of such plenitude of time. Narrative as mediation, frozen within space, cedes to a time that testifies to its own false objectivity.

In the rest of this section I will discuss the major examples of such forms of plot-collage in McCarthy’s work, beginning with the vocation of reenactment pursued by the narrator in *Remainder*. But it is worth noting that the self-reflexivity such as these appropriated plot-devices perform does not remain at the level of inscription or writing itself. Rather, as I will argue in section 4 of this chapter, they slide from instances of novelistic time that cancel their own plenitude in their foregrounding of their impotence or artificiality, to a much more direct

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 159.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

insertion of the time of the image. As we will see, this occurs through figures derived from contemporary image technology—particularly, a computer screen’s buffering circle in *Satin Island*— in a movement that links the device of allegory to the question of technological mediation and simulation in temporality. Through their contradictory status—at once demonstrating an apparently literal directness and distancing the protagonists from the objects that such media represent—these devices self-reflexively articulate the function of allegory itself in McCarthy’s work, wherein the image at once promises a solution to the stasis of plot and withholds it behind the dumb and asignifying appearance of the image itself.

In order to outline the temporal function of the novels’ borrowed devices, it is worth returning for a moment to Zadie Smith’s binary opposition in the ‘Two Paths for the Novel’ essay. On the one hand, the lyrical realist novel which ‘colonizes all space by way of voracious image’, subordinating space to the temporal continuity of psychological subjects and their forms of motivation, a temporal depth embedded in metaphor and symbol: ‘the nostalgic pleasure of returning to a narrative time when symbols and mottoes were full of meaning.’⁵⁶ On the other, an anti-realist novel dispossessed of such resources and defined by ‘a perverse acknowledgement of limitations [...] a rigorous attention to the damaged and partial, the absent and the unspeakable.’⁵⁷ Smith’s opposition is crystallised in the object of cricket in McCarthy’s *Remainder* and Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008): ‘In *Netherland* cricket symbolizes the triumph of the symbol over brute fact (cricket as the deferred promise of the American Dream). In *Remainder* cricket is pure facticity [...] Everything must leave a mark. Everything has a material reality. Everything happens in space.’⁵⁸ Space, then, disrupts and replaces the plenitude of time that constitutes the value of Barthes’ ‘reality-effect’—a value that, as I analysed in Chapter 2, functions in much the same way that the value-form does in

⁵⁶ Smith, p. 78, 75.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 91.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 95.

Marx, Lukács and Debord: an appearance, abstracted from any of its material determinants. As Colin McCabe noted, realism produces itself through its concealment of its own form; Smith describes realism in terms of ‘the transcendent importance of form, the incantatory power of language to reveal truth, the essential fullness and continuity of the self’, and such ‘transcendence’ names precisely this effect of form apparently exceeding itself through its actual occlusion.⁵⁹ By contrast, Smith implies, McCarthy’s spatialisation of narrative foregrounds his texts’ own formal construction. Such brandishing of formal mechanics prevents what Jonathan Crary calls ‘the referential illusion’, the sense, contiguous to realism’s reliance on the image as a vehicle for meaning emerging out of patterned time, that the medium provides transparent access to a tangible and present reality (a concept also discussed in Chapter 2).⁶⁰ As we saw in the last section, such a static spatialisation of narrative makes clear, by its formal reflection of such conditions, the underlying frozenness of spectacular time, the contemplation that the form of the realist novel requires.

This account is, however, only partial. McCarthy’s self-reflexive instantiation of form, dispelling the temporal illusionism of realist prose, does not negate it as such. As Pieter Vermeulen points out, ‘[t]he momentous stakes of McCarthy’s novelistic project [...] attune the reader to the impossibility of a single novel [*Remainder*, Smith’s case study] living up to such grave claims for an outright break with traditional notions of emotion and subjectivity’, a fact that ‘validate[s], in other words, the critical attempt to locate the points where the novel diverges from its author’s intentions.’ The anti-realist novel of McCarthy’s critical programme—spatialised, materialist, anti-depth and anti-psychological—emerges only partially in his novels’ ‘imperfect displacement of subjectivity and [...] the subjectless affect that emerges in its place.’⁶¹ In one sense, this divergence, which prompts a reading orientated against the grain

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 73.

⁶⁰ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 129.

⁶¹ Vermeulen, ‘Trauma’, p. 553; *ibid.*

of McCarthy's own account of his practice, requires a move from the level of content, in which, as we saw in the last section, the concern with space is for the most part concentrated, to that of form. In this, McCarthy's work reflects the status of the space/time opposition in Debord's work and the tradition from which it emerges, which I analysed in Chapter 1. Debord does not, in his analysis of spectacular time, pose the two vectors in a static binary. For Marxists, as Massimiliano Tomba writes, 'the appearance of the *spatialisation of time* is nothing other than the inverted image of the harder *temporalisation of space*.'⁶² That is, the production of time as a mere appearance, only accessible as a commodity, that belies the spatialised frozenness constitutive of it, is itself a translation of its enabling condition—the production of what Debord called the 'irreversible' or properly historical time of capitalist modernity, which broke with the static cyclical time of pre-bourgeois societies. The temporality abstracted in the form of commodities is premised on the socialisation, the disenchantment and freeing, of the time of production; but '[t]hough ever-present in society's depths, history tended to be invisible at its surface. The triumph of irreversible time was also its metamorphosis into the *time of things*, because the weapon that had ensured its victory was, precisely, the mass production of objects in accordance with the laws of the commodity.'⁶³ The commodity-form's spatialisation of time, turning into, in Lukács' phrase, 'an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable "things"', thus nonetheless requires the dimension of time.⁶⁴ Spectacular time is thus structured not as pure space but as an antinomy between space and time. In Kant's analysis of this antinomy in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), which he posits as one of the fundamental structuring oppositions that condition thought, one is seen as easily collapsing into the other and vice versa: although time is organised as a series and space is not, '[y]et the synthesis of the manifold parts of space, through which we apprehend it, is

⁶² Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, trans. by Peter D Thomas and Sara R Farris (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. xii.

⁶³ Debord, *Society*, p. 93, 105; *ibid*, p. 105.

⁶⁴ Lukács, *History*, p. 90.

nevertheless successive, and thus occurs in time and contains a series'.⁶⁵ Each condition is rational but contradicts the other, such that neither term can stand alone. This is a situation that must in turn be seen, from a dialectical point of view—that of Marxist analysis itself, which views the rigidified objects of such oppositions, such as that between space and time, as temporally unfolding, contingent processes—as only resolvable not through the conceptual operations of thought but actually temporally and spatially unfolding action. Therefore, if McCarthy's texts formally reflect the spatialised appearance of the commodity-form, interpolated as a synecdoche of spectacular time, then time remains as a necessary, if not always, present Other to the detemporalised synchronic space of narration.

The 'incomplete displacement' of temporal depth-effects is visible in McCarthy's texts, firstly, in their translation of existing generic plot-structures. As Daniel Lea notes, the texts' treatment of their protagonists as 'part of the informational circuitry of a Kittlerian mediated subjectivity, sits uneasily with the generic and formal organization of [the] texts which privilege linearity, exegesis and resolution'.⁶⁶ Lea is referring here to the work of German media theorist Friedrich Kittler, who has been influential on McCarthy's non-fictional work. Lea emphasises in his reading of McCarthy the *mediating* function of the protagonists, whom he sees, following Kittler, as 'an interface between fleshly and machinic exchange' of information.⁶⁷ The temporal simultaneity of global information and production, what Lea calls 'the ever-presence of the multi-nodal interface of the digital network', contradicts the canalised, directed narrative structure of the novels.⁶⁸ If McCarthy's texts nonetheless seem to deny the forms of diachronic narrative progress, development and resolution typical of the realist novel—most obviously, as Smith notes, in the form of the epiphany, which in

⁶⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pas462.

⁶⁶ Daniel Lea, 'Discursive Networks and the Post-Hermeneutic in Tom McCarthy and Steven Hall', *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings* 1 (2012), 65-83 (p. 81).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Netherland has become a ‘saccharine image’ that cannot stand on its own but must ‘naturally remind Hans [the narrator] of another’—then it is worth asking what form the overall temporal structure of the texts, outside of the discrete present of narration, takes.⁶⁹

McCarthy gives remarkable prominence in his core fictional texts to self-reflexive allusions to structural features of a number of modernist and realist novels. The status of such allusions remains ambiguous. In a 2010 interview McCarthy describes ‘a type of realism’ as a ‘code’ employed as a ‘frame’ in *C*.⁷⁰ This suggests not only a temporal structure, constructed as it were around the various episodes of *C*—not only the individual scenes, which possess a relative autonomy from one another, though no more so than the general temporal development of the realist novel, but the larger units of the novel’s four sections—but an optic through which the novel’s narrative takes on a specific and delimited stability and integrity. ‘Code’ recalls the term’s use in semiotics, which we have already encountered in our discussion of photography in Chapter 2: as I noted there, Jonathan Crary suggests that the spectacle is defined by the artificial introduction of ‘older “naturalistic” pictorial codes’ and forms of realism twinned with the preceding deracination and destruction of such meanings.⁷¹ As such, ‘realism’ comes to constitute part of the text, including the general structure of signification of its temporal structure, but does not originate with or belong to the text. Despite Lea’s suggestion that *C* does not structure itself by ‘inter and paratextual parodies’, he concedes that the text employs the model of the *Bildungsroman* in its basic structure, which follows Serge from his childhood through adolescent development to adult action in war and his death.⁷² As Franco Moretti points out, the genre is that in which the model of the interiorised human subject, identified with the modern novel-form more generally, gestated: in marking off ‘youth as the most meaningful part of life’, the *Bildungsroman* turned the

⁶⁹ Smith, p. 81-82.

⁷⁰ James Purdon, ‘Tom McCarthy: “To ignore the avant garde is akin to ignoring Darwin”’, *The Guardian*, 1 August 2010 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/01/tom-mccarthy-c-james-purdon>> [accessed 20 June 2019].

⁷¹ Crary, *Techniques*, p. 133.

⁷² Lea, p. 81.

development of the individual subject into a model for temporally differentiated narrative, which registers how the ‘new and destabilizing forces of capitalism [...] gives rise to unexpected hopes, thereby generating an *interiority* not only fuller than before, but also—as Hegel clearly saw [...]—perennially dissatisfied and restless.’⁷³ The reproduction in the novel’s first section of details of Sergei Pankajev’s childhood, taken from Freud’s clinical case history, instantiates a model of temporally continuous subjectivity founded on the past.

The forms of irony that characterise McCarthy’s use of appropriated narrative elements can itself be seen, in one sense, as a movement towards allegorisation on the part of the texts. Their appearance as alien fragments reflects back on the relationship between McCarthy’s text and the novel tradition, positing them as instances of metafiction within the texts. As Patricia Waugh notes, ‘[e]ach metafictional novel self-consciously set its individual *parole* [the individual utterance, in Ferdinand de Saussure’s system of linguistics] against the *langue* (the codes and conventions) of the novel tradition’ in which it signifies.⁷⁴ By producing such foregrounded devices, through which the narrative discourse moves forward through the fabula, the novels internalise the novel’s form as their own content. They thus constitute what Jameson calls forms of ‘narrative figurability’, devices through which a particular constitutive problem—the relationship between McCarthy’s texts and realism, with its narrative tension between space and time, affect and *récit*—‘becomes *representable* in tangible form.’⁷⁵ In this sense, by suggesting a plenitude of meaning and temporal depth that their form itself belies or cancels, such metafictional instances draw attention to narrative form as a process that unfolds diachronically. As Currie notes, narrative discourse’s own temporal movements (such as analepsis and prolepsis, retrospective narration, time dilation and so on) in relation to the fabula are themselves embedded within the temporal form of the text: ‘Imagine reading a

⁷³ Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 3, 4.

⁷⁴ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 11.

⁷⁵ Jameson, ‘Allegory’, p. 845.

novel with a bookmark. [...] Everything to the left of it is in the past, already known, and everything to the right of it is in the future, and not yet known. The past of the narrative is fixed in a way that the future of the narrative is not. Anything could happen.⁷⁶ The way in which these structural features appear now only as the mere necessary forms of appearance of time foregrounds their individual roles in constructing patterned, meaningful structures of narrative time. The encounter between the present of narration and such decontextualised fragments of significant time thus forms an enquiry into the process by which the time of the *récit* is itself constituted, precisely in its negation and reconstitution.

The use of historical form to project temporal structures is particularly clear in *Remainder*. The text's narrative effectively centres around an attempt to reconstruct the very possibility of retrospective narration, to recast the text itself as a temporally continuous perspective on events that preceded it. The accident that injured the narrator and initiates the novel's events, by providing him with a financial payoff, is initially cast as the object of a narrative lacuna, which cannot form part of the text's discourse: 'About the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing'; he is constrained, we later learn, by a 'Clause' that 'prohibit[s] me from discussing, in any public or recordable format [...] the nature and/or details of the accident', on pains of forfeiting his money. But he then avers that he is not even in a position to make it a narrative kernel: 'for one, I don't even remember the event. It's a blank: a white slate, a black hole.'⁷⁷ The past, then, is an absent object, present only as the subject of discursive interdictions, and the narrator's enabling funds form 'a future strong enough to counterbalance my no-past, a moment that would make me better, whole, complete.'⁷⁸ As Vermeulen comments, this temporal unmooring of the present from the past is a common characteristic of what he calls 'trauma fiction. The narrative borrows the "grammar" of post-

⁷⁶ Currie, p. 5.

⁷⁷ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 6.

trauma, which thrives on “repetition and re-enactment”.⁷⁹ In this sense the text’s structure, with past and future negated in favour of narrative engagement in the present, mirrors that of realist depictions of trauma, which, as Roger Luckhurst comments, ‘[are] saturated with stories that see trauma not as a blockage but a positive spur to narrative.’⁸⁰ In other words, the trauma novel’s form contains and canalises trauma’s actual disruptive temporal effects into realist time, producing a future and temporal continuity into which the present is integrated.

McCarthy’s treatment of the ‘customary pieties of trauma fiction’ further inflect this manufacture of temporal continuity.⁸¹ This occurs not only through the debased, externalised means by which the narrator produces his future, contrasted with the ‘transcendental’ vocation that Smith identifies in the realist novel—literally, that is, through financial speculation, in which value is assigned as it would be ‘in an imaginary future’, as his stockbroker explains, a temporality that forms a self-sustaining mechanism, for ‘[b]y the time one future’s there, there’s another one being imagined.’⁸² The building and its expensive use as a zone for re-enactment is the form that the narrator’s fortune takes—in other words, he guarantees the narrative future of the text through the recreation of a space experienced at a specific time in the past that returns ‘crystal-clear, as clear as in a vision.’⁸³ The anticipatory orientation of the present—the narrator confides that before the day he moves in ‘I’d lie awake for half the night, running in my imagination through the events and actions that we were to go through in reality when the time came’—can only be engineered by re-routing the text’s narrative machinery towards a past that is otherwise occluded.⁸⁴ The dynamic of this device—internalising the production of narrative continuity through a factitious space constructed via financial abstraction—is made clearer by contrast with an early scene. Finding

⁷⁹ Vermeulen, ‘Trauma’, p. 550.

⁸⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 551.

⁸¹ Vermeulen, ‘Trauma’, p. 550.

⁸² McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 43-4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

that adopting the bodily pose of a homeless person brings on the feeling of euphoric authenticity he seeks, the narrator quizzes one of them, ‘thinking that *these* people, finally, were genuine.’⁸⁵ He describes buying dinner for the homeless man, but the details of his description inexplicably change: the waitress is at first ‘an old woman with big glasses’, then a few paragraphs later a young woman with ‘nice, round breasts. She must have been about his age, eighteen, nineteen.’⁸⁶ He eventually admits, halfway through a paragraph, that ‘[t]here wasn’t any table. The truth is, I’ve been making all this up—the stuff about the homeless person.’⁸⁷ He concludes that such an act of storytelling, which was in aid of understanding a genuine or first-hand ontology, is futile: ‘I didn’t go and talk to him. I didn’t want to, didn’t have a thing to learn from him.’⁸⁸ Narrated in the simple past tense, this is an attempt to construct a retrospective position of narration from which to access narrative information. He seeks to establish a stable and realistic temporal structure from which to enter into a first-handed ontology of the sort that the mediations of the reality effect promise. As McCarthy notes elsewhere, ‘realism’s founders [...] fully appreciate the scaffolding of artifice holding their carefully wrought edifices up’, building an awareness of it into their texts and continually testing and adjusting the forms of realism.⁸⁹ By contrast the acknowledgement of artificiality or unreliability of narration in this early scene is perfunctory: there is hardly any consistent effort to build up a reality effect in the first place. Reality cannot exist in time, but must deputise its discovery to the frozen space of the building. The retrospective view of the realist novel, looking back on a fabula that precedes the moment of narration in the syuzhet, is brought into being as a side-effect of the text’s project of anticipatory narrative production. Moreover, the novel cannot access this temporal continuity directly, but through its repeated representation. This is an aspect I will return to, but for now it is worth suggesting, with Arne

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 52.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 54.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, p. 56.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ McCarthy, ‘Machines’, p. 21.

de Boever, that in *Remainder* the novel-form effectively stages a re-enactment of itself—such re-enactment constituting not a return to the presence and genuineness of the past, ‘an affirmative confirmation of the past’, but rather ‘*questionings of the present*’.⁹⁰

In addition, the narratorial present in which this complex work of narrative production takes place is subject to a double determination: although unmoored from any position in the fabula, the text indicates at certain key points that the narrator is speaking from its chronological end-point. Waiting at the end of the first chapter for Catherine, whom he had previously met in Paris and become infatuated with, he states that he has ‘right to this day, a photographically clear memory of standing on the concourse looking at my stained sleeve, at the grease’.⁹¹ What ‘day’ is it that he has preserved this memory until? He links this temporal question quite explicitly with the failure of his attempt to produce a future, to orientate the present of narration in an overarching temporal structure: the grease is ‘messy, irksome matter that had no respect for millions, didn’t know its place’, an object that would be ‘[m]y undoing’, a statement affirmed when, as mentioned in the last section, a kink in the carpet foils his planned bank robbery.⁹² Retrospection is only reintroduced in the last chapter, as he looks back on the robbery itself: ‘I know one thing for sure: it was a fuck-up. It went wrong.’⁹³ But in this case, retrospection does not even fix temporal form, as he quickly adjusts himself to say ‘I know two things: one, it was a fuck-up; two, it was a very happy day.’⁹⁴ When, at the text’s endpoint, the narrator has hijacked the plane designated for his escape, he forces the pilot to bank in a recurring figure-of-eight. This place, from which the narrative discourse presumably looks back on the events of the fabula, is uninhabitable: as the narrator himself acknowledges, eventually ‘we’d just run out of fuel’.⁹⁵ The present of narration, the time in which the narrative

⁹⁰ De Boever, p. 137-138.

⁹¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*. p. 17.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 260.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 284.

discourse unfolds and takes in the temporal span of the fabula, is thus premised on its extinction. If, as Currie suggests, drawing on the phenomenology of Heidegger and Husserl, the narrative present 'is structured by retentions and protentions, or elements of the past which are retained in the consciousness and those which are present as anticipatory expectation', then McCarthy's narrative present is *only* composed of such crossings of differentiated temporal materials—it has no substance or content of its own.⁹⁶ *Remainder's* appropriation of existing structural materials from the post-trauma novel points not to realist time but a contorted interdependence between an anticipated narrative future and an otherwise opaque chronological past. This interrelation is one in which each term depends on the other but neither can be fully realised, because they are focused through a present that can only exist in the form of the artificial narrative device of re-enactment and simulation, through the metafictional reenactment of an obsolete form in the trauma novel. But this narrative present, as McCarthy himself suggests in his analysis of spatialised narrative, is itself negated, though it does not thereby cease to produce its appearances of temporal continuity. Notably, the text ends with the narrator immersed in the dirt and misplaced matter that undoes narrative time: 'The cloud, seen from inside like this, was gritty, like spilled earth or dust flakes in a stairwell.'⁹⁷ Time cannot be offered in achieved and diachronic form, but nonetheless does not freeze into any form of space. Instead, the narrative can only offer its appearance, in the form of a narrative present that turns itself into synchronic commentary on its own processes—as allegory.

In the next section, I will go on to suggest that in this allegorical mode McCarthy proposes a narrative solution that reproduces the specifically visual logic of spectacle, but now in a critical mode. Time reappears in spatialised narrative, as its point of orientation—not as directly available in its form, but in how McCarthy's texts allegorise the stasis of their

⁹⁶ Currie, p. 13.

⁹⁷ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 284.

narrative presents. Their narrative devices enact the false diachrony of the spectacle, but, in the distance they preserve between the present of narrative discourse and their idealised images of flowing time, suggest the possibility of a new and productive narrative time.

4.4 Allegorical Time

As I noted in the last section, McCarthy's texts confront not a simple binary opposition between space and time, in which one term negates the other, but an antinomy. If, as I have argued, the spatialised narration of McCarthy's texts depends in turn on the appearances of temporality that the appropriated component parts of narrative conjure, then the obverse is also the case. If time cannot be apprehended directly in the texts, then this is partly because of its dependence, in turn, on the spatialised present of description that I have identified in McCarthy's texts. The texts' own metafictional enquiry into the status of their structures—the reality or efficacy of the formal appearances that constitute their narration—can, I am suggesting, take the form of spatially embedded allegory. In what follows, I will examine a number of such allegorical figures in the texts, primarily concentrating on one example from *Satin Island*: a buffer circle, glimpsed on a computer monitor early in the novel. Such allegories, relying on the visual logic of the spectacle—in which meaning appears in the most apparently literal and total of forms, but only in objects 'portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, *at a distance*, and as desirable by definition'—at once promise a plenitude and depth of time, immediately accessible to perception, and separate it from the subject, both the protagonist and the implied reader.⁹⁸ Hence, McCarthy's texts so often take, as their diachronic form, a version of the quest narrative, in which the protagonists must complete a project of investigation or writing, a process for which the allegories' image of textual self-production

⁹⁸ Debord, *Society*, p. 112.

serves as a metonym. The texts' operation of spatialised looking takes the form, as Camilla Weaver notes, of investment in 'indexicality', a notion from the work of philosopher and semiotician CS Pierce, in which a sign 'exhibits a closer—and specifically material—bearing on what it represents', in which the object of signification 'must "be in dynamical (including spatial) connection"' with the sign and the system in which it signifies.⁹⁹ Such images abound in McCarthy's texts: for example, the image of the Turin Shroud which opens *Satin Island*, produced supposedly by contact with the body of Christ and imbued thus with his likeness, 'hands folded over genitals, eyes closed'; the carbon paper Serge uses to type 'everything [...] in triplicate' in *C*; or the imprints the narrator takes of oil spills in *Remainder*.¹⁰⁰ Looking, McCarthy's protagonists suggest, produces a privileged relation to knowledge, one whose pursuit forms the central set of narrative kernels, such as they are, of the texts. But, as I argue later, Weaver's invocation of indexicality is inaccurate—or, rather, its knowledge-claims belong only to the ontology of the spectacle, its false objectivity, as the 'materialization of ideology'.¹⁰¹ I will argue in closing, that it is precisely the distance that these allegories mark between their promised plenitude and what the novel-form can deliver that preserves the possibility of a narrative time both within and beyond the boundless artificiality of the spectacle.

In the seventh chapter of *Satin Island*, in the Company's offices, as work on the Koob-Sassen Project progresses, they are 'afflicted by frequent bouts of buffering.' U's comments are worth quoting at length:

The buffering didn't bother me, though; I'd spend long stretches staring at the little spinning circle on my screen, losing myself in it. Behind it, I pictured hordes of bits and bytes and megabytes, all beavering away to get the requisite data to me [...] stacks of

⁹⁹ Weaver, 'Action' p. 102.

¹⁰⁰ McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 3, *C*, p. 248, *Remainder*, p. 149- 150.

¹⁰¹ Debord, *Society*, p. 150.

memory banks, satellite dishes sprouting all around them, pumping out information non-stop, more of it than any single person would need in their lifetime, pumping it all my way in an endless, unconditional and grace-conferring act of generosity. [...] It was this gift, I told myself, this bottomless and inexhaustible torrent of giving, that made the circle spin: the data itself, its pure, unfiltered content as it rushed into my system, which, in turn, whirred into streamlined action as it started to reorganize [sic] it into legible form. The thought was almost sublimely reassuring.¹⁰²

But, in the next paragraph, he goes on:

[...] on this thought's outer reaches lay a much less reassuring counter-thought: what if it were just a circle, spinning on my screen, and nothing else? What if the supply-chain, its great bounty, had dried up, or been cut off, or never been connected in the first place? Each time that I allowed this possibility to take hold of my mind, the sense of bliss gave over to a kind of dread. If it was a video-file that I was trying to watch, then at the bottom of the screen there'd be that line, that bar that slowly fills itself in – twice: once in bold red and, at the same time, running ahead of that, in fainter grey [...] Staring at this bar, losing myself in it just as with the circle, I was granted a small revelation: it dawned on me that what I was actually watching was nothing less than the skeleton, laid bare, of time or memory itself. Not our computers' time and memory, but our own. This was its structure.¹⁰³

¹⁰² McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 67-68.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 68-69.

He then concludes that unless we continually replenish the supply of experiences our 'consciousness' has to reflect on, 'we find ourselves jammed, stuck in limbo [...] Everything becomes buffering, and buffering becomes everything.'¹⁰⁴

The first thing to note about this passage is that the described image is intensely overdetermined, structured in opposing ways without necessarily being in contradiction. The flat plane of the image—the monitor upon which U. is looking at it—gives rise to a 'pictured' depth of data. But the data itself, 'pure, unfiltered content', is without form, and is only present through a further act of interpretation and imaging—its translation into the metaphor of 'gift'—and the screen's own operation of graphic rendering, two actions whose temporal function the narrator states are identical. But this doubled form of imaging itself becomes an instance of paucity and dread: it's 'just a circle'. The graphic—spatial and visual—rendering of a time that promises fullness—a formless bliss, flowing and 'pumping'—reverses into a structured, quantitative time that is bare and contentless, containing none of the 'hordes of bits and bytes and megabytes' the rendering of temporal change promises. As space disappears in the transposition from the circular to the linear—the narrator notably shifts his explanation from the buffer circle itself to 'a video-file'—time ceases to exist as duration, as a diachronic trajectory of differentiation and change. The progress through the quantitative time that the circle measures is not progress at all, but movement through a segmented and unsequenced collection of moments, a flat demarcated space with no end. The object, like the state it promises to illustrate, is characterised by an antinomy of meaning: the referent, what the image supposedly represents, exists, but in such abundance that the meaning itself becomes unclear and indecipherable. The meanings proffered by the narrator each depend on the negation of their own conditions of possibility, provided by the other meaning: it is *the very promise of time through the image* that makes the possibility of its emptiness an object of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 69.

‘dread’. This can be related back to Debord’s concept of pseudo-cyclical time: as a naturalised form of appearance for abstract time, the image contains and depends on the very abstraction it gives illusionistic objectivity to. What we are presented with, in *Satin Island*’s symbolic framework, is a flat image that incorporates two separate aspects. In this sense, the very function of the image of the buffer circle, combining flatness with such overdetermination, is that of an impression of both time and meaning as depth and hence as a ‘reality-effect’—but no longer one that operates properly. It cannot in fact organise content into the ‘legible form’ of depth, but, as with Jonathan Crary’s analysis of the stereoscope, which I dwelt on in Chapter 2, its illusionism is at once convincing and unstable, breaking down into the flatness that constitutes it.

In the terms of computer science a buffer circle is not simply a graphic representation of the temporality of computer processing: as defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of Computer Science*, a buffer is ‘[a] temporary memory for data, normally used to accommodate the difference in the rate at which two devices can handle data during a transfer.’¹⁰⁵ The buffer, in this case, would temporarily house data between U’s computer and the server that delivers it; the buffer circle shows the progress of the data in its transfer through the buffer between the two devices. In a circular buffer, a single buffer is treated as if composed of discrete chunks of (temporary) memory joined end-to-end, data passing from one to another. In a sense what we see in the buffer circle—its ‘whirr[ing] into streamlined action’—is the time of processing itself, but in effect we do not see it. RAM memory is not built in circles, so the buffer circle is a conceptual structure, a representation: the circle creates an identification between this deeper meaning (the ‘gift’ of data) and its flat counterpart onscreen. Representation or mediation—the process by which the abstract data of the world, communicated through ‘a giant *über*-server, house somewhere in Finland or Nevada or Uzbekistan: stacks of memory banks,

¹⁰⁵ ‘Buffer’, in *A Dictionary of Computer Science*, ed. by Andrew Butterfield and Gerard Ekembe Ngondi <www.oxfordreference.com> [accessed 14 March 2016]

satellite dishes sprouting all around them', is 'made legible', but also by which this process of representation is itself represented—is itself structured as a form of abstraction. In this can be seen the logic of the spectacle as Debord describes it, in which what Crary calls the commodity's 'illusion of [...] utter tangibility' in fact instantiates 'society's generalized abstraction', to which sight, 'the most abstract of the senses', now has a privileged relation.¹⁰⁶

This image of the buffer circle provides, in both its content and its form, a neat homology with the present-centred, spatialised narration of McCarthy's fictions described above. The text's main demarcation of narrative time emerges through its arbitrary division into individual sections, which may end and consequently begin with adjacent sentences that do not register their structural position. The process that dominates the narrative, of writing the 'Great Report', cannot be divided into narrative kernels. Or rather, such narrative kernels occur not in the fabula but in the protagonist's imagination or sleeping consciousness—for example in the hypothetical lecture he delivers in chapter 10, or the 'splendid dream' of chapter 12 in which he first encounters the phrase '*Satin Island*'.¹⁰⁷ A number of prospective narrative kernels, which suggest that they will alter the course of the narrative action, do not issue in any change but resolve themselves as non-events; for example, in the long-running narrative strand of the 'skydiving murder case' that obsesses the narrator, and which causes him to believe that he has 'made a genuine *discovery*, a breakthrough, on the scale of Schrödinger's or Einstein's', only to admit a few pages later that '[i]t was bogus; full of shit'.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, each textual unit—the paragraph or chapter division—which organises the narrative time of the text merely repeats a temporality that does not develop or change. This temporality is indexed, notably, to internet browsing—the source of the narrator's buffering—and to travel. The opening scene, indeed, demonstrates the conjunction of the two. Stranded in Turin

¹⁰⁶ McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 68; Crary, 'Eclipse', p. 287; Debord, *Society*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 102-110, 130.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 111, 120, 122.

Airport, U. is 'clicking through news sites and social pages, meandering along corridors of trivia, generally killing time'.¹⁰⁹ He reads a description of Torino-Caselle as 'a hub-airport [...] predominantly transfer points, rather than destinations in and of themselves', a concept illustrated by a 'webpage [that] showed a diagram of a rimless wheel, with spokes of different lengths all leading to the centre'.¹¹⁰ This diagrammatic sense of connection shapes his activity, as he clicks on links that lead him to 'reading about flanges, track sprockets and bearings in bicycle construction. Then I clicked on *freehub*'.¹¹¹ Movement through space, as he presents conference papers, takes meetings and gathers information, becomes mimetic of a visualised form of movement through information that 'kills time'.¹¹² As U. comments, the text treats the very notion of narrative events as the object of irony: '(*events!* if you want those, you'd best stop reading now)'. Like *Remainder*, the text is narrated retrospectively, purporting to be the end-product of the process of writing that it narrates ('this not-Report you're reading now'), but the narration occupies a similarly impossible position with respect to the fabula, such that its only form of temporal differentiation is precisely this repetitious temporality common to the internet and post-industrial labour.¹¹³

It is precisely this narrative temporality that the buffering circle, with its unending, non-durational movement, illustrates. Such a temporality, as I have described above, is that which Jonathan Crary characterises as the form that spectacular time takes in the current phase of late capitalism that, as I noted in the Introduction, can be periodised by the rise of a finance sector structured by digital technologies and the crisis of global finance in 2007-8: 'a time without time, [...] a time without sequence or recurrence', in which the subject must be 'constantly engaged, interfacing, interacting, communicating or processing'.¹¹⁴ What the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 5.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 13.

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 115.

¹¹⁴ Crary, *24/7*, p. 29.

narrator sees in the buffer circle, then, is a glimpse of this time that makes indifferent the extremes of dynamism and frozenness, a time of production that is not 'irreversible' in Debord's terms but in fact cyclical. But, as we have seen, this very graphicness or apparent representational literalness, which seems to promise such a direct plenitude of meaning, is also and in fact a mode of blockage and non-meaning, in which the diachronic process of differentiation or dialectical movement by which meanings might be parsed or produced are both racing and at a standstill. Whilst this temporality may not be precisely homologous with what we think of as the experiential time of the narrative, this time of buffering is replicated across a number of images, whose dilated moments of time come increasingly to dominate the narrative. In chapter 4, as U. begins his 'dossier on oil spills', he looks for images similar to those he glimpsed at the beginning of the first chapter: 'I looped on a spare laptop a video-clip [his colleague] Daniel found me: it showed a close-up sequence of a few feet of seabed across which oil was creeping, carpeting the floor as it coagulated'.¹¹⁵ Time here creeps, moving without volition before the moment ceases and repeats itself. These images, restricted to the flat opticality of the screen, seem though to promise access to other sensory registers and other times: he 'sensed [...] a smell: the sweet, familiar scent of home-made toffee at the point—that magic instant—of caramelization', a perception conveyed 'through the mangling of digital compression, the delays, decays and abstractions brought about by storage and conversion'.¹¹⁶ It even conveys the impression of total sensory contiguity, the feeling that 'every time I watched, I felt my own face and the diver's run together', a feeling produced directly by the technological constraints of the image, the camera's 'point of view', which summons the lost time of the narrator's memory of 'a childhood holiday to San Francisco'.¹¹⁷ Narrative subject and object are brought together, breaking the distance of contemplation, but

¹¹⁵ McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 34-35.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 35.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 36.

only through the abstract pseudo-cyclical form of the image. As he notes later on, the image of the oil spill displays '[d]ifferentiation in its purest form [...] Ones and zeros, p and not-p: oil, water.'¹¹⁸ It is the process by which the perpetual present of the novel breaks and new kernels of narrative, a continuity of past and future, emerge.

But this sense of differentiation, of a temporality that is not simply the repetitious aggregation of equivalent units of time, occurs through a fixation on a movement of 'endless metamorphoses' achieved through 'regular, repeating movements that stretched and folded, stretched and slapped the taffy through the same shapes over and over again'.¹¹⁹ The buffer zone of an oil slick sliding through water, viewed from above in chapter 1 is replicated in the description of a woman to whom, in chapter 7, U. remembers talking: he looks 'at the objects she had placed around her [...] She was, like many single women in her situation, using these objects to create a buffer zone around herself, in which her lifestyle, personality and, not least, availability were simultaneously signalled and withheld.'¹²⁰ Meaning emerges, then, only in the buffer zone between terms, separating out homologies. Thus, as I have suggested, the time of the buffer is cyclical, stranded: it simultaneously signals and withholds meaning. Processing, writing, differentiation stand on one side of McCarthy's formal homologies, the narrator investing in them as means of producing a legible form of temporality. On the other side stands oil, data and what U. calls '[t]he stuff of the world [, which] is black'.¹²¹ The image, which I have already suggested provides a supposedly privileged relationship to knowledge in the text, encodes the antinomic relationship between these two figures within its flatness—two halves that do not add up to make a whole. It is worth recalling, in this connection, U.'s claim that the time of the buffer is '[n]ot our computers' time and memory, but our own': the distinctions collapse.¹²² The possibility of narrative—of the novel form itself—as a durational

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 104.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 36.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 71.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 135.

¹²² Ibid, p. 69.

structure, rather than a cyclical temporality of imagistic sequential moments, depends on this buffer that both splits and mediates between the temporality of the *récit* and the global simultaneity of the spectacle that makes narrative impossible. But the buffer's very mode of making-visual dramatises its persistent failure, inscribing in the narrative an experiential time that becomes non-time.

It is only towards the end of the novel that a third term emerges which might, like the figure of visual art in *10:04*, solve the antinomy: the eponymous island, which appears in a dream. It appears as a transfiguration of the Great Report, which now manifests as a 'trash incinerating plant', the surfaces of whose '[g]iant mountains' of oozing, smouldering rubbish hint 'at a deeper, almost infinite reserve of yet-more-glowing ooze [...] that made the scene so rich and vivid, filled it with a splendour that was regal.'¹²³ In one sense, this image enacts the same dynamic as that of the buffer circle: a surface that promises reserves of meaning beneath. But this image, it seems, is one of mediation rather than blockage: waking from the dream, he experiences his surroundings as 'forming a single object with a single membrane, and, at the same time, porous'; instead of being positioned as a subject outside of the image's impenetrable surface, he 'seemed to be consistent with this membrane too, to partake of its leakage', a function enacted in his writing down of the dream-phrase '*Satin Island*'.¹²⁴ This, it would seem, is the image that, in sublating the two contradictory aspects of the buffer circle, solves the antimony: it is at once dynamic—'full of bustle'—and serene, 'splendid', 'rich and vivid'.¹²⁵ It allows a sense of temporal difference, the distant city that the island serves being an amalgamation 'from all periods: Carthage, London, Alexandria, Vienna, Byzantium and New York', ending in the production of a genuinely new object of narrative meaning, the title phrase.¹²⁶ In this image is staged the obliteration of writing, of narrative and of the frustrations

¹²³ Ibid, p. 130-131.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 132

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 130-131.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 130.

of buffering hinted at in Chapter 10's vision of a world 'improved: augmented, transformed' by its submersion in oil: the world becomes a totality of the black 'stuff' it thought to constitute itself by excluding—the 'flow of oil' that 'embodies time, contains it: future, present, past.'¹²⁷ This recapitulates U.'s earlier disquisition on writing directly in terms of oil, the clip of the spill becoming 'ink polluting paper, words marring the whiteness of a page'.¹²⁸ But this very process overflows the differentiation it suggests (the contrast in which white becomes a foil for black), becoming, he later suggests, not 'scientific, evidence-based research', nor 'epic art', but the damp, pulpy mass that forms the opaque body at whose outer limits, like two mirages, the others hover.¹²⁹ The Great Report ceases to be writing as differentiation, becoming instead an image of the radically dedifferentiated.

McCarthy directly links such a vision of writing becoming its opposite, in an article that quotes heavily from the narration of *Satin Island*, to the simultaneity of digital technology:

Who, nowadays, maps our tribe's kinship structures, our systems of exchange, the webs of value and belief that bind us all together? Software does, tabulating and cross-indexing what we buy with who we know, and what they buy, or like, and with the other goods that are bought or liked by others who we don't know but with whom we cohabit a shared buying or liking pattern. Far from being unwritable, the all-containing Great Report is being written around us, all the time – not by an anthronovelist but by a neutral and indifferent binary system whose sole aim is to perpetuate itself, an auto-alphaing and auto-omegating script.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 106, 109.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 91.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.115.

¹³⁰ McCarthy, 'The death of writing – if James Joyce were alive today he'd be working for Google', *The Guardian*, 7 March 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/07/tom-mccarthy-death-writing-james-joyce-working-google>> [accessed 22 June 2019].

The image demonstrates its own yielding to a newly promised plenitude of narrative time, contained in the non-time of image technology. Narrative time, if we are to believe *Satin Island's* own account of its formal processes, can only survive through its own obliteration. There is of course much to be said here about McCarthy's work in its relationship specifically to digital media. I would like, however, to turn back in closing to the formal question of the means by which his work's investment in the image at once incorporates and reflects critically on spectacular time. For if *Satin Island's* use of images as narrative devices suggests a solution to narrative time's stagnation, depletion and spatialisation—beyond the linguistic, in a graphic flatness that gives on to a newly coherent depth of time—the text's temporal form preserves the antinomic ambiguity that characterised the buffer circle. As I have suggested, the image forms an allegory of the text's narrative form, in which a narrative time otherwise unavailable is proffered in the form of a flat image that focuses description, seeming to provide epistemological access to a non-spatialised narrative precisely through its spatialisation of perception. It claims to solve a formal split: the breakdown of the relationship between the chronological extensity of the fabula and the present of narration, which, as I described in the last chapter, is of particular importance for realism, and similarly falters in the work of Lerner and DeLillo, under the pressure of an artificial and unassimilable spectacular time. But the depth of time that the image proffers, for which the title phrase and the image glimpsed in the narrator's dream-sequence serves as a synecdoche, dissolves again into its constituent parts. The promised seamlessness of the image, which *Remainder's* narrator discovers in the artificial life of Robert de Niro, is mirrored by novelistic narrative itself, whose lack of cohesion persists as a remainder in the process of allegory.

This becomes clearest in the scenes following the dream sequence in *Satin Island*, up to the close of the novel. The narrator expects the title phrase to be a radical condensation of narrative, full of 'meaning of a genuinely deep and intense nature, whose sense eluded me but

whose presence radiated pouring into everything around it', one that upsets the usual terms of the way he presents his research to his bosses: he 'look[s] at the blotter sheet as though it were a picture, rather than a page', and, at the meeting to present his contribution to Koob-Sassen, 'picture[s] what it would have looked like on his [Peyman's] wall: where it would have gone, how it would have changed that space's dynamic'.¹³¹ But instead of altering the course of the narrative's repetitive rhythms of informational labour, it simply results in him being sent to New York for 'a big symposium'.¹³² In New York he has no means of enacting his narrative-altering discovery, even of the kind of the imagined lecture and riot in chapter 10, making only 'off-the-cuff utterances, none of which I can remember'.¹³³ He instead takes up 'a fair stretch of [...] free time, [with] no desire to fill it up with anything' with travelling to the space that seems to enact the secret meaning of the title phrase: 'something would happen if I went to Staten Island. I didn't know what; but something would. And something would make sense—if not the whole caboodle, at least *something*'.¹³⁴ He seeks in doing so to make sense of a number of narrative kernels introduced in the course of the narration which lead to no resolutions: 'Trashed, pulverized, dissolved back into the whimsy-froth from which they'd bubbled up'—he describes this process, notably, in terms of visual pattern, referencing the 'dot-codex' glimpsed earlier on a piece of Aborigine pottery at a museum in Frankfurt.¹³⁵

This can be understood in terms of Jameson's reformulation of the fabula/syuzhet split as one between the 'chronological temporality of the récit' and 'the realm of affect'. The breakdown of the 'symbiosis' between these two aspects is already familiar to us as the condition of McCarthy's texts, forming on the one hand the spatialised present of *Remainder* and his aesthetic theories and on the other the allegorical investment in the image in *Satin Island*, which raises spectacular time to the level of formal self-consciousness. U. sees the

¹³¹ McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 136-138.

¹³² Ibid, p. 138.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 160.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 163.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 163, 98.

allegorical image as a device that will solve the split by taking its static ‘scenic impulse’, its form of imaging, as an incorporation of the time of the récit, becoming the secret that it promises to disclose, the kernel of time at the heart of the subject’s spatial crypts.¹³⁶ And yet, the text ultimately fails to close the rift. Notably, one of the narrative kernels U. returns to in the novel’s final pages is narrated in great detail in the preceding chapter 13. A number of times in the preceding chapters Madison, the woman he dates, alludes to having been in Turin at some point. He forces her to tell him why she had been there: an activist at the 2001 G8 conference in Genoa, she describes for U. being raided and arrested by police, then left at ‘some kind of villa’ with a ‘smartly dressed [...] quite portly’ man.¹³⁷ There she was shocked randomly with a cattle-prod and forced to ‘strike up and hold certain postures’, before being led out several hours later, travelling to the train station and taking the train to Turin, where she buys an aeroplane ticket back to London.¹³⁸ The spatial setting of Torino-Casselle, in other words, serves as the occasion for a preceding, largely unrelated stretch of narrative time: Madison is only in Torino-Casselle due to the vagaries of transport infrastructure, just as, in the opening scene set in the airport, described above, U. is lead to unrelated topics by the form of internet links. U. complains, just prior to his journey to Staten Island, that ‘Madison’s story was, like Lévi-Strauss’s tribe, just fucking weird’, with no interpretation to be made from it.¹³⁹ By contrast, when U. attempts the epistemological operation of his imagined journey, that will he thinks produce an interpretation of these narrative kernels, he instead refuses to take the ferry, as ‘[t]o go to Staten Island—*actually* go there—would have been profoundly meaningless.’¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Jameson, *Antinomies*, p. 10-11.

¹³⁷ McCarthy, *Satin*, p. 147-148.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Instead, having made himself static to prevent going through the doors onto the ferry, he turns to description. As the ferry moves away, he describes its wake in terms that recall Zadie Smith's emphasis on the symbolic in her critique of 'lyrical realism':

Staten Island was no longer grey, and it had grown: the sun was right behind it now, haloing it, transmuting it into a brilliant orange pool that spread across the harbour like a second mass of water, one set on a slightly different plane that spilled across the first one when the two planes intersected. This pool of light was spreading right towards the ferry, swallowing it up, dismantling it pixel by orange pixel. Its haze spread even further, past the boat's still-discernible stern, turning the ferry's wake, and those of other vessels, a metallic, silvery shade. There were scores of wakes, crossing each other in irregular and tangled patterns.¹⁴¹

Description here literally mimics an additive process of visual detail that unfolds in time, following the 'spread' and alteration of the 'brilliant orange pool'. But this seems to be the *only* form of time it provides, eschewing the temporal depth of the symbol Smith describes: U. attempts briefly to parse some meaning from the scene, before relenting at a futile effort —'*Networks of kinship*: the phrase flashed across my mind; I snorted with derision.'¹⁴² The notion of the real pool of light appearing as 'pixel[s]' ironises the description further: the very possibility of symbolic plenitude appears solely in the guise of an image that foregrounds its own artificiality. The text, then, falls on one side into what Jameson calls 'anecdote which forms the structural core of the *récit*', detached from the possibility of description, the 'scenic impulse', and on the other into an affective description frozen in its own procedures. The ironised surface of U.'s closing description, becoming a simulacrum of what it describes even

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 171.

¹⁴² Ibid.

as it provides privileged access to it, assuming the artificial reality of the spectacle that *Remainder* discovers in de Niro, preserves a distance from the temporal depth it promises. The possibility of a suture—the formal promise of the realist novel—between the two persists as a break in the seamlessness of the spectacular time-image. The novel-form, now spatialised but with narrative time persisting at the heart of its allegorical still-lives, is deformed into an imperfect container for these two incomplete halves that the spectacle tries to resolve through the image. McCarthy's metafiction, which turn the time of narration into a meditation on its own process, make the components of the novel into ill-fitting, seamed objects in narrative time, like the 'individual, separate steps' of *Remainder*'s escalator, which become 'dis-articulated' and leave narrative time streaked across the novel like 'black grease.'¹⁴³

¹⁴³ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 18.

Chapter 5: Autonomy of the Image

5.0 Introduction

Having, in the preceding two chapters, analysed the forms that the spectacular remaking of time takes in the narrative temporalities of texts by Lerner, DeLillo and McCarthy, I will turn my attention in this closing chapter to a slightly different narrative strategy. If their novels have dealt repeatedly with problems of narrative flow and duration—the reduction of narrative time to a frozen image—that result from the spectacle’s voiding and reconstruction of the subject-object opposition, this chapter focuses on the structure of that dualism, as crystallised in such frozen moments. As I have argued so far, drawing on Debord’s analysis of the place of the visual in the global field of the spectacle, the operation of seeing is a privileged and pressurised term in these texts. As I noted in Chapter 2, the spectacle assumes the structuring force of the Cartesian model of seeing, as a posited relationship between subject and object, even as it vacates or abolishes its underlying premises, rendering them abstract: as Debord wrote, ‘[t]he spectacle is heir to all the weakness of the project of Western philosophy, which was an attempt to understand activity by means of the categories of vision’; with this ‘most abstract of the senses’ generalised, ‘the spectacle philosophizes reality, and turns the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation’. Debord emphasises the one-way nature of the spectacle’s visual relationship: in the spectacle ‘the ruling order discourses upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise’, and ‘this “communication” is essentially *one-way*’.¹ The spectacle, in its remaking of the world that socialised labour produces, establishes a mediatory system that is in fact one of non-mediation, producing the subject in a

¹ Debord, *Society*, p. 17; *ibid*, p. 19.

position of contemplation of an impenetrable object. The object, in a very real sense, does not return the gaze.²

This is, in part, because, as noted in our analysis of Jonathan Crary's work on the history of the spectacle in Chapter 2, the spectacle's ontology has only a partial relationship with the physical situation of seeing and reflected light that Descartes describes in his *Optics*. As Marx notes of the commodity, 'the value-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this'. Debord emphasises likewise that '[t]he spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images', that, in Marx's phrase, instantiates itself as the 'fantastic form' of exchange value, which incarnates itself with 'phantom objectivity'. The spectacular object thus does not address itself to the contemplative subject, unlike the physical situation of seeing (what, as we saw in Chapter 2, Crary calls the 'camera obscura model' of sight) in which both subject and object are physically interrelated by light reflections. Rather, as Marx says of the objects of the commodity world (to repeat the quotation in Chapter 1) the image 'far from being under their control, in fact control[s] them.'³ Looking, the privileged operation of subjectivity in the world of the spectacle, enmeshes the subject instead in a situation of disempowerment, frozen in contemplation of an object that maintains a fixed distance from it. Seeing and the contents or enabling apparatus of visibility—images, light, optical technology, what Gilles Deleuze called 'percepts'—therefore bears a deeply overdetermined relation to the subject.⁴

² This motif of the object returning the gaze recurs in theoretical literature on sight. In 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', Walter Benjamin claims that the unique quality of artworks as identified in aesthetics—what he calls 'aura'—can be conceived thus: 'the painting we look at reflects back at us that of which our eyes will never have their fill'. See *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1973), p. 146. In one sense, this marks the difference of Debord's period from the 19th-century industrial capitalism that Benjamin was analysing: 'aura' has disappeared but the subject enmeshed in the spectacle still looks to the object for it; the subject-object relationship is produced as a reality-effect over a generalised field of the visible.

³ Marx, *Capital*, p. 165; Debord, *Society*, p. 12; Marx, *Capital*, p. 167-8.

⁴ As Claire Colebrook puts it, for Deleuze percepts are instances of perception 'freed from organising and purposive viewpoints' or 'a reception of data that is not located in a subject'. In cinema, in particular, Deleuze sees 'a mode of

That overdetermination plays out in the texts I have analysed in a number of ways. I have already examined, in the preceding chapters, the form in which time's reduction to an image becomes at once an impediment to narrative and the locus of narrative's posited focus and reemergence. Narrative turns for compensation to the image, the form of value of the system of abstract time that negates narrative itself. In what follows I will turn to another aspect of these texts' enquiry, at times self-reflexive and at others belying the ideological investments of their apparent strategies, into the relationship between the subject, the image and narrative in the novel form in its historical disintegration. These are, primarily, an investment in *style* and a self-conscious use of the lyric register as an autonomous component of narrative; and an extremely elastic form of focalisation that comes to detach 'point of view' from the narratorial subject altogether. My analysis in this chapter will focus on those moments where texts by DeLillo, Lerner and McCarthy invest themselves in the image—what Jameson designated as the 'scenic impulse' of description and picturing—as an autonomous part of the narrative. This could be seen as a formal analogue to Debord's analysis of the spectacle as 'a part of society' that comes to be 'a means of unification', an autonomous fragment that replaces the whole.⁵ This is particularly the case with the subject of section 5.3 of this chapter, these fictions' fluctuations in narrative perspective or 'point of view'. As I noted in the first part of Chapter 3, point of view serves an important mediating role in the realist novel's structure of meaning: as Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth puts it, the forms of focalisation developed in the novel from the mid-19th century onwards establish a flexible 'middle distance' from which to narrate the events that constitute their narrative.⁶ The development of free indirect style, for example, in the work of Gustave Flaubert and George Eliot, in which the narrative perspective maintains a relationship with a central focaliser but one that can vary and shift in its proximity and

"seeing" that is not attached to the human eye', a strong description of the ideological image that the spectacle holds out for subjects. See Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London: Routledge), p. 36, 29.

⁵ Debord, *Society*, p. 12.

⁶ Deeds Ermarth, p. 50.

identity, drifting towards other subjects and other aspects of the scene, represented a decisive development in realism relative to the work of Balzac in the preceding generation: as Erich Auerbach comments, while Balzac ‘plunges his heroes far more deeply into time-conditioned dependency’, working to ‘exaggerate expression to the point of melodrama’ (this latter being the aspect that Jameson identifies with the *récit* or anecdotal core of fiction), ‘[i]n Flaubert realism becomes impartial, impersonal, objective’.⁷ As we will see in a moment, these developments take place in a rather longer historical morphology of the novel. This chapter is particularly interested in a development in narrative perspective’s establishment of distance, its decentring of narrative from the subject: in instances when narrative perspective seems to tack away from the subject entirely and to identify with the operation of seeing, divorced from the subject, or with the field and apparatus of visibility that constitutes the subject. As the subject of narrative disintegrates and the formal structure that sustains it dissolves in turn, the novel invests in the image-object and in the condition of imagehood: the image makes itself autonomous from the novel-form and the narrative temporality that late capitalism has made unsustainable.

5.1 Autonomy of the Image

What I described in the previous chapter as a prose focused on the visual, usually channelled through description as opposed to narration of events, is a feature of varying prominence throughout much of the history of the novel.⁸ It is necessary at this point to distinguish how the way in which this investment in seeing operates in the contemporary texts under consideration differs from its role in other contexts. This will require a further

⁷ Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 482.

⁸ See Georg Lukács’ distinction between the two as mentioned in the Introduction, in the essay ‘Narrate or Describe’, in Lukács, *Writer & Critic*, pp. 110-148.

theoretical detour through Jameson's work, namely his account of the trajectory from the early realist novel to modernism through the work of Joseph Conrad.

Joseph Conrad's fiction lies at a transitional point in the history of the novel, between what we have already identified as the classic realist text of the 19th century and emergent forms of modernist fiction. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson claims, in the course of an analysis of *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Nostromo* (1904), that in Conrad's style:

we have [here] not only the transition from the naive naming of the outside world in realism to the presentation of the image, a transition to modernism and impressionism which is itself dependent on the very ideology of the image and sense perception and the whole positivist pseudo-scientific myth of the functioning of the mind and the senses; we also have a preselection of narrative material such that thought can be fully realized in images, that is to say, a rejection of the conceptual in favor of the two great naturalist psychic and narrative texts of daydreaming and hallucination.⁹

This passage requires a certain amount of unpacking. We have already encountered the 'positivist pseudo-scientific myth of [...] mind and the senses' in our account in Chapter 2 of Crary's reading of the spectacle's 19th-century prehistory. As we recall, psychological research in the late 19th century posited the mind as a blank slate on which external stimuli made an undifferentiated impact. Forms of sense-perception became differentiated into separate systems and capacities as sense-data itself was increasingly divorced from its content and hence from cognitive interaction with what it conveyed. The shift in form that takes place in Conrad's work, then, depends on this ideological coding of an historical transformation of the subject to function. Conrad's work requires this ideological armature for its historical

⁹ Jameson, *Unconscious*, p. 200.

condition to *be legible as coherent form*. But for Jameson there is a decisive formal modification here that cannot be reduced to the emanation of a new ideology. As he suggests, this is attendant on the novel's relationship with the market, a 'preselection of narrative material' modelled on the commodity-form's parcellisation of the content of social labour: as he glosses it, the process by which 'things are broken into their component parts and reorganised with a view to greater efficiency according to the instrumental dialectic of means and ends'.¹⁰ Conrad's prose apprehends its narrative material, its anecdotal core or *récit*, not as something to which it can have a referential relation but as a pre-existing representation, always-already processed and denatured by the market, experienced at secondhand. He presents this as a qualitative development of Flaubert's use of lyrical discourse drawn from mass-market romances in *Madame Bovary* (1856):

Madame Bovary invented a register of impressionistic daydreaming in order then sharply to differentiate its own "realistic" language from the other, to use the first register of language as the object to be demystified by the second, to create a decoding machinery which does not have its object external to itself but present within the system—and a presence which is not merely abstract, in the form of the "illusions" and ideals of the Balzacian or Stendhalian heroes, but stylistic and molecular, of a piece with the text and the life of the individual sentences.¹¹

At one level, then, Conrad's prose flattens out what was meant to be a stylistic distinction constitutive of the realist novel's narrative. Where realism marks out its reality-effects by differentiating itself from the language of the market, Conrad's style, which takes the 'naturalist' image as its formal focus, subsumes the commodity-form within itself. The style of

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 20.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 201.

Lord Jim, what Jameson describes as Conrad's 'nonstop textual production [...], a self-generating sequence of sentences for which narrative and narrator are mere pretexts', is then generated by a generalisation of the logic of the commodity within itself. Conrad's protagonist sees himself 'saving people from sinking ships cutting away masts in a hurricane [...] always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.'¹² The narrative kernels towards which the peripheries of the narrative orient themselves—its plot of colonial adventure and gold mining, purloined from 19th-century popular novels—are taken straight from the market, and are apprehended in the first instance *as images*, bending away from narrative itself to stand autonomously. In this, the 'positivist pseudo-scientific myth of the functioning of the mind and the senses' plays an important mediating part: whilst it obviously serves an ideological function, deflecting attention from the text's relationship with the market to a biological account of sense-data (the theory of the mind as a 'blank slate', referred to above), it is not *mere* ideology, insofar as it allows a particular formal functioning (the subordination of narrative and 'the conceptual', in Jameson's phrase, to the image) in relation to a social reality that cannot be directly represented (the market). Jameson relates this back to narrative form: where *Madame Bovary* ends with 'the nonrealization of the image', in which Emma Bovary's romantic daydreams lead eventually to her disillusionment and suicide, Conrad incorporates such mass-market dreams into the novel's bifurcated structure, where 'in the whole second half of the novel Conrad goes on to write precisely the romance here caricatured both by himself and, implicitly, by way of stylistic pastiche, by his great predecessor.'¹³ In Conrad, then, the image emerges, by way of a particular ideological account of the functioning of the senses, as an autonomous part of the narrative, in a manner that it could never have functioned in a realist text, maintaining, through the positivist ideology of the senses, a reference in its states of daydreaming and imagining some putative real, a

¹² Ibid, p. 207; qtd in *ibid*, p. 200.

¹³ Ibid, p. 201.

‘reality-effect’. Jameson’s affect and récit split, not only in the sense that they no longer cooperate as part of the same narrative structure but that they literally divide the narrative in two, the first half occupied by optically focused description, the second by the mass-market adventure plot.

As Jameson makes clear, this formal shift and its accompanying struggle over values in Conrad’s work does not occur in a vacuum: ‘both positivism as ideological production and impressionism as aesthetic production are first to be understood in terms of the concrete situation to which they are both responses: that of rationalization and reification in late nineteenth-century capitalism.’ That is, as I have implied in the close readings that occupied the last two chapters, formal innovations of the sort exemplified by Conrad’s focus on the image, taken over from a culture saturated by the logic of the commodity, does not simply reflect in a crudely homologous or analogical way the specific logic of social production usually designated within Marxism by the term ‘base’ or in Marx’s own phrase ‘economic structure’.¹⁴ Rather the formal drive—what Jameson calls Conrad’s ‘will to style’—becomes a means of rendering ‘legible’, of producing a ‘figure’ as Jameson puts it, or registering reification, seeing both it and the positivist ideology that mediates it in turn ‘as a projected solution [...] to a genuinely contradictory situation in the concrete world of everyday social life.’¹⁵ As we noted in Chapter 2, discussing the work of such 19th-century psychological researchers as Johannes Müller and Charles Bell, one of the central tenets of positivist research on the senses was their division and autonomisation: the sensorium was conceived of as fragmented into unlinked capacities, each performing a specialised task, receiving

¹⁴ To reiterate Marx’s distinction between base and superstructure: ‘In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society — the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.’ See Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by N.I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1904), p. 11.

¹⁵ Jameson, *Unconscious*, p. 214; Jameson, ‘Allegory’, p. 845.

undifferentiated and non-indexical stimuli along separate nerve-systems. Jameson refers this process back to reification's breakdown of every organic unity as it renders social material into commodities: it 'sunders subject from object and structurally colonizes each separately, producing hierarchies of functions according to their technical use (thus, the quantifying, "rational" parts of the psyche are to be developed, indeed, overdeveloped, while the more archaic functions—the senses, or certain types of thinking—are allowed to vegetate in a kind of psychic backwater).'¹⁶ Thus modernism, as exemplified by the impressionist impulse in Conrad, addresses 'the Utopian vocation of the newly reified sense, the mission of this heightened and autonomous language of color to restore at least a symbolic experience of libidinal gratification to a world drained of it, a world of extension, gray and merely quantifiable.'¹⁷ In this sense, as Jameson notes, the autonomisation of the image in Conrad should be referred laterally, as it were, to the history of modernist painting at the same time as it is referred vertically to the history and concept of reification that mediates modernist form's relationship with social production.¹⁸ More than this, as the analogy with painting suggests, seeing comes to float free of the subject-object relationship, being a by-product of the reified opposition between the two rather than an intended and productive consequence thereof. For —although this is outside the scope of this project— from the transition from the realist contemplation of Flaubert to Conrad's impressionism, a path could be traced to the further development of the autonomous gaze in such high modernist fiction as the work of John Dos Passos, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, through to the *nouveau roman* of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute.¹⁹

¹⁶ Jameson, *Unconscious*, p. 208-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁹ For Gérard Genette this trajectory of development in the novel towards opticality is also one of increasingly tight focalisation: '[i]nternal focalization is fully realized only in the narrative of the "interior monologue," or in that borderline work, Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie*, where the central character is limited absolutely to—and strictly *inferred* from—his focal position alone.' See Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 193.

In one sense, the preceding chapters proceed through a methodologically similar analysis to that which Jameson outlines, drawing on the qualitatively advanced form of reification that Debord outlines in the theory of the spectacle. I analysed the transformation of narrative temporality in the texts by DeLillo, Lerner and McCarthy under consideration, in which 'realism' forms the mediating ideological concept that the texts receive as a contemplative, secondhand object, and proceed to tarry with, invert or estrange. At the same time, I referred the analysis to the visuality of photography, painting and cinema in Chapter 3, and digital images in Chapter 4. What I want to do in what follows is to analyse the way in which this autonomisation of the image and its effects on narrative structure operate in texts of a different period, namely the contemporary works under consideration in this project. Throughout Lerner, McCarthy and DeLillo's work are threaded crucial moments in which seeing becomes an autonomous part of their narrative form. This occurs in a number of ways. Firstly, it can be seen at the level of style. As in Conrad's work, DeLillo utilises the Flaubertian lyrical register at key points in *Point Omega*, the rhythmic and syntactic ripples of style becoming a sort of substitute for a narrative time that, as I explored in Chapter 3, is slowed or stilled, becoming static or non-durational, or fragmented into synchronic and quantitative, spatialised instants. But this phenomenon of the high or art sentence, with its reception of the world as images, parsed from an anecdotal core (the *récit*) that already exists as just images, is mixed with a pared-back, blunt or dull style that registers the mere facticity of the world it describes. The autonomous art-sentence is entangled with the contemplative objectivity it arises around, incapable of transcending it, but unlike in the realist novel, or Conrad's modernism, in which it takes on a 'Utopian vocation', it exists as merely one image-object among others. Secondly, it emerges in problems of focalisation. There are moments, particularly in *Remainder*, *Point Omega*, DeLillo's short story 'The Starveling' and *Leaving the Atocha Station*, in which the narrator or focaliser sees themselves as if from outside, trapped

in a gaze that is not their own, and often cannot be solidly located.²⁰ In these moments they are at once most fully realised as subjects—pictured, placed in the spectacle’s order of value—and dispossessed, rendered objects. This question of focalisation is linked also to the use of multimodal narrative devices, primarily the counterpoint of text and reproduced images inserted on the page. Lerner employs this technique extensively in *10:04* and *Leaving The Atocha Station*, in which certain images act as key foci for the narration. He draws, in this case, on a tradition within recent fiction—for example, on W.G. Sebald’s use of reproduced photographs and artworks, or Mark Z. Danielewski’s innovative page layouts and typography in *House Of Leaves* (2000). Lerner’s usage differs in crucial ways from these texts, stemming in part from the intervening shift in technological reproduction of the image represented by digital technology. In these instances, narrative subjectivity leaves language almost entirely, migrating to the image, the object supposed to supply meaning to the social material that, as Debord writes, it helps ‘mediate’; but for all that the image purports to supply narrative, it also leaves a sort of dumb, empty and inexplicable effect on the narrative, remaining opaque objects, incapable of containing what one of Lerner’s narrators calls ‘a profound experience of art’.²¹

5.2 The Style of Immobilisation

We have already seen, in Section 3.2, the extent to which the protagonists of DeLillo’s late fictions encounter the material of their narratives in the form of images. The subjectivity of the focaliser of *Point Omega*’s frame narrative does not seem to precede his envelopment in the images of *24 Hour Psycho*: the narrator’s first indications of his thoughts are that ‘[h]e watched Anthony Perkins reaching for a car door, using the right hand. He knew that Anthony Perkins

²⁰ Unfortunately for lack of space this chapter will not deal with DeLillo’s short fictions in detail.

²¹ Debord, *Society*, p.12; Lerner, *Atocha*, p. 8.

would use the right hand on this side of the screen and the left hand on the other side. He knew it but needed to see it'. Finley, arriving in the Anzia-Borrigo, encounters the conditions of the landscape as images: 'I keep seeing the words. Heat, space, stillness, distance. They've become visual states of mind. I'm not sure what this means.'²² Similarly, in a number of DeLillo's short stories the world appears first in terms of second-hand images; the narrator of 'Midnight in Dostoevsky' (2009) thinks of the people local to his small town college as 'transient spirits, a face in the window of a passing car, running with reflected light, or a long street with a shovel jutting from a snowbank' and shares 'an unspoken moment of respect [...] for times past, frontiers gone', a notion that recalls the visual register of Western films.²³ In what follows, I will show how the dimension of style in *Point Omega* in particular participates in the contradictory narrative strategies I have already outlined.

If, as I have suggested, the frozen or flattened narrative structures of *Point Omega*, for example, identify with the condition of the image as a means of producing a semblance of narrative time, through the motor of flat, imagistic intertexts, then DeLillo's style at once carries with such flatness and attempts to break or transform it. Drawing on the reified and spectacular plot material at the core of the text, it reshapes it into the lyrical or 'high' register of the cosmic or philosophical. Unlike the lyrical component of what Zadie Smith calls 'lyrical realism', which, as I noted in Chapter 4, provides a kind of ready access to the depth of time via the imposition of symbolism, here the lyrical image emerges as an autonomous and immobilised component of DeLillo's ongoing process of sentence production. It participates in the generalised slowing, stretching and glaciation of time that Peter Boxall describes: 'an extraordinary lack of spatial or temporal awareness, a sudden and drastic failure of the bonds that hold us in time and space [...] a different kind of time, a thin, simultaneous time in which

²² DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 5; *ibid.*, p. 24.

²³ DeLillo, *The Angel Esmerelda: Nine Stories* (New York: Scribner, 2011), p. 119.

it is hard to gain a narrative purchase'.²⁴ If, as Jameson argues above, Conrad's novels bifurcate structurally between the autonomous image and secondhand plot, in *Point Omega* there is nothing but the image, with the plot, as I suggested in Chapter 3, emerging only through inferences mediated by the image itself. In one sense, this relationship between image and narrative depends on what in Section 5.1 I called a legitimating ideology of style (in Conrad's case, positivist psychological theories of the senses). As Jay David Bolter notes, designers of videogames and other digital media construe their technologies' representational abilities in terms of 'transparent representation', with Virtual Reality fulfilling most completely 'the desire for perceptual immersion' and 'the sense of presence'.²⁵ Filmmakers in turn come to see the forms and techniques of realism described at the end of Chapter 2 as being augmented and perfected by digital image technology such as CGI special effects, 3D and digital editing: 'many of the most popular Hollywood blockbusters [...] still offer eager audiences an aesthetic of transparency and authorial presence'.²⁶ *24 Hour Psycho*, as a digital remediation of an analogue film work, exercises that much more vividness for the subject: as the tools of digital imaging exercise a total control over the image, so does the image over the viewer. In one sense, this marks the difference between the spectacle of the 21st century and Debord's own, in which the latter has been internalised, in TJ Clark's words, as 'a regime of visual flow, displacement, disembodiment, endless available revisability of the image, endless ostensible transparency and multi-dimensionality [...] this pseudo-utopia [that] presents itself as the very form of self-knowledge, self-production, self-control'.²⁷ But I would argue that, as with Conrad, style in DeLillo is not reducible to such ideology. The emergence of the autonomous image, producing as it does an intense internal dissonance between registers in the text, holds open a gap of difference—what Frida Beckman identifies as the later novels' 'ambivalence' within a

²⁴ Boxall, *Fiction*, p. 27.

²⁵ Jay David Bolter, 'Digital Media and the Future of Filmic Narrative', in *The Oxford Handbook of Film and Media Studies*, ed. by Robert Kolker, 22-35 (p. 29).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁷ Clark, *Sight*, p.121.

spatialised present—that DeLillo’s style refuses to close or gloss over.²⁸ In doing so, it gestures to an outside to the airless closure of the texts’ enmeshment in the image, and thereby suggests, by inversion, the ‘Utopian vocation’ Jameson claims for the autonomous and reified sense. The very spectacular identification with the image as the necessary form of appearance of value—with *value as appearance*—becomes a narrative strategy that moves towards its own limit, a point that we will return to and enlarge on in the concluding section of this chapter.

I have already suggested, in Chapter 3, that DeLillo’s late texts convey, through the leaps of identification and absorption with intertexts embedded as images, differentiation and movement within a conspicuously flat and durationless narrative. As I noted in Chapter 3, the relationship between what we may describe as the frame narrative—the ‘Anonymity’ chapters that bookend the text—and the central chapters, which, if the reader accepts the hypothesis that the narrator of ‘Anonymity’ is responsible for Jessie’s disappearance, can be seen as a story-within-a-story, is both clear and ambiguous. This is the case insofar as it is apparent that the two belong to the same fabula, but it is by no means clear how the two story levels relate to one another, in terms of the overall sequence of plot-events read back from the narrative discourse. The continuities between the figure of Finley, in his relation to Jessie’s disappearance, and the narrator of ‘Anonymity’, are well-established, mediated by the intertext of *24 Hour Psycho* and the figure of Norman Bates, with whom, as David Cowart puts it, ‘the watcher in the dark is a double—but also the double of every filmgoer [...] Hitchcock always took a perverse pleasure in hinting that the viewer in the theater shares an uninnocent, scopophilic delight with the onscreen voyeur.’²⁹ The patterns that the separate sections establish at the level of style are likewise produced through differences and relations, both at

²⁸ Frida Beckman, ‘Cartographies of ambivalence: allegory and cognitive mapping in Don DeLillo’s later novels’, *Textual Practice* 32 (2018), 1383-1403 (p. 1395).

²⁹ Cowart, p. 43.

the macro-level level of the text and at the micro-level of individual sentence-production. My argument in what follows will attend to both these levels of the text, moving from the former to the latter.

The 'Anonymity' sections, as previously noted, are narrated in a free indirect style that attends to one focaliser, while the central chapters are in first-person. However, both are notably variable in the distance they take from their centres of narration. 'Anonymity' begins by presenting the narrator from the outside, 'a man standing against the north wall, barely visible', tarrying in the fourth paragraph with the other museum visitors who 'looked at him [the museum guard], seeing eye contact, some kind of understanding that might pass between them and make their bafflement valid' and who feel there is 'no point lingering in a secluded room in which whatever was happening took forever to happen'.³⁰ This slowness of the image becomes, as I noted in Chapter 3, an allegory for the narrative's own strategy in which, in this opening section, attention to and description of the image is almost the only thing that can be said to happen, a fact that the narration reflects back on the nature of the protagonist: '[t]he film's merciless pacing had no meaning without a corresponding watchfulness, the individual whose absolute alertness did not betray what was demanded.'³¹ This slowness comes to the fore exactly as the narrative perspective moves into a close third-person, beginning with the sixth paragraph, which persists with variations for the rest of the chapter. At this point the attention reverses, as it were, directing outwards from the protagonist onto the screen and the contents of the room. Free indirect discourse comes to dominate the style, which develops in two contrary directions: on the one hand towards increasing fragmentation of syntax and an often truncated use of paragraphs, on the other towards an increasing elaboration of multi-clausal sentences. One example, which exhibits a combination of fragmentation and complexity: 'Or the fall down the stairs, still a long way off, maybe hours yet before the private

³⁰ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 3-4.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

detective, Arbogast, goes backwards down the stairs, face badly slashed, eyes wide, arms windmilling, a scene he recalled from earlier in the week, or maybe only yesterday, impossible to sort out the days and viewings'.³² This has two effects. Firstly, the contrast between sentence fragments of largely unindicated inner monologue—'The empty staircase seen from above. Suspense is trying to build but the silence and stillness outlive it'—and longer sentences and paragraphs that similarly dispense with tense indicators, attribution, or prepositions, underlines the sense that the latter emerge from the same consciousness, but enact an entirely different force.³³ His narratorial consciousness, that is, is not a unitary form but divided between specifically opposed, indeed binary, impulses. This will prove to be important later in our analysis.

Secondly, whilst these tendencies develop in opposing directions, both depend on a basic operation of attention. The fragmentary tendency breaks down the action observed by the narrator into discrete details; time undergoes segmentation: 'It was like whole numbers. The man could count the gradations in the movement of Anthony Perkins' head. [...] Every action was broken into components so distinct from the entity that the watcher found himself isolated from every expectation.'³⁴ Each such detail tends to be isolated in a discrete sentence fragment, or in consecutive clauses: 'He counted six rings. The rings spinning on the curtain rod when she pulls the curtain down with her. The knife, the silence, the spinning rings.'³⁵ The transitions between these fragmentary pieces of discourse and paragraphs of extended lyric description are not governed by any causal relationship, but operate instead as the transmutation of identical material from one register to another, in a seemingly arbitrary form. Consider, for example, the following paragraphs:

³² Ibid, p. 14.

³³ Ibid, p. 17.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 5, 9-10.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

The empty staircase, seen from above. Suspense is trying to build, but the silence and stillness outlive it.

He began to understand, after all this time, that he'd been standing here waiting for something. What was it? It was something outside conscious grasp until now. He'd been waiting for a woman to arrive, a woman alone, someone he might talk to, here at the wall, in whispers, sparingly, of course, or later, somewhere, trading ideas and impressions, what they'd seen and how they felt about it. Wasn't that it? He was thinking a woman would enter who'd stay and watch for a time, finding her way to the place at the wall, an hour, half an hour, that was enough, half an hour, that was sufficient, a serious person, soft-spoken, wearing a pale summer dress.

Jerk.

It felt real, the pace was paradoxically real, bodies moving musically, barely moving, twelve-tone, things barely happening, cause and effect so drastically drawn apart that it seemed real to him, the way all the things in the physical world that we don't understand are said to be real.³⁶

Nothing—or at least nothing the prose indicates—prompts the realisation that 'he'd been standing here waiting'; indeed, the empty space of the screen, whose 'silence and stillness' persist beyond a suspense that they smother, would seem to militate against any growing expectation of change, the entry of another party. The additive clauses of the sentence beginning 'he'd been waiting' seem to struggle to deal with this new and unexpected influx of narrative information, whose details aggregate and increase in complexity, finessing and adjusting the moment of her arrival, into which is compressed the future time of 'later, somewhere, trading ideas and impressions'. The woman's imagined entrance is conceived of

³⁶ Ibid, p. 17-18.

primarily in terms of images: she is oriented entirely towards him as the observing subject, 'someone he might talk to', a figure from art-house cinema, 'wearing a pale summer dress'. Although it does not specify why he is waiting for this woman, it is clear that she primarily supplies a specific, predefined narrative function for him, to possess these given qualities as a kind of stock figure. This follows Laura Mulvey's anatomy of the function of the look in narrative cinema: women 'connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*' and while '[t]he presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in a normal narrative film, [...] her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.'³⁷ The one word paragraph '[j]erk' functions as a momentary break of self-reproach in the prose's slow flow, but one that leads back into the same tempo, albeit with different subject-matter. 'It felt real', the next paragraph begins, but the verb precedes the noun to which the pronoun 'it' refers, rendering the content itself nugatory until the second clause defines it as 'the pace'. This rearrangement of syntax, which Michael Jones notes is common in DeLillo's late fiction, elevates abstract and contentless objecthood and its attendant adjectival state (being 'real') above the noun. As Jones puts it, it 'expresses a potentiality': bare, uninflected happening, uninstantiated in time, untouched by what Jameson, as we saw in the last section, calls 'the conceptual'. The substance of the sentence's subject exists beyond what Jones calls 'language's structuring of facts', the pronoun merely gesturing towards it. In this sense, the 'potentiality' the sentence expresses has the same relationship to its substance as an image does to the thing it resembles.³⁸ This potentiality could, in this sense, be seen as expressing the relationship to its substance as Debord sees in the forms of value of

³⁷ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1989), p. 19.

³⁸ Jones, p. 1350-1351. Such a relation can be seen as what CS Peirce calls the 'indexical' relationship possessed by certain images to the things they are an image of, mentioned in the last chapter in the context of McCarthy's use of the image. Michael Silverstein glosses Peirce's theory thus: '*Indexes* are those signs where the occurrence of a sign vehicle token bears a connection of understood spatio-temporal contiguity to the occurrence of the entity signaled. That is, the presence of some entity is perceived to be signaled in the context of communication incorporating the sign vehicle.' See Silverstein, 'Shifters, Linguistic Categories and Cultural Description', in *Meaning in Anthropology*, ed. by Keith H. Basso and Henry A. Selby (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), pp. 11-55 (p. 27).

the spectacle: as entailing ‘a generalized shift from *having* to appearing [...] all effective having must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate *raison d’être* from appearances.’³⁹ Multi-syllabic adverbs—‘paradoxically’, ‘musically’, ‘drastically’, ‘barely’—slow the language of these ‘things barely happening’, in a sentence that eventually circles back to the status of the ‘real’, a ‘reality-effect’ that it suggests, in a lyric touch, subsists hidden precisely in its physicality (‘the way all the things in the physical world that we don’t understand are said to be real’). Image locates reality in a plenitude beyond visibility’s limits, but which is otherwise inaccessible to understanding. In style, speed becomes slowness, mediated by the image: spectacular time renders them fundamentally interchangeable, equivalent.

A notably similar convergence occurs in the central chapters, again in moments centred on stasis. They centre, particularly, on the characters’ encounters with the landscape, which manifests the ‘space and time’ that Elster, the former defence intellectual, has traded what he calls ‘News and Traffic. Sports and Weather’ for.⁴⁰ Finley’s visualisation, mentioned above, of ‘[h]eat, space, stillness, distance’ and ‘time’ become the surrounding and in some ways overwhelming context for the narrative’s encounter, in the putative storyline of Jessie’s death, with murder and sexual violence.⁴¹ The landscape is defined by ‘the distances that enfolded every feature [...] and [...] the force of geologic time, out there somewhere, the string grids of excavators searching for weathered bone.’⁴² Finley ‘see[s] past physical dimension into the feelings that these words engender, feelings that deepen over time’, just as Elster is ‘alive to the protoworld, I thought, the seas and reefs of ten million years ago. He closed his eyes, silently diving the nature of later extinctions, grassy plains in picture books for children, a region swarming with happy camels and giant zebras, mastodons, sabertooth tigers.’⁴³

³⁹ Debord, *Society*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 23-4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Spatiotemporal states overlay emotion, which is only accessible through the apprehension of the world as images, rendered to 'isolated figures', which flatten the two terms (emotion and image) into one.⁴⁴

The inhuman vitality he had sensed in the landscape and death itself become interchangeable and indifferent, dissolving from Elster's 'grand themes' into the stylistic frozenness of *24 Hour Psycho*'s narrative of psychological abnormality and murder, 'funnelled down to local grief, one body, out there somewhere, or not.'⁴⁵ Finley's reverie as they prepare to leave departs from the fabula entirely, occurring purely in the stasis of the narrative discourse:

That night I could not sleep. I fell into reveries one after another. The woman in the other room, on the other side of the wall, sometimes Jessie, other times not clearly and simply her, and then Jessie and I in her room, in her bed, weaving through each other, turning and arching sort of sea like, some impossible nightlong moment of transparent sex. Her eyes are closed, face unfrozen, she is Jessie at the same time that she is too expressive to be her. She seems to be drifting outside herself even when I bring her into me. I'm there and aroused but barely see myself as I stand at the door watching us both.⁴⁶

These sentences perform an arrested lyric apprehension of Jessie, who has now become, like the woman in 'Anonymity 2' (with whom we presume her to be identical), merely an image, even as they admit her unreal or phantasmic ontology. The paragraph's tenses change, beginning in past and slipping into the present continuous, then the simple present. These

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 124.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 119-120.

provide an unstable time-sense within a frozen present: Finley reinhabits a past experience, moving out, paradoxically, of the present of narration into a past present whose reality overtakes it; he is displaced, in turn, from an ongoing process to a present of discrete and differentiated actions, though one which confuses states ('she is Jessie at the same time that she is too expressive to be her'). This relates, at a micro-level, to the problem of narrative temporality that I examined in Chapter 3: the narratorial present and its frame narrative are compressed into one flat surface, to which the fluctuating narrative intertext, the image of *Psycho* serving as a mediator, attempts to restore depth and differentiation. The position of retrospective narration cannot stay still, but collapses, through the category of the image by which it receives its material, into a continuous flow of images, coagulating in turn into the immediacy of a frozen present. Its pace, like that of *24 Hour Psycho* as quoted above, is 'paradoxically real', palpable, tactile and vivid precisely in its spectacular unreality, its displacement from any inhabitable continuum or flow of time. This blurred continuity between story-levels provides the context to the convergence and divergence of focalising distance in style in the two narrative strands. Finley's movements into a lyric register within the stasis of style represents a form of self-alienation, a shift into the altered perception that the narrator of 'Anonymity' finds in *24 Hour Psycho*, determined by the image's temporality. Fundamentally, because Finley cannot place himself in a temporal position safely outside the fabula, he enters into the (apparent) killer's subjectivity. The only way to inhabit narrative time at all is to meld, as the 'Anonymity' narrator does at the end, into the intertextual figure of Norman Bates. This form of variable focalisation in style is enacted as a necessary self-alienation—an attempt to leave the position of contemplation and merge with the image.

The third sentence lacks any verb until the gerund 'weaving' more than halfway through, not clearly related to the object ('[t]he woman in the other room'), nor any clear object. Reversing the effect of the sentences mentioned above, in which verb precedes noun,

action and transformation becomes impossible—the ‘weaving’, ‘turning and arching sort of sea like’ hardly seem to occur in time at all. They exist instead in a stasis that flattens out punctual events into timeless states, that occur in a compressed and durationless ‘impossible nightlong moment’ whose content of ‘transparent sex’ participates in the register of the most tawdry Hollywood erotic drama. The only mutability exists in the simultaneous and undecidable ontology of Jessie and Finley, who are no longer discrete beings but interpenetrate each other in this flat moment: ‘sometimes Jessie, other times not clearly and simply her’. The fetishised image-object he makes of the narrative kernel of Jessie’s body and his erotic obsession with her, broken down into detached glimpses of anatomy rather than a whole person (‘her eyes are closed, face unfrozen’) can only exist in this paradoxically real mobility under the sign of the spectacle’s frozen imagehood. The temporality of style here is complicated further by the final sentence, in which Finley is ‘there and aroused but barely see myself as I stand at the door watching us both’. This doubling of looks or subject positions is a point I will return to in the next section of this chapter. At a basic level, this splitting dramatises the contradictory imperative that Debord notes in the spectacle: that every image-object must express its value in what Crary calls ‘the illusion of [the commodity’s] utter tangibility’ and that simultaneously it must be ‘portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, *at a distance*, and as desirable by definition.’⁴⁷ It must exist, as the commodity itself must in Marx’s analysis, as both the abstraction of exchange value and the concreteness of use value. In this sense, the spectacle prepares a fixed position, at a contemplative distance, for the subject from the world they simultaneously must constitute. Where, in this case, does Finley’s *style* of slow contemplation—which, as I have noted, itself expresses an aporetic temporality—belong? The position of seeing seems to drift, across the course of the paragraph, beginning as a floating or omnipresent eye that sees ‘on the other side of the wall’, becoming one that stays

⁴⁷ Crary, ‘Eclipse’, p. 287; Debord, *Society*, p. 112.

close to Finley's dream-self, though he does not state that he sees the woman through his own eyes, before splitting. If the lyrical tone here promises a redemption of the disastrous shame of erotic obsession and murder, the position of the image—what can possess the seamless value of the image-object—is continually displaced. Finley is troubled, in other words, by the very emergence of the image in its autonomy within style: as he reports his wife remarks, his investment in the image is such that '[i]f you were any more intense, you'd be a black hole. A singularity [...] No light escapes.'⁴⁸ Visibility, in his total identification with its promised and utopian vocation, reverses into a lightless and static blankness.

This very action of wavering or flickering at the micro-level of the sentence's relation to the image marks out a certain difference with the 'Anonymity' chapters, in which variation tends to occur at the level of the paragraph, while tone and syntax stays relatively consistent. But the convergence of the two story-levels and their respective narrators recurs in the novel's closing pages, as the protagonist of 'Anonymity', having finished speaking to the woman we presume to be Jessie, 'separates himself from the wall and waits to be assimilated, pore by pore, to dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates.'⁴⁹ Imagehood reaches something like a zero degree of movement or duration: 'complete immersion' would require 'the film to move even more slowly, requiring deeper involvement of eye and mind, always that'; the image is 'the thing he sees [...] sharing consciousness with him.'⁵⁰ His subjectivity is not his own—'[h]e is not responsible for these thoughts'—and yet 'they're his thoughts, aren't they?'⁵¹ Nonetheless, some movement occurs, as the lyric register reaches its most concentrated pitch here, in the final paragraphs of the text:

⁴⁸ DeLillo, *Omega*, p. 34.

⁴⁹ DeLillo, *Omega* p. 148.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 146.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 147.

Sometimes he sits by her bed and says something and then looks at her and waits for an answer.

Sometimes he just looks at her.

Sometimes a wind comes before the rain and sends birds sailing past the window, spirit birds that ride the night, stranger than dreams.⁵²

It is worth noting here the loop that this establishes with the opening paragraph of the first 'Anonymity' chapter, as the perspective zooms out and sees the protagonist from the outside. But the image simultaneously performs a flattening of subjectivities—as I noted in Chapter 3, it is unclear if the 'he' of these paragraphs refers to the protagonist or Norman Bates. The anaphoric repetition of '[s]ometimes' marks these paragraphs' events out as occurring within some kind of continuum of time—whether that of the film or his own is undecidable, perhaps at this point irrelevant—converging in an abstract form with the time of everyday life that Finley left behind for the desert. But they are occurrences of deeply uncertain duration: 'just look[ing] at her' may last for seconds or minutes. The single-sentence paragraphs restore a sense of speed, reinforced by the relatively compressed word-choices—none more than two syllables—even as it maintains the lyric tone. The final sentence accumulates until it reaches the mention of 'the rain', marked by a definite article despite no rain having been mentioned before, a shift repeated in 'the window' that narrows down and intensifies the focalisation on what had previously been a relatively externalised world. The very presence of a window inserts the idea of looking, with the birds framed within this device: it holds open a glimpse of an outside world of the sort that Finley encounters in the desert, but now no longer entirely frozen. But they too are only to be contemplated, insubstantial, apparitions that are 'stranger than dreams', for being at once more real than

⁵² DeLillo, p. 148.

dreamed objects—situated here, in something like the fantasised heart of the spectacle—and stranded in an impossible time, sailing indefinitely.

5.3 The Subject of the Spectacle

This section concerns what is, perhaps, the foundational instance in this project's enquiry into the relationship between innovative narrative structures and the place of the subject in the spectacle. In this section, I will build on the account of style and the autonomisation of the image developed in this chapter so far, and attempt to show how the political and formal problems laid out in previous chapters come to one particular impasse: in the subject's impossible identification with the image, or rather with the function of seeing. The image, to refer back to the concept of spectacle traced through Chapters 1 and 2, exists in a rigid opposition to the subject, but nonetheless forms the subject's alienated being. As Debord writes, the spectacle 'manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear."' To identify with the image as the locus of value is, due to the mechanism of contemplation, to devalue oneself: 'the more he [the subject] contemplates, the less he lives; the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence'.⁵³ Therefore, for the subject to identify with the condition of the image, its seamless visibility, and to put oneself, as it were, in the image's place in the subject-object opposition, requires breaking or bending this very mechanism of opposition. But, paradoxically, such identification would carry out the logic of that mechanism, by which 'whatever is good will appear'. As we saw above, it is precisely such an internalisation of the powers associated with the condition of the image that defines the spectacle in the 21st

⁵³ Debord, *Society*, p. 15; *ibid*, p. 23.

century. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, style internalises reification, making the image, as a kind of formal by-product, become an autonomous part of the novel-form—slowing the form's duration and splintering it, both at the level of the sentence and the overall text, which must nonetheless resort to the image to produce textual variation and interrelation, to provide an image of textual or formal integrity or wholeness. Moreover, as I suggested in the last two chapters, the texts' formal and narrative accounts of subjectivity frequently pivot on questions of time. These novels conceive, as I suggested in Chapter 3's analyses of work by Lerner and DeLillo, of time as a static image that nonetheless represents the only possible dimension of depth, the plenitude and fullness of time that the spectacle promises and withholds, because it is based on a freezing and rigidification of time that underlies its false appearances of time. These novels also conceive of the temporal dimension—as I suggested in my analysis of McCarthy's work in Chapter 4—as a secret orientation of depth amid a spatialised form that negates, voids or abolishes the subject, as the centre of narrative.

If we assume the destruction of the subject implied by these distortions of the conditions of narrative time and space, then one question that these texts answer by their investment in the image is: what organising principle can the novel, which developed as attentive to the everyday life of the bourgeois individual subject, rely on after that subject's demise?⁵⁴ The formal problem I will examine in what follows takes this temporal disorder as a basic assumption: time broken down into static moments, apprehended only as images, understood as mental images belonging to the consciousness of the focaliser or as a focus on visual aspects in the text's process of description. The only possible way of overcoming this disempowering spatialisation, then—aside from McCarthy's unacknowledged formal solution of tracing the underlying presence of time—is to take the spatialised time of the spectacle as

⁵⁴ See Watt, p. 66-67.

given. To invest in the power of seeing that structures this spatialised time would be to gain the image's power, to place oneself in the position of the image. To exercise the mobility of sight in a paralysed field is the only power left to narration. Through close readings of moments in works by Lerner and McCarthy I will show how what Jameson calls the Utopian vocation of style, as we referred to above in Section 5.1, which is for the most part reversed and recuperated by these texts, is displaced into one of the central problems of the modern history of the novel—namely, that of point of view or focalisation.

Jameson claims in *The Antinomies of Realism* that the development of free indirect style occurred as a means of managing the problems posed to the novel by reification in the 19th century. The commodity-form's spatialisation of time, the increasing freezing of duration and the sense of time as a flexible span is received as 'the weakening of the pole of the récit, of the past-present system itself, by the dominance of an eternal present'.⁵⁵ As Percy Lubbock noted in one of the first thorough theoretical reflections on fictional form after modernism, *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), fiction exists on a spectrum between the 'purely dramatic subject' composed entirely of narrative kernels, 'that will tell itself in perfect rightness, unaided, to the eye of the reader' without the intervening distance of the narrator, and stories that 'will not naturally accommodate themselves to the reader's point of view', which may be composed of a larger or more fine-grained span of non-eventful time such as is represented by Chatman's term 'periphery'. He characterises the latter type of story as 'rather pictorial than dramatic—meaning that they call for some narrator, somebody who *knows*, to contemplate the facts'.⁵⁶ Free indirect style, maintaining a variable distance from the narrator, evades the increasingly subjective focus that Lukács would criticise in the modernist novel, which must articulate itself in the present of first-person narration (what Jameson, drawing on art historian Michael Fried, calls 'theatricality'). *Style indirect libre's* 'synthesis of the past (récit) and the present

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Antinomies*, p. 176-177.

⁵⁶ Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), p. 254-255.

(scene) would seem to offer an ideal solution to the realist problem par excellence'.⁵⁷

Lubbock's use of the word 'pictorial' is telling: free indirect style contains and canalises the kernel of the image to realist fiction, through the intervention of a narratorial subject that the narrative conjures into being. The distortion or derangement, then, of this technique implies an uncontrolled looseness impelled by the underlying and intolerable space-time conditions of a spectacular society in crisis, which nonetheless preserves the basic coordinates of the technique. This discloses, by a form of parody, the function of the formal technique, to maintain the contemplative fixity of the 'reality-effect'. The texts' investment in the imagistic breakdown of time, the frame in which the diegetic world is caught, as a structuring limit that organises representation—the time of the snapshot, the photogram, the stilled or slowed film, the 'reality-effect' of Barthes' excessive description, the frozen placidity of the interiors catalogue in Debord's film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1979), now transmuted into the cyclical digital temporality of McCarthy's buffer circles and looped images of oil slicks, as analysed in the last chapter—returns, as an imagined space of freedom the subject is drawn inexorably into. Point of view comes to identify with the commodity-image itself, splitting, doubling or displacing the subject who persists, as an appearance, at the novel's heart. This play with point of view, although it does not itself stray outside of the spatialised time of unfreedom the spectacle occupies, makes clear through its tarrying with the blankness and vacancy at the heart of style's Utopian vocation—its impersonality, which mirrors the bare facticity of the commodity-form—the conditions that make the spectacle possible.

5.3.i The Poetry of Sight

⁵⁷ Jameson, *Antinomies*, p. 176-177. For Lukács' criticisms, see in particular 'Narrate', pp. 140-148; 'Expressionism: its Significance and Decline [1934]', in *Essays on Realism*, ed. by Rodney Livingstone, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), pp. 76-113; and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. by John and Necker Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1962).

As I analysed at length in the second part of Chapter 3, Lerner establishes in *10:04* and in his critical writings an opposition between different forms of writing—poetry, biography and the novel—to which visual materials (film, painting and photography) are counterposed as a term that, beneath the text's explicit and self-reflexive statements, resolves the antinomy of these different forms of writing. As we saw, such a visual ontology corresponded to a renewed realism that, whilst retaining its contemplative positioning, overcame itself precisely through its intense investment in flatness and disenchantment. Lerner's earlier novel *Leaving the Atocha Station*, though it does not so prominently address questions of realism, also finds visual art and its relationships to writing and contemporary everyday experience as a prominent structuring element in its narrative.

The novel's narrator, Adam Gordon, is an American poet on a university research fellowship in Madrid, around the time of the city's 2004 train bombings, which are portrayed late in the narrative. He claims professionally that he 'intended to write [...] a long, research-driven poem exploring the [Spanish civil] war's literary legacy', but the research he in fact conducts seems to have little to do with the war or literature. In the text's opening pages, he recalls that '[t]he first phase of my research involved' daily visits to the Prado art museum. He carries 'a bilingual edition of Lorca's *Collected Poems*, my two notebooks, a pocket dictionary, John Ashbery's *Selected Poems*, [and] drugs', but uses the books only for 'what I called translation' in El Retiro, a park near the Prado.⁵⁸ In the Prado itself, he repeatedly views 15th-century Flemish painter Roger van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* (1435). One morning, he finds 'someone had taken my place':

He was standing exactly where I normally stood and for a moment I was startled, as if beholding myself beholding the painting, although he was thinner and darker than I. I

⁵⁸ Lerner, *Station*, p. 23; *ibid*, p. 7, 16.

waited for him to move on, but he didn't. I wondered if he had observed me in front of the *Descent* and if he was now standing before it in the hope of seeing whatever it was I must have seen. [...] I was about to abandon room 58 when the man broke suddenly into tears, convulsively catching his breath. Was he, I wondered, just facing the wall to hide his face as he dealt with whatever grief he'd brought into the museum? Or was he having a *profound experience of art*?⁵⁹

Adam continues to observe this figure, while 'pretend[ing] to take in other paintings', who breaks into further fits of weeping in front of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510) before he 'headed calmly for the museum's main exit.'⁶⁰ The reason this perturbs Adam is the contrast it draws with his own experience: 'I had long worried that I was incapable of having a profound experience of art and I had trouble believing that anyone had, at least anyone I knew. I was intensely suspicious of people who claimed a poem or painting or piece of music "changed their life," especially since I had often known these people before and after their experience and could register no change.'⁶¹ As I noted in Chapter 3, he associates this 'profound experience' with the transparency, the self-presence of the realist novel. He posits poetry as valuable precisely because of its failure to achieve this profundity: '[p]oetry actively repelled my attention, it was opaque and thingly and refused to absorb me; [...] and yet by refusing to absorb me the poem held out the possibility of a higher form of absorption of which I was unworthy, a profound experience unavailable from within damaged life, and so the poem became a figure for its outside.'⁶² Art's profound experience is a lesser object than the form of absorption that is *not* provided, one that requires as its condition of possibility the

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 9, 10.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 8.

⁶² Ibid, p. 20.

transformation of the whole of 'damaged life'.⁶³ This profound experience, occurring in someone else, short-circuits this set of values. Seeing this display of emotion, it is as if his own perception of a painting he was so familiar with has been inverted. But this experience is detached from him: he can only observe his own process of perception from outside, as a similar instance of looking. His own act of looking, which should be identical or interchangeable with that of the man in front of the painting, is excluded from that experience. A detail from the painting appears in reproduction on the facing page to the end of the section, the tearful face of a man to the immediate right of Christ being lifted down from the cross, looking at the stigmata of his left hand; the illustration is spatially separated from the narrative and the man's eyeline does not meet the picture plane. The reader is placed, to some extent, in Adam's own position as an unacknowledged and separated spectator; but the doubling effect here—the face is, after all, part of the painting itself and not that of its weeping onlooker—complicates matters. The 'profound experience' and the flat materiality of the artwork, on which the fracture of its illusionism is arrayed, the core of its putative ability to produce a 'profound experience of art', form a *mise-en-abyme*. The spectator—Adam, the reader—could substitute themselves into either of the subject-positions in the relay between spectator and painting, but the two are undecidable; the profound experience is contained, and looks left across the page at the narrative itself, without seeing it.

This form of self-separation is, in different guises, part of Gordon's 'research'. His persistent use of pharmaceutical and recreational drugs to maintain himself in his research opens up a recurrent self-alienation: shortly after the opening scene in the Prado, he smokes marijuana and 'an abyss opened up inside me', after which he switches, mid-paragraph, to the third person, maintaining the fragmentation of syntax that occasionally marks his first-person

⁶³ Lerner alludes here to Theodor Adorno's 1951 text *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974).

narration ('[s]ome of the gray was sucked inside him, and he was at a loss; he became a symptom of himself').⁶⁴ In a following scene, he crosses the Plaza Santa Ana in the evening:

In the distance airliners made their way to Barajas, lights flashing slowly on the wing, the contrails vaguely pink until it was completely dark. I imagined the passengers could see me, imagined I was a passenger that could see me looking up at myself looking down.⁶⁵

The tangle of the latter sentence, whose syntax is ordered by a single comma, echoes the mirror-play of reflected glances in Adam's encounter with the van der Weyden painting in the Prado. It is notable, to begin with, that this moment, which begins a section where Gordon talks at length about his poetic vocation and troubles with the Spanish language, echoes certain realist and modernist narrative conventions, most notably the epiphany.⁶⁶ The 'lights flashing slowly' of the airliners and changing colour of the sky dramatise a slow temporal change and the movement of consciousness, a stillness within narrative movement. As Steven Connor notes, the epiphany among other techniques was the modernist novel's means to 'attempt to defeat transience, by bending it into pattern'.⁶⁷ Moreover, the moment involves what we might call an internalised imagining of an omniscient narrative perspective. The use of omniscient third-person narration persists, of course, as a feature of the realist novel even after the development of free indirect style. Take for example the opening of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860):

⁶⁴ Lerner, *Atocha*, p.16-17.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 22-28.

⁶⁷ Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 124.

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships, laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of the oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal, are borne along to the town of St. Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the rich pastures and the patches of dark earth, made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops, or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed autumn-sown corn.⁶⁸

Not only is this description unanchored to any character—no person appears for at least another paragraph, until the mention of ‘the honest wagoner’ working near the river’s mill—but it begins notably from a perspective that seems to be high above the river: encompassing the expanse of the ‘wide plains’ either side and a fair amount of the length of the river, taking in both ‘the loving tide’ and the town.⁶⁹ The narrator here claims on the hand a panoptic sensory experience of the landscape, with special emphasis on visual colour and shape—‘green banks’, ‘black ships’, ‘dark glitter’, ‘purple hue’—and on the other an insight into invisible qualities (‘impetuous embrace’, ‘tender-bladed’) with which these seem to be intertwined. The Situationists themselves associated this aerial perspective with contemplation. Aerial photography of cities, a favoured technique of the French urbanist and geographer Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe, cannot, Debord claimed, communicate ‘the personal meaning they have for us’.⁷⁰ His subsequent attack in *Society of the Spectacle* on post-

⁶⁸ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers/W.L. Pooley & Co, 1860), p. 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 80.

war urban planning, although it does not mention such visual representations, condemns the organisation of the city by ‘an *authoritarian decision-making process* that abstractly develops any environment into an environment of abstraction’—engineering, in other words, the city according to a logic detached from concrete ground-level experience, that of the spectacle and ‘the *free space of commodities*’.⁷¹ As Anthony Vidler notes, Debord’s own art practice (sometimes in collaboration with the painter Asger Jorn) utilised and *détourned* aerial maps and photographs in a way that ‘seems less oppositional than incorporative’, playing with and inverting its logic of contemplation.⁷² In other words, the omniscient aerial perspective exacerbates the existing contemplative logic by which realist fiction manages its narrative material.

To return to Lerner’s scene of the ‘airliners’ passing overhead: Lerner modifies the framework of omniscient perspective by introducing it within a first-person perspective. This act of imagining—a component of the plot that nonetheless does not occur as an event—forms an instance of self-alienation and decentring of the sort analysed in Section 5.2. The narrator imagines himself in a spatial position he is not, in a subjective relation to himself he does not have: that of a total externality, of godlike contemplation, in which he perceives himself as simply a visual image. He adopts a parodic version of the ‘middle distance’ of realist fiction, whose mediating role, as we noted in Section 3.1, organises an indifferent time into symbolically meaningful patterns, but which in this case is extended far beyond any such possible mediation. The sequence of the sentence renders very ambiguous where the gaze, as a relationship of power between seer and seen, lies. Gordon firstly imagines being seen, then—or simultaneously, his comma being unaccompanied by any indicators of sequence—imagines he is a passenger seeing, but what he sees is himself looking up into his own gaze

⁷¹ Debord, *Society*, p. 122, 120.

⁷² Anthony Vidler, ‘Terres Inconnues: Cartographies of a Landscape to Be Invented’, *October* 115 (2006), 13-30, p. 27.

looking down. The symbolic capacity of seeing resides with both and neither: they are the same subject, investing an imaginary event—mere spatial movement within a stilled moment, enabled by the technology of the aeroplane—with power they can assume. The position shifts from ground to air between the first and second clauses, but with the arrival of the third pronoun ('could see me looking up') he can only see because he is himself looking up from the ground—the intersecting capacities of the gaze form a general field, a palimpsest in which each is layered on top of the other, so that there is no primary perception belonging to one or the other. Notably, there is a change in the perceiving subject in the aeroplane over the course of the second half of the sentence: Gordon first imagines 'the passengers could see me', a displacement from the classic individuated subject of novelistic narrative into a collective and undifferentiated subject; this then collapses back into individuation, as Gordon imagines 'I was a passenger'. In other words, the image provides a glimpse of another form of narrative, one which, as in the 'Utopian vocation' of style that I examined in the last section, individuated and contemplative narrative perspective points to its own outside. This is a logical development of the notion of the layered gaze as a general field, but one that is eclipsed immediately by this doubled or split individuation.

It is notable that this move to omniscience recurs in a number of contemporary novels, though usually displaced into technology rather than occurring within narrative focalisation. The strongest example here would be that of Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*, which Zadie Smith, as we recall from Chapter 4, uses as a paradigm of contemporary realism. Late in the novel, the narrator, Hans van den Broek, uses Google Maps to inspect what would have been the site of a cricket ground established by a friend, Chuck Ramkisson, who is found dead in a canal shortly beforehand:

I veer away into Brooklyn, over houses, parks, graveyards, and halt at olive-green coastal water. I track the shore. Gravesend and Gerritsen slide by, and there is Floyd Bennett Field's geometric sprawl of runways. I fall again, as low as I can. There's Chuck's field. It is brown—the grass has burned—but it is still there. There's no trace of a batting square. The equipment shed is gone. I'm just seeing a field. I stare at it for a while. I am contending with a variety of reactions, and consequently with a single brush on the touch pad I flee upward into the atmosphere and at once have in my sights the physical planet, submarine wrinkles and all—have the option, if so moved, to go anywhere. From up here, though, a human's movement is a barely intelligible thing. Where would he move to, and for what? There is no sign of nations, no sense of the work of man. The USA as such is nowhere to be seen.⁷³

This externalisation of perspective seems to promise to contextualise the narrator himself within an inhuman view in which 'a human's movement is a barely intelligible thing'. This would be to enlarge the 'middle-distance' of realist narration outside the scope of the individual subject. But as Benjamin Kunkel notes, Hans moves readily between the small and large-scale and 'Hans's own intermediate position is bypassed'.⁷⁴ Thus the omniscient view of technology in O'Neill's work poses no real alternative to the contemplative position of the subject. It is instead merely another form of contemplation that slides all too readily into symbolisation—he may start out 'just seeing a field' but this becomes a portrait of the vanity of human effort. This is what Gordon would call a 'profound experience', but one contained within the technology of seeing rather than affecting his own subject position. The omniscient view, then, supplies the promise of a 'profound experience' in art (an equivalent to the formal element of the epiphany in its supply of organising order and meaning within narrative time),

⁷³ Joseph O'Neill, *Netherland* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), p244.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Kunkel, 'Men in White', *London Review of Books* 30:14 (2008), 20-22 (p. 21).

an element that confounds the appreciation of poetry, which relies on its testimony to the recessed utopian promise in profound experience's absence. If, as we noted in Chapter 3, poetry thus supplies an experience of the virtual rather than the merely real of the novel's reality-effect, then the novel is aligned with the core banality of profound experience. Biographical experience, as Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan note in their account of *Atocha Station* as a 'novel of commission', supplies the solution to the antinomy: form unfolds as a contingent and durational process, the artwork's commission leading to its own formal outcome.⁷⁵ Hence how poetry resolves itself in the novel: Adam's personality, as he remarks late in the text, substitutes itself for the poem, or takes on the poem's status as a 'tissue of contradictions [...] a failure of language to be equal to the possibilities it figures'.⁷⁶ Notably, the sense throughout the text of Gordon's distance from himself mutates. The mediating distance of the novel, parodied in the omniscient distance of the overhead flight, becomes 'critical, aesthetic, as opposed to a side effect of what experts might call my substance problem.'⁷⁷ What Gordon calls his sense of 'fraud', the failure of life and his poetic work to achieve form, becomes a blending of poetry and the novel through biographical experience, in which each lose their form and meld.⁷⁸ But, as his remark on distance suggests, this must pass through the mediator of the image. In order to discover that the self is not a 'fraud' without form, but can be expressed in defamiliarising forms—that biographical experience might resolve the antagonism between poetry and the novel—requires first passing through the contemplative distance of drugs and realism. Such an experience of damaged life becomes clear in the novel's initial derangement of point-of-view: seeing oneself seeing oneself from a distance, as a frozen object in the spectacle displaced spatially and layered onto itself.

⁷⁵ Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan, 'Notation After the "Reality Effect": Remaking Reference with Roland Barthes and Sheila Heti', *Representations* 125 (2014), 80-102 (pp. 87-92).

⁷⁶ Lerner, *Atocha*, p. 164.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

5.3.ii The Sight of Death

Tom McCarthy, as I analysed in Chapter 4, also explores this dynamic of self-alienation and identification with the spectacle. As we recall, the narrator of *Remainder* only discovers what he thinks of as his authentic self in the mediated image of Robert de Niro and expends much effort in attempting to actualise it through elaborate representations of spaces and memories that may have had no reality. Similarly, U. in *Satin Island* is animated and disturbed in the course of writing by the conviction that his writing practice as an anthropologist has been displaced entirely by ‘some auto-alphaing and auto-omegating script’ whose authors are not even human beings themselves: ‘we, far from being its authors, or its operators, or even its slaves (for slaves are agents who can harbour hopes, however faint, that one day a Moses or Spartacus will set them free), were no more than actions and commands within its key-chains.’⁷⁹ As I noted in that chapter, the account of subjectivity and representation in McCarthy’s texts depends to a great extent on spatialisation and stasis: the narrative method, in terms of how the narrators and protagonists’ consciousnesses process the material of the plot, moves primarily through a flat and quantitative space rather than through time. However, what we might call the lack of psychologisation in McCarthy’s work—what Pieter Vermeulen, speaking of *C*, calls a ‘rigorous curtailment of internal focalization’, a technique that in the first-person narratives of *Remainder* and *Satin Island* occurs through a register of flat reportage with regards to affect or the movement of consciousness—nonetheless accompanies what we noted as a persistence of certain narrative conventions of the novel-form.⁸⁰ This persistence, as we saw there, forms a core of the texts’ self-reflexive account of the fate of the novel in the conditions of the 21st-century spectacle: as we described above, an internalised sense of

⁷⁹ McCarthy, *Island*, p. 123.

⁸⁰ Vermeulen, ‘Trauma’, p. 549.

spatialised and frozen time as ideal or utopia. Moreover, as we described towards the end of Chapter 4, there is also, beneath this spatialisation, the persistence of time as an orienting point within form, focused in the allegorical image.

One of the features that persists, and transforms, I would like to suggest in what follows, is focalisation as a key problem for the novel. For whilst there are moments in which the first-person narration of *Remainder* or *Satin Island* undergoes the kind of displacement, splitting and distortion seen in Lerner's *Atocha Station* and DeLillo's *Point Omega*, the properly free indirect style of *C* is subject at points to wild deformation. At such points, the logic of time dissolving down into synchronic moments of perception, which I have focused on throughout, comes as it were to stand outside the protagonist Serge. What appears at first as a condition of Serge's consciousness as mediating narrative agency—particularly his tendency to describe and construe the world in terms of geometry, forces and their mechanistic interaction—comes to seem a wider system of visuality in which he is caught. And by submerging his narrative agency in this wider system—the field that the spectacle constitutes—McCarthy exposes the structuring limits of narrative subjectivity, the condition of contemplation, at once external and utterly internalised, that makes novelistic narrative possible.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the obsession with omniscient perspective, or relationships of asymmetrical scale between the perceiving narrative subject and diegetic objects, recurs in McCarthy's fictions. These tend to be inserted as self-reflexive narrative details rather than as modulations of point of view. *Remainder's* narrator demands not just access to a crime scene but reproductions: '[i]f I were interested in photos, which I'm not, I'd want to take aerial ones too: first from a crane, then from a circling blimp—one high enough to enable the viewer to make out among the crime scene's larger patterns images and shapes'.⁸¹ During the construction of his re-enactment building he enjoys looking at it through a telescope, having

⁸¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 176.

refused the close-up view offered by CCTV.⁸² After its opening, he commissions a scale model, with the inhabitants included, fixed in place: '[t]here were little figures in it: the motorbike enthusiast next to his bike, the pianist with his bald pate, the liver lady with her headscarf and her snaky strands of hair, the concierge with her stubby arms and white mask. He'd even made a miniscule mop and Hoover for the cupboard.'⁸³ He then forces his re-enactors to conform to the miniature figures he towers over: 'I dragged Roger's model over to the window so I could see both it and the courtyard at the same time. [...] I lifted the model up and rested it against the window sill so I could look down on the model's head poking out at the same time as I looked at the real one. The distance made them both look the same size.'⁸⁴ In effect, he creates a series of representations that allow him to position himself in a succession of privileged spectatorial positions. He can adjust these representations so that the re-enactment building is small, viewed from afar, and then close, ready to hand, but still the same size in the form of the model. By finding in the representation a form of authentic reality (analogous to the instance of Robert de Niro's acting that forms a locus of his sense of authenticity), the creation of new reproductions allows its spurious and contemplative authenticity to be displaced across spatial locations. Holding up the model, so that reproduction and supposed original line up, referring both to the position of the seeing eye, flattens out the difference, but also cancels out the 'middle-distance' necessary for realist narration—if any object appears equally distant, all material is equally narratable or unnarratable. As we noted in Chapter 4, the narrative climaxes in something like the logical endpoint of this tendency, with the narrator circling in a plane from which he sees the consequences of his actions throughout the text as 'interlocking, hemmed-in fields, and [I] had a vision of the whole world's surface cordoned off,

⁸² Ibid, p. 120.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 152.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 153.

demarcated, broken into grids in which self-duplicating patterns endlessly repeated.’⁸⁵ This parodic extension of narratorial distance again flattens and spatialises narrative.

This form of aerial view recurs in *C* and forms the occasion for the text’s modulations of point of view. But as I noted in Chapter 4, the novel’s forms persist as a sort of remainder in McCarthy, which the seamless utopian state of the image, as the hidden endpoint of narrative, cannot tidy away. If McCarthy’s texts are replete with moments which promise an access to the transparency and legibility of the spectacular image—the obsession in *Remainder* and *C* with grids and cartography are a paradigmatic example, of which the aerial view is an extreme variant—then the points of rupture and dissonance in his works will come where focalisation is treated as the remainder of a novelistic problem—but one that, as we will see, can only be accessed by the image. As Daniel Lea notes, in the programme of McCarthy’s work, an abundance of synchronic information overruns the boundaries of the subject, an erasure we have indexed to the spatialised image, but this meets a paradox in the case of *C*, which relies on a largely stable free indirect style.⁸⁶ How can focalisation refer to a subject that, as McCarthy seems to suggest here, has no stable identity and is rather a node in the anonymous, simultaneous flows of the 21st-century capitalist world-system? This paradox appears in its intense form in a moment towards the end of the ‘Chute’ section, set on the Western Front:

In the background of these iterations, like a relic of an old order, the sun: intoxicated, spewing gas and sulphur, black with cordite smoke and tar. As the summer months draw on, it seems to sicken. Rising beneath him on early-morning flights, its light [is] infected by the ghostly pallor of the salient’s mists, driven a nauseous hue by green and yellow flashes. It darkens, not lightens, as each day progresses and the puffballs, vapour clouds and tracer-lines build up. Its transit through the air seems laboured, as

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 282.

⁸⁶ Lea, p. 81.

though the whirring mechanism that dragged it along its tracks were damaged and worn out. As the afternoons run into evenings, it becomes so saturated with the toxins all around it that it can no longer hold itself up and, grown heavy and feeble, sinks. Serge watches it die time and time again, watches its derelict disc slip into silvery, metallic marshlands where it drowns and dissolves. When this happens, a chemical transformation spreads across both land and sky, turning both acidic. In these moments, he feels better than he's ever felt before—as though his rising were commensurate with the sun's sinking. As space runs out backwards like a strip of film from his tail, the world seems to anoint him, through its very presence, as the gate, bulb, aperture and general projection point that's brought it about: a new, tar-coated orb around which all things turn.⁸⁷

Serge is airborne just prior to this passage, which seems to pass over a longer phase of time. The previous sentences are close to Serge, to the point of appearing almost as internal monologue: '[i]n these moments Serge is like the Eiffel Tower, a pylon animating the whole world, calling the zero hour of a new age of metal and explosive, geometry and connectedness.'⁸⁸ Except that, as the last clause implies, Serge's experience is one of enmeshment in a whole spatial field: he is no longer a localised consciousness, but part of a synchronic space defined by the same forms of patterning and organising that became the passion of *Remainder's* narrator. His subjectivity dissipates into space. Moreover, despite the lyric tone here, the syntax is remarkably stable throughout a set of complex sentences, quite unlike Serge's spoken dialogue in the same section. This style, then, as an organising order, does not necessarily arrive from the subjective interior its focalisation seems to focus on. Furthermore, there is a shift in distance in the paragraph that follows, with the attention

⁸⁷ McCarthy, C, p. 159-60.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 159.

moving to 'the background of these iterations'. No longer is the narrative primarily a matter of Serge and his environment but what lies behind it, and it is not clear how far, spatially or temporally, Serge lies from this black sun; he disappears momentarily as a narrative locus. The black sun looms out, at once autonomous as an image—in the manner described in Chapter 5.2—and crucial to the ongoing movement of Serge's narratorial discourse.

For the description here of the sun brings to one culmination a series of leitmotifs in the text, one initiated when Serge sees his sister, who interferes with him sexually as a child, having sex in silhouette behind a sheet: 'It's some kind of moving thing made of articulated parts. One of the parts is horizontal, propped up on four stick legs like a low table; the other is vertical, slotted into the underside of the table's rear end but rising above it, its spine wobbling as the whole contraption rocks back and forth.'⁸⁹ The estranged motion of the body, that 'pulses like a [sic] insect's thorax, and with each pulse comes the rustle, scratch and chafe', is as alien and mechanistic as the motion that his sister instills in their dead cat through electric shocks: 'Serge, watching the leg move with the angular stiffness of a clockwork mechanism, thinks of semaphore machines, their angles and positions.'⁹⁰ His conception of the world, and particularly the human body, as a mechanistic and dysfunctional assemblage becomes exemplified in the airborne moment of indeterminate length, in which visual details of the sun's 'nauseous hue' seem to index its collapse into a synchronic condition of failure and decay, as 'Serge watches it die time and time again', completing the same orbit repeatedly. These details could not be perceptible without Serge as 'a pylon animating the whole world', but they are not reducible to his sense-data or consciousness, which is instead immersed in them. The text discloses a momentary view of its narrative universe that refers only to itself, not to any focaliser: contemplation contemplates itself. But as its closing pages make clear, this anti-subjectivist vision is not a matter purely of the image:

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 60.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 60, 62.

The steward pauses and watches the scraps bobbing in the churned-up water for a while. The moon's gone: only the ship's electric glow illuminates the wake, two white lines running backwards into the darkness. When the stretch in which the scraps are bobbing fades from view, the steward turns away towards the staircase. The wake itself remains etched out across the water's surface; then it fades as well, although no one is there to see it go.⁹¹

The 'etched' wake recalls the waves of static and noise which Serge experienced earlier in the text, exploring the upper reaches of radio static: 'they seem to contain all distances, envelop space itself, curving around it like a patina, a mould...'⁹² And yet the very inconclusion of this moment, which borrows the tone of lyric whilst denying its symbolism—which 'fades as well'—admits that it cannot supply the needs of the narrative that persists alongside the subject it tried to dissolve into pure contemplation.

In this sense, the moments of dispossession in Lerner and McCarthy access the utopian kernel of the rigidified opposition of subject and object at the heart of Debord's concept of spectacle. The potentially liberated space-time that Lerner, DeLillo and McCarthy have explored, and which I analysed in Chapters 3 and 4, comes into view here: as an image or appearance, certainly, but now as pure visibility, devoid of content. The image is no longer the secret agent of the novel-form's development, but one that reflects back the contemplation at realism's heart and begins to imagine, through immanent criticism, something outside of the frozen closure of spectacle.

⁹¹ McCarthy, *C*, p. 310.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 67.

Conclusion

The subject and approach of this thesis—the questions I have tried to answer and the method of framing them—has been an attempt to think through neglected aspects of innovative contemporary fiction, one that is perhaps unusual for the field. To bring it to a conclusion, I will firstly try to give some sense of what the intent and outcome of this research project has been and its relation to the field of contemporary literary studies; and secondly to draw out some suggestions, particularly on the relationship between the visual and the verbal, that may prove fruitful for further research.

This project began from a simple observation: that certain 21st-century fictions tended towards an *imagistic* technique, in which description took on a pressurised and privileged role and narrative causality was increasingly broken up into static moments. The protagonists or narrators seemed unsure of their own abilities to intervene in the narrative, to make the time they inhabited coherent, meaningful and durational. Affect became flat. Plots instead became recursive and self-reflexive meditations on how to navigate time or space. Moreover, visual objects—artworks, films, photography—seemed to play an increasingly prominent role in these fictions. Hence, the research became an attempt to answer the question: why is it that such contemporary fictions—for example, the work of Tom McCarthy, Ben Lerner and the late work of Don DeLillo—tend, in their concerns and their handling of narrative form and subjectivity, towards the image? What, moreover, does it mean in the context of what appears to be, on the one hand, a newly intensified contest over social time, and on the other hand a sense within literary culture that narrative form is currently provisional or open to experiment, having passed out of one dominant stylistic paradigm (postmodernism) but not yet solidified into another? The rise of precarious work and labour struggles around it is a major example of the former, as is the linked issue of increasing scrutiny towards privatised

debt and financial instruments in the wake of the 2007-8 financial crisis.¹ The latter can be seen in the valorisation within the popular press and literary prize culture of new putatively experimental fiction, neglected late modernist writing such as the work of BS Johnson and Ann Quin, and the rise of ‘autofiction’ as a recognised subgenre of literary fiction.²

To answer these questions, it made most sense to form a methodology that could link literary form and historical development at a broad level. Marxist literary theory, which has at its most persuasive—as in the work of Fredric Jameson—been able to move between levels with sensitive attention to the specificity of each and to compare the morphology of literature over time, seemed the most useful in this case. Moreover, its frequent encounters with narratological theory—from the Russian Formalists to structuralist analysis of narrative in the influential work of Roland Barthes—would prove important for tracing how narrative form, particularly different strategies around temporality, operate in these texts. But the formal problems I located in these texts, which formed the whole focus of my inquiry, demanded a more complex response, an indication that they in turn were more complex, irreducible to problems of content or narrative time in the recent history of British or American fiction. Rather, a methodology that grasps the problem in its full richness would have to draw on a variety of sources.

As outlined in the first two chapters, the resources of the tradition in critical theory crystallised in the work of Guy Debord and the Situationist International was perhaps the central contributor: the Marxist critique of political economy read through the commodity fetish, as a means of organising abstracted social time. The commodity-form, as what Marx

¹ See for example Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (London: Verso, 2015). Annie McClanahan has analysed at length the effect that financialisation and debt structures have had on the time-sense of fictions of the last decade. See McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); McClanahan, ‘Investing in the Future’, *Journal of Cultural Economy* 6 (2013), 78-93.

² See for example William Skidelsky, ‘Experimental fiction: is it making a comeback?’, *The Guardian*, 1 August 2010 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/01/experimental-fiction-bs-johnson-skidelsky>> [accessed 31 July 2019]; Jonathan Coe, ‘Has Ann Quin’s time come at last?’, *The Spectator*, 13 January 2018 <<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/01/has-ann-quins-time-come-at-last/>> [accessed 31 July 2019].

calls a 'form of appearance', renders abstract time in new and meaningful form, but one from which the subjects who produce it are alienated.³ The development of capitalism has, in Debord's reading, been the spread of this logic remaking the whole social world as a mechanism that works without the subject that made it: '[t]he spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see—commodities are now *all* that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity.'⁴ The implications of this aspect of Debord's thought for research in visual art and cultures has been and continues to be largely neglected, but it presents an important optic through which to view the political implications of post-war culture's image-saturation and how this inflects artistic practices of the period. This could then be concretised through bringing this Marxist-Hegelian theory into contact with the admittedly small body of historical work in art history and art theory that has taken on this aspect of Debord's work.

What emerges are a series of motifs central to our enquiry into the political relationship between the contemporary novel and the image: the contemplative subject/object opposition, in which seeing is at once impotent and the only meaningful relationship between the two terms; the freezing and congelation of social time into dumb, meaningless appearances; realism and the reality-effect as privileged or governing terms within aesthetics, allied to notions of meaning and depth. Moreover, the selective and specific use of Debord's work in our analysis drew the particularity of the formal and thematic problems of the contemporary novel, which have quite rightly occupied much of the field's energy, into an historical constellation with much broader questions.⁵ The interpretive question posed by the emergence of new forms in the Anglo-American literary novel, as posed by Zadie Smith in

³ Marx, *Capital*, p. 127.

⁴ Debord, *Society*, p. 29.

⁵ For an overview of major and emerging debates around form in 21st-century fiction, see Daniel O'Gorman and Robert Eaglestone, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, ed. by Daniel O'Gorman and Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-10.

'Two Paths for the Novel', where she frames the split between innovation and lyrical realism as a recent phenomenon (or at least 'post-9/11'), can thus be seen not only against the literary backdrop of postmodernism, but against the development of the late capitalist system since 1945.⁶ These fictions' conjuncture of uncertainty and crisis is shown in a new light by Debord's own historiography of the spectacle: the development of new technologies of vision and reconfigurations of the subject across the 19th and 20th centuries; the critique of the commodity-form; the ruptures, discontinuities and historical failures of revolutionary politics that threaten to break contemplation.

Moreover, this approach draws contemporary fiction away from the present and into a complex of problems in the history of the novel since at least Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* (1914). For Lukács, at that early stage of his work, the novel is 'the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God', the form in which the experience of a life that modernity has fragmented and drained of meaning can be reintegrated.⁷ His encounter with Marxism would allow him to reframe this confrontation with fragmentation and disenchantment in terms of reification and the commodity fetish, although this would be altered in turn by his return to the orthodoxy of the Third International in the late 1920s. Integration would, he wrote, occur through the novel's unprecedented sensitivity to the dimension of time: the 19th-century realist novel of 'the romanticism of disillusionment', typified by *Madame Bovary*, Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* (1830) or Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859), dramatises 'the discrepancy between idea and reality' through 'time as duration'.⁸ But when the novel achieves a 'genuinely epic quality' in its attention to such duration, '[t]he duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he (the subject) glimpses the organic unity of his whole life through the process by which his living present has grown from the stream of

⁶ Smith, *Mind*, p. 72.

⁷ Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), p. 88.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 117, 120.

his past life dammed up within his memory.⁹ But this meaningful and patterned time, emerging from the realist novel amid the spread of reification, is itself the product of a delicate balance—as we saw through Fredric Jameson’s analysis in *The Antinomies of Realism*—between story as duration and the reified time of the image. The puzzling and partial return, for example, of McCarthy’s work to modernist tropes and form (as Justus Nielsen examines) can thus be seen not just as a rejection of postmodernist or lyrical realist styles but as an appropriation, inversion or immanent critique that drills down into the political freight that concepts of realism, depth or novelistic duration carry in their contested transmission down the history of culture within late capitalism.¹⁰ As I showed in Chapter 3, the overwhelming sense of formal struggle with time in the work of Lerner and DeLillo, the tension and formal complexity of their work’s narrative structure, is the especially intense form that these questions take in the present. Far from existing in a binary opposition to realism, these narrative innovations could be seen as an attempt to reorganise realism, to open up the utopian possibilities held in check by its mechanisms of contemplation, which have otherwise failed and run into crisis.

In this light, the *imagistic* features from which this project began take on a more complex role. As I explored in Chapter 3, the frozen, synchronic time of the narratives in Lerner and DeLillo’s work come to function as an *image*—a flat, spatialised surface across which the narrative discourse plays out, and to which the protagonists can have only a contemplative relationship (as what Debord called a ‘pseudo-cyclical’ form of time).¹¹ But in these instances the image is not simply a form of blockage or deformation of plot; it comes to function as a narrative device that allows plot to reenter the narrative, precisely through contemplation. Passages of elongated, imagistic description focused on visual intertexts, as well as inserting a

⁹ Ibid, p. 127.

¹⁰ Nieland, p. 569.

¹¹ Debord, *Society*, p. 110.

slow, frozen, segmented time of the image, also thus provide access to time as a depth of the sort that realism's contemplative reality-effects once promised. In Chapter 4 this analysis of a dialectical tension between synchronic image-space and time as depth gained complexity. The anti-psychological flatness of McCarthy's protagonists, who discard realist cause-and-effect for a spatial obsession that guides their narrative discourse, was shown to depend in turn on a temporality that inserts itself into the narrative: the allegorical temporality of self-reflexivity itself, a time-sense that has its analogues in the temporal ruptures in Debord's work of détournement and revolutionary politics. This allegorical temporality of the image, at once static and dynamic, exposes the limits of late capitalist subjectivity, but also opens them up to the possibility of a time outside that structured by the spectacle. The contemplative subject-object opposition, meanwhile, was explored in more depth in Chapter 5. The initial sense of restricted focalisation in McCarthy and DeLillo's work, which could be seen as a mere domination of the subject became, in light of the issues raised above, a richer and more complex issue. This was explored through the cracks and dislocations in the subject's opposition to the object—particularly, the moments when (self-consciously degraded) lyric style seemed to animate the binary. Finally, in the last section of the chapter the contemplative opposition was deconstructed as seeing came to operate as a capacity independent of the subject: in Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station* and McCarthy's *C*, the image is invested in, as an autonomous part of narrative, to such a degree that the false utopia of its static time exposes its limits and structure.

The approach described above, in which the problem of the image in contemporary fiction is linked to larger formations in the political history of the novel and visual art, can hopefully provide resources for further research into ongoing problems in contemporary fiction, and sharpen some debates in the field. Moreover, it attempts to provide literary studies with what Mark McGurl has called for as a corollary to 'fiction in the age of Amazon': the intertwinement

of two contradictory impulses in a single time-sense, 'real time and long term', a 'future', or indeed a past, 'as always already happening *now*.'¹² McGurl sees the phase of late capitalist development for which Amazon is a synonym as being premised on the kind of spatialised simultaneity that we have identified at the heart of Debord's account of time-as-image, making 'real-time retail' its core mission.¹³ In this economy, the literary novel is at once reduced to 'a unit of discourse in the formation of a trilogy or a longer series', structured according to the broad constitutive tensions of genre fiction ('a highly gendered and age-differentiated genre system structured by the poles of epic and romance and their characteristic modes of wish fulfillment') and preserved in its obsolescence: 'longevity is encountered on the backlist, in the long tail of literary value persisting through time, and for all its investments in instantaneity, Amazon has done more than any other entity in recent years to realize that value, giving it a market presence.'¹⁴ For McGurl, this temporal contradiction is at the heart of contemporary literary fiction, which inscribes 'quality time', the 'narrative dilation of human intimacy and intrigue' in the midst of 'real time', a time without duration: literary narrative is '*the virtualization of quality time*', produced through what we have repeatedly called 'pseudo-cyclical' forms of narrative time.¹⁵ It is precisely this contradiction between long-term and an overwhelming now that the innovations this study has focused on try to resolve through the antinomic stillness and dynamism of the image, and which McGurl calls on literary studies to attempt to think through.

This study can hopefully also shed light on what Jed Esty has called the 'realism wars' within literary studies: as he notes, in recent years scholars have attempted to 'priz[e] it [the category of "realism"] anew from the bipolarities of Cold War models and twentieth-century

¹² Mark McGurl, 'Everything and Less: Fiction in the Age of Amazon', *Modern Language Quarterly* 77 (2016), 447-471 (p. 468).

¹³ Ibid, p. 463.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 460, 469.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 465.

critical habit: realism/romance; modernism/realism; modernism/postmodernism.’¹⁶ These efforts respond, in part, to ‘new demands for attention across scattered sites of artistic production, cultural consumption and critical conversation’, the emergence of new strains of realism that do not imply ‘some kind of absolute divide from experimentalism or from the patterned use of mythic/symbolic devices.’¹⁷ The texts that form the core of this study preserve what we might term a critical relation to the conventions of realism: they can be said to deconstruct the ‘bipolarities’ that Esty criticises by taking realism as a site to be investigated, whose component parts are to be tested and experimented with, made to disclose the assumptions about the subject-object relationship and the organisation of social time that underpin it. They seek to make realism productive by pointing to the limits of its representational capacity, the foundation of its mimesis in a system of abstract appearances, pushing on the most vulnerable part of its constitutive tension (between *récit* and the frozen time of the image).

The recent development of ‘metamodernism’ as a periodising discourse for 21st-century art and theory that distinguishes itself from the postmodernist period, also provides a productive contrast to the outcomes that have emerged here. As its formulators Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker put it, the metamodern ‘oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, [...] unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity.’¹⁸ McCarthy’s selective interpretation of modernist aesthetics in terms of spatialisation and the evacuation of depth, which his own texts counterpoint through their investment in time, or the repeated appeals in Lerner and DeLillo to the promise of the commodity-image that are then deflated, could be seen as instances of just such oscillation. But it seems to me that these texts complicate this reading of narrative innovation after

¹⁶ Jed Esty, ‘Realism Wars’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49 (2016), 316-342 (p. 316).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 316, 319.

¹⁸ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on metamodernism’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2 (2010), unpaginated.

postmodernism. McCarthy and DeLillo's 'remediation' (to use Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's term) of modernism in these works is cast in terms of negativity and irony rather than enthusiasm: in *Point Omega* modernist film and psychoanalysis (*Psycho*) discloses only the hollowness of the subject, its complicity with contemplative time; in *Remainder* the narrative ellipses and intensively visualised description of modernist fiction are reduced to the aftereffects of brain damage.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Lerner's enthusiastically modernist construction of (as Pieter Vermeulen puts it) an "asynchronic present" remove[d] [...] from its teleological subordination to the future' depends, as we saw in Chapter 3, on a structure derived from neither modernist nor postmodernist narrative, but the realist novel.²⁰ Rather, the narrative innovations at the heart of this study—its exploration of stilled narrative time and subjectivity—could be seen as forming not an 'oscillation' between the two poles but a dialectical tension, disclosing the terms—realism, contemplative time—that the two ('modernist enthusiasm', 'postmodernist irony') constitute themselves by excluding. As we observed in the Introduction, apropos of David Cunningham's discussion of the time-sense of contemporary fiction as a permanent present, this may mark an important break with postmodernism, which 'metamodernism' may mischaracterise through its governing binaries. The relationship between these fictions and postmodernism may be a fruitful area for further enquiry, but as Martin Paul Eve notes of David Foster Wallace's post-2000 fictions, their ultimate consequence may be to 'productively unearth critically-neglected ethical tropes in postmodern fiction as a form of dialectical image', their rupture into a permanent present 'point[ing] towards a regulative utopianism'.²¹ This position from which to rethink such periodising and stylistic discourses would allow us to put the innovative fictions this study

¹⁹ Bolter and Grusin, *passim*.

²⁰ Pieter Vermeulen, 'Person', p. 673.

²¹ Martin Paul Eve, 'Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace and the Problems of "Metamodernism": Post-millennial Post-postmodernism?', *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 1 (2012), 7-25 (p. 8).

focuses on in a new dialogue with other works that inscribe their periodising concerns in their form.²²

And whilst the focus of this study has been, for practical reasons, very restricted, I can see the potential for its opening towards work being done in the field through other critical optics, that may help to ameliorate its worst limitations. In particular, I would point not only to the burgeoning work in ecocriticism that informs much of the extant literature on the writers studied here, but Sianne Ngai's remarkable scholarship on late capitalist commodity aesthetics, exemplified in her study of temporality in Helen De Witt's *Lightning Rods* (2011).²³

In closing, though, I would like to note that the argument of this research project is one that ultimately leads contemporary literary studies into interdisciplinary terrain. At the heart of the narrative innovations that this study has focused on, after all, is a dissonance between registers and between media: the visual and the verbal. Part of the historical distinction, I have argued, of the contemporary texts studied here is a fairly widespread argument about culture and technology in the advanced capitalist economies in the 21st century—as TJ Clark puts it, 'the notion that some kind of threshold has been passed in our time between a verbal world and a visual one'.²⁴ This argument was certainly current when Clark was writing in 2000:

Not that the realm of language has proved dispensable for human beings [...] but that its pacing and structuring and sedimentation of experience are increasingly invaded—interfered with, overtaken—by the different rhythms and transparencies of the shifting

²² See for example David James and Urmila Seshagiri's attempt to redefine metamodernism: James and Seshagiri, 'Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution', *PMLA* 129 (2014), 87-100. Nick Bentley has similarly examined some recent innovative fictions—Zadie Smith's *NW* and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004)—that 'trail' after postmodernism; see Bentley, 'Trailing Postmodernism: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Zadie Smith's *NW*, and the Metamodern', *English Studies* 99 (2018), 723-743.

²³ De Bruyn, *passim*; Ioannis Tsitsovits and Pieter Vermeulen, 'The Anthropocene Scriptorium: Writing and Agency in Ben Lerner's *10:04* and Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*', in *Ecocriticism – Environments in Anglophone Literature*, ed. by Sonja Frenzel and Birgit Neumann (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017), pp. 193-217; Sianne Ngai, 'Theory of the Gimmick', *Critical Inquiry* 43 (2017), 466-505 (pp. 497-505). See also Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

²⁴ Clark, *Sight*, p. 175.

visual array. We have at last a technology of visualization, it is said, that truly can emulate language's flexibility and power to make otherwise, but augment that power by its own unique offer of vividness, its promise of worlds laid out in an instant. Grammar gives way to perspective.²⁵

Clark avers that:

I do not believe this story. On the contrary, our present means of image-production strike me as still utterly under the spell of the verbal—that's a main part of the trouble with them. They are an instrumentation of a certain kind of language use: their notions of image clarity, image flow, image depth, and image density are all determined by the parallel (unimpeded) movement of the logo, the brand name, the product slogan, the compressed pseudo-narrative of the TV commercial, the sound bite, the T-shirt confession, the chat show q. & a. Billboards, web pages, and video games are just projections—perfections, perfected banalizations—of this world of half-verbal exchange. [...] I see our image machines as flooding the world with *words*—with words (blurbs, jingles, catchphrases, ten thousand quick tickets to meaning) given just sufficient verbal cladding.²⁶

Clark is describing here what he sees as one form that the ideology of the spectacle takes in the latter phase of late capitalism: the form of hermetic self-closure and autonomy that the visual is seen as possessing within the society of the spectacle covers over its actual instrumentalisation. The fantasy of the image is, in a sense, the 'imaginary relationship' of subjects to the contradictory conditions under which the commodity structures social time

²⁵ Ibid, p. 175-176.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 176.

(the abstract/concrete, exchange/use-value split), as Althusser defined ideology.²⁷ This is certainly pertinent to what I referred to, in the Introduction, as recent ‘discourses of the end of the novel’. The texts under consideration in this study can be seen, in this light, as staging the collapse or exhaustion of the novel as a complex narrative form structured by the richness and representational capacities of prose. The layered, complex and diachronic times of story and discourse cede to the synchronic ‘vividness’ of the image. In this reading, the work of McCarthy, Lerner and DeLillo analysed here would be mere reproductions of ideology, unable to subvert or disclose the logic by which the spectacle subordinates the visual to the language of the commodity. Clark values instead a form of writing that would ‘keep alive a notion of a kind of visuality that truly establishes itself *at the edge of the verbal*’.²⁸ As I hope to have demonstrated in the course of these studies, these novels show that the situation is more complex than this.

As I argued in Chapters 3 and 4, whilst in these novels the image forms a focus of investment against the verbal—the failed or stalled forms of narrative—this produces, not access to the image’s plenitude—for, as Debord notes, the ‘abundance [the spectacle] generates, is experienced by its producers only as an *abundance of dispossession*’—but a return to narrative time.²⁹ In Lerner’s *Leaving the Atocha Station* and *10:04*, for example, the verbal can never be disassociated from the commercial language Clark sees the visual being appended to: recall that *10:04*’s narrative begins with the narrator signing a book contract in a restaurant frequented by bankers: the octopus he eats is ‘the majesty and murderous stupidity’ of the commodity chains, the time and labour and money, required to make it.³⁰ The novel as an aesthetic form possesses, for Lerner, no autonomy from the market. And yet the texts’ investment in the image, the contemplative element in realist form, leads precisely to the

²⁷ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 109.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Debord, *Society*, p. 23.

³⁰ Lerner, *10:04*, p. 156.

apprehension of a different form of narrative, a utopian time immanent to the commercialised verbal. It could be said that this study therefore comprehends, through a particular Marxist account of aesthetics, the novel in the contemporary juncture as a split object, which always contains the opposing force (the market, the image) that they must suppress. Where Clark worries that the image is instrumentalised into demonstrating something merely verbal—being ‘truly (as their intellectual groupies go on claiming) a “discourse”’—in these works that bend towards the ideological semblance of ‘the long-awaited promised land of total consumption’, knowing, in the failure of their reality-effects, its false objectivity, paradoxically disclose exactly the specificity of the image.³¹ A critical practice that attended to the particularity of the visual—or conversely, for literary studies, one sensitive to the specificity of literary form—would of necessity be attentive to its opposite. From this perspective, the disciplinary object of contemporary fiction studies increasingly cannot be perceived on its own, but as embedded in other media systems and incorporating other registers. Such a shift is already at work in the field of contemporary literature in a host of vital scholarship and I hope that this study can help further it.³²

³¹ Clark, *Sight*, p. 176; Debord, *Society*, p 45.

³² See for example, Zara Dinnen, *The Digital Banal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

Bibliography

- Abel, Marco, 'Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future": Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11', *PMLA*, 118 (2003), 1236-1250
- Abraham, Nicholas and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986)
- Adorno, Theodor, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974)
- 'Address to Revolutionaries of Algeria and of All Countries', in *Situationist International Anthology*, 2nd edn, ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 189-194
- Agamben, Giorgio, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)
- , 'Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films', in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. by Tom McDonough, trans. by Brian Holmes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 313-319
- , *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000)
- Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001)
- Altieri, Charles, 'What is Living and What is Dead in American Postmodernism: Establishing the Contemporaneity of Some American Poetry', *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996), 764-789
- Anderson, Perry, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979)
- , *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998)

Ardagh, John, *The New France: A Society in Transition 1945-1977*, 3rd edn (London: Pelican, 1977)

Auerbach, Erich, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953)

'The Avant-Garde of Presence', in Knabb, pp. 142-144

The Bad Days Will End', in Knabb pp. 107-114

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981)

Balibar, Etienne, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1995)

Ball, Edward, 'The Great Sideshow of the Situationist International', *Yale French Studies*, 73 (1987), 21-37

Barrot, Jean, 'Critique of the Situationist International', in *What is Situationism? A Reader*, ed. by Stewart Home (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996), pp. 24-62

Barrow, Daniel, "'Our old enemy the commodity": Image, Narration, Spectacular Time', *Brief Encounters* 3:1 (2019), 29-38

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1984)

—, *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977)

—, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989)

Baudrillard, Jean, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988)

—, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster, trans. by John Johnston (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983)

—, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. by Julia Weaver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000)

- Bazin, André, *What is Cinema? Volume I*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967)
- Beckman, Frida, 'Cartographies of ambivalence: allegory and cognitive mapping in Don DeLillo's later novels', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1383-1403
- Raymond Bellour, 'The Film Stilled', *Camera Obscura*, 8:3 (1990), 98-124
- Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1973)
- Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 3, 1935-1938*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland et al (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)
- , *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Rodney Livingstone et al (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2006)
- Bentley, Nick, 'Trailing Postmodernism: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Zadie Smith's *NW*, and the Metamodern', *English Studies*, 99 (2018), 723-743
- Bergson, Henri, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988)
- , *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. by F.L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910)
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York/London: The Guilford Press, 1997)
- Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 2nd edn, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2018)
- Bolter, Jay David, 'Digital Media and the Future of Filmic Narrative', in *The Oxford Handbook of Film and Media Studies*, ed. by Robert Kolker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 22-35

- , and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999)
- Bordo, Susan, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism & Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987)
- Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, ebook edn (London: Routledge, 2005)
- Bordwell, David, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 11th edn (New York: McGraw Hill, 2017)
- Bottomore, Tom (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)
- Bowlby, Rachel, *Just Looking* (London: Methuen, 1985)
- Boxall, Peter, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2006)
- , *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Brenner, Robert, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2008)
- Brewster, David, *The Stereoscope* (London: John Murray, 1856)
- Briziarelli, Marco and Emiliana Armano (eds.), *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*, ed. by (London: University of Westminster Press, 2017)
- Bunyard, Tom, *Debord, Time and Spectacle: Hegelian Marxism and Situationist Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2018)
- Burch, Noël, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. by Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990)
- , *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. by Helen R. Lane (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973)
- Burgin, Victor, 'Looking at Photographs', in *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1982), pp. 142-153

- Butterfield, Andrew and Gerard Ekembe Ngondi, editors, *Oxford Dictionary of Computer Science*, digital edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press) <www.oxfordreference.com> [accessed 14 March 2016]
- Buurma, Rachel Sagner and Laura Heffernan, 'Notation After the "Reality Effect": Remaking Reference with Roland Barthes and Sheila Heti', *Representations*, 125 (2014), 80-102
- Carver, Beci, *Granular Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Chatman, Seymour, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978)
- Clark, TJ, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes From a History of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)
- , 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review*, 2 (2000), pp. 85-96
- , *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987)
- , *The Sight of Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006)
- Classen, Constance (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses, Volumes 1-6* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)
- Coale, Samuel, *In Hawthorne's Shadow* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1988)
- Coe, Jonathan, 'Has Ann Quin's time come at last?', *The Spectator*, 13 January 2018
<<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/01/has-ann-quins-time-come-at-last/>> [accessed 30 July 2019]
- Cohen, Josh, *Spectacular Allegories: Postmodern American Writing and the Politics of Seeing* (London: Pluto Press, 1998)
- Cohn, Elisha, *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
- Cole, Teju, *Open City* (New York: Random House, 2011)

- Colebrook, Clare, *Gilles Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Colletti, Lucio, 'Introduction', in Marx, *Early Writings*, pp. 7-56
- Comolli, Jean-Louis, 'Machines of the Visible', in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (London: St Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 121-142
- Connor, Steven, *Postmodernist Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989)
- Cook, David A., *A History of Narrative Film*, 3rd edn (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996)
- Cowart, David, 'The Lady Vanishes: Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*', *Contemporary Literature* 53 (2012), 31-50
- Crary, Jonathan, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013)
- , 'Eclipse of the Spectacle', in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984)
- , 'Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory', in McDonough, pp. 455-466
- , *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001)
- , *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990)
- Cunningham, David, 'Time, Modernism, and the Contemporaneity of Realism', in *The Contemporaneity of Modernism: Literature, Media, Culture*, ed. by Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 49-62
- Currie, Mark, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)
- Cusk, Rachel, *Outline* (London: Granta, 2016)
- Davies, Jeremy, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016)
- De Boever, Arne, *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and Novel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

De Bruyn, Ben, 'Realism 4. Objects, weather and infrastructure in Ben Lerner's *10:04*', *Textual Practice* 31 (2017), pp. 951-971

Dean, Jodi, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009)

Debord, Guy, 'Conscious Changes in Everyday Life', in Knabb, pp. 90-99

——, 'The Great Sleep and Its Clients', in McDonough 2002, pp. 21-24

——, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2003) <<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord.films/ingirum.htm>> [accessed 9 June 2019]

——, 'One More Try If You Want to Be Situationists (The SI *in* and *against* Decomposition)', in McDonough 2002, pp. 51-60

——, 'Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of *Society of the Spectacle*', trans. by Michel Prigent and Lucy Forsyth (New York: Not Bored!, 2000) <<http://www.notbored.org/debord-preface.html>> [accessed 26th May 2016]

——, 'Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action', in Knabb, pp. 25-43

——, 'The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art', in McDonough 2002, pp. 159-166

——, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995)

——, 'Theses on Cultural Revolution', in McDonough 2002, pp. 61-66

——, and Pierre Canjuers, 'Preliminaries Toward Defining a Unitary Revolutionary Program', in Knabb pp. 387-391

——, and Gil Wolman, 'A User's Guide to Détournement', in Knabb, pp. 14-21

- Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005)
- DeLillo, Don, *Americana* (London: Penguin, 2006)
- , *The Angel Esmerelda: Nine Stories* (New York: Scribner, 2011)
- , *The Body Artist* (New York: Scribner, 2001)
- , *Cosmopolis* (London: Picador, 2004)
- , *The Names* (London: Picador, 1987)
- , *Players* (London: Picador, 1991)
- , *Point Omega* (London: Picador, 2010)
- , *White Noise* (London: Picador, 1985)
- Derrida, Jacques, 'Foreword', in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. xi-ii
- Descartes, René, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- , *The World and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. by Stephen Gaukroger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- Dinnen, Zara, *The Digital Banal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018)
- 'Editorial Notes: Critique of Urbanism', in McDonough 2002, pp. 103-114
- Edmundson, Mark, 'Not Flat, Not Round, Not There: Don DeLillo's Novel Characters', *The Yale Review*, 83:2 (1995), 107-124
- Egan, Jennifer, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (London: Corsair, 2011)
- Eliot, George, *The Mill on the Floss* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers/W.L. Pooley & Co, 1860)

- Ermarth, Elizabeth Deeds, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space, Narrative*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998)
- Esty, Jed, 'Realism Wars', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49 (2016), 316-342
- Eve, Martin Paul, 'Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace and the Problems of "Metamodernism": Post-millennial Post-postmodernism?', *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 1 (2012), 7-25
- Feenberg, Andrew, *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács and the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2014)
- Feuerbach, Ludwig, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by Marian Evans (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1893)
- Fisher, Mark, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009)
- Forster, E.M., *Aspects of the Novel* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1927)
- Foster, Hal, 'Preface' in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. by Hal Foster (Seattle/New York: Bay Press/Dia Art Foundation, 1988), pp. ix-xiv
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991)
- Freud, Sigmund, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. by Shawn Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005)
- , *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI (1910)*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957)
- Frizot, Michael (ed.), *The New History of Photography*, trans. by Susan Bennett, Liz Clegg, John Crook et al (Köln: Könemann, 1998)
- Gaines, Jane M., 'Introduction: The Family Melodrama of Classical Narrative Cinema', in *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars*, ed. by Jane Gaines (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), pp. 1-8

- Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980)
- 'Geopolitics of Hibernation', in Knabb, pp. 100-107
- Gernsheim, Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography : from the Earliest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century up to 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955)
- Gilman-Opalsky, Richard, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord & the Practice of Radical Philosophy* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011)
- Gombrich, E.H., *Art and Illusion*, 2nd edn (London: Phaidon Press, 1961)
- Goodheart, Eugene, 'Some Speculations on Don DeLillo and the Cinematic Real', in Lentricchia 1991, pp. 117-130
- Gourley, James, *Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)
- Greenberg, Clement, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961)
- , 'Modernist Painting', in *Modern Art & Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Francis Francina and Charles Harrison (London: Harper & Row, 1982) pp. 5-10
- Hadjinicolaou, Nico, *Art History and Class Struggle*, trans. by Louise Asmal (London: Pluto Press, 1978)
- Hanley, D.L., A.P. Kerr and N.H. Waites, *Contemporary France: Politics and Society since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1984)
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)
- Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)
- Hastings-King, Stephen, *Looking For the Proletariat: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Problem of Worker Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014)

- Hayward, Susan, *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996)
- Heidegger, Martin, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977)
- Herren, Graley, 'Don DeLillo's Art Stalkers', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 61 (2015), 138-167
- Heti, Sheila, *How Should a Person Be?* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013)
- Huehls, Mitchum, 'The Post-Theory Theory Novel', *Contemporary Literature* 56 (2015), pp. 280-310
- Hussey, Andrew, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002)
- Jacobs, Karen, *The Eye's Mind: Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000)
- James, David and Urmila Seshagiri, 'Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution', *PMLA*, 129 (2014), 87-100
- Jameson, Fredric, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013)
- , 'Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film', *College English*, 38 (1977), 843-859
- , *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998)
- , 'The End of Temporality', *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (2003), 695-718
- , *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act* (London: Routledge, 1983)
- , *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991)
- Jappe, Anselm, *Guy Debord*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)
- Jenks, Chris, 'The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An Introduction', in *Visual Culture*, ed. by Chris Jenks (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-25
- Johnston, John, 'Generic Difficulties in the Novels of Don DeLillo', *Critique*, 30 (1989), 261-275

- Jonas, Hans, *The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966)
- Jones, Michael, 'The other side of silence: realism, ecology and the whole life in Don DeLillo's late fiction', *Textual Practice* 32 (2018), 1345-1363
- Jütte, Robert, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. by James Lynn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005)
- Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- , *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, trans. by J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan and Co, 1914)
- , *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006)
- Katz, Daniel, "'I did not walk here all the way from prose": Ben Lerner's virtual poetics', *Textual Practice*, 31 (2017), 315-337
- Kauffman, Vincent, 'Angels of Purity', in McDonough 2002, pp. 285-311, trans. by John Goodman
- , *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, trans. by Robert Bonnono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006)
- Khayati, Mustapha, 'Captive Words (Preface to a Situationist Dictionary)', in McDonough 2002, trans. by Tom McDonough, pp. 173-180
- Kobek, Jarrett, *I Hate the Internet* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2016)
- Kotányi, Attila and Raoul Vaneigem, 'Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism', in Knabb 2006, pp. 86-89
- Kunkel, Benjamin, 'Men in White', *London Review of Books*, 30:14 (2008), 20-22
- Kushner, Rachel, *The Flamethrowers* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013)
- Larkin, Maurice, *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1996*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

- Lazzarato, Maurizio, 'Immaterial Labor', in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. by Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, ed. by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 133-147
- LeClair, Thomas and Don DeLillo, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo', *Contemporary Literature*, 23 (1982), 19-31
- Lea, Daniel, 'Discursive Networks and the Post-Hermeneutic in Tom McCarthy and Steven Hall', *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings*, 1 (2012), 65-83
- Lefebvre, Henri, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2008)
- , *Critique of Everyday Life Volume II*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2008)
- , *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. by Sasha Rabinovitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1971)
- Lentricchia, Frank, 'The American Writer as Bad Citizen', in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 1-6
- Lerner, Ben, *10:04* (London: Granta, 2014)
- , 'Future Continuous: Ashbery's Lyric Mediacy', *boundary 2*, 37:1 (2010), 201-213
- , *The Hatred of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2015)
- , 'Keith Waldrop's Haunted Realism', *The New Yorker*, 25 February 2013
- <<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/keith-waldrops-haunted-realism>>
[accessed 22 July 2019]
- , *Leaving the Atocha Station* (London: Granta, 2011)
- Levy, Deborah, *Swimming Home* (London: And Other Stories, 2011)
- Lin, Tao, *Richard Yates* (New York: Melville House, 2010)
- Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)

Lorey, Isabell, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (London: Verso, 2015)

Lubbock, Percy, *The Craft of Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954)

Luckhurst, Roger, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008)

Lukács, Georg, *Essays on Realism*, ed. by Rodney Livingstone, trans. by David Fernbach
(London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980)

——, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney
Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971)

——, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. by John and Necke Mander (London:
Merlin Press, 1962)

——, *Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971)

——, *Writer & Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Arthur D. Kahn (New York: Grosset &
Dunlap, 1970)

MacCabe, Colin, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian theses', *Screen*, 15 (1974),
7-27

McCarthy, Tom, *C* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010)

——, 'The death of writing – if James Joyce were alive today he'd be working for Google', *The
Guardian*, 7 March 2015 <[https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/07/tom-
mccarthy-death-writing-james-joyce-working-google](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/07/tom-mccarthy-death-writing-james-joyce-working-google)> [accessed 22 June 2019]

——, *Recessional, or the Time of the Hammer* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2016)

——, *Remainder* (Richmond: Alma Books, 2006)

——, *Satin Island* (Jonathan Cape: 2015)

——, 'Stabbing the Olive', *London Review of Books* 32:3 (2010), 26-28

——, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* (London: Portobello Books, 2006)

——, *Transmission and the Individual Remix: How Literature Works* (New York, Vintage, 2012)

——, "'Ulysses" and its Wake', *London Review of Books* 36:12 (2014), 39-41

- , 'Writing Machines', *London Review of Books* 36:24 (2014), 21-22
- , James Corby and Ivan Callus, 'The *CounterText* Interview: Tom McCarthy', *CounterText*, 1:2 (2015), 135-153
- McClanahan, Annie, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017)
- , 'Investing in the Future', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 6 (2013), 78-93
- McDonough, Tom, "*The Beautiful Language of my Century*": *Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007)
- , 'Introduction: Ideology and the Situationist Utopia', in McDonough 2002, pp. ix-xviii
- , 'Introduction' in *The Situationists and the City*, ed. and trans. by Tom McDonough (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 1-31
- McGurl, Mark, 'Everything and Less: Fiction in the Age of Amazon', *Modern Language Quarterly* 77 (2016), 447-471
- McHale, Brian, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge)
- McMillan, James F., *Twentieth Century France: Politics and Society 1898-1991* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992)
- Mandel, Ernest, *Late Capitalism*, trans by Joris De Bres (London: New Left Books, 1975)
- Manning, Nicholas, "'The uses of boredom": affect, attention and absorption in the fiction of Don DeLillo', *Textual Practice*, 33 (2019), 155-173
- Marcus, Greil, *Lipstick Traces*, 2nd edn (London: Faber & Faber, 2001)
- , 'The Long Walk of the Situationist International', in McDonough, pp. 1-20
- Marcuse, Herbert, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. 2nd edn. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1941)
- Marien, Mary Warner, *Photography: A Cultural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002)

- Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books/New Left Review), 1976
- , *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by N.I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1904)
- , *Early Writings*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Gregory Benton (London: Penguin/New Left Review, 1975)
- , *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin/New Left Review, 1973)
- , *Karl-Marx-Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe, Band 6: Das Kapital. Kritiken der Politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band, Hamburg, 1872* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987)
- , 'Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper', in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp. 577-578
- and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology: Part I', in Tucker, pp. 146-200
- and Friedrich Engels, *Letters on 'Capital'*, trans. by Andrew Drummond (London: New Park Publications, 1983)
- and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in Tucker, pp. 469-500
- Maayan, Myriam D., 'From Aesthetic to Political Vanguard: The Situationist International, 1957-1968', *Arts Magazine*, 63.5 (1989): 49-53
- Merrifield, Andy, *Guy Debord* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005)
- Mitchell, WJT, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994)
- Moretti, Franco, 'Serious Century', in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. by Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 364-400
- , *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987)
- Moshfegh, Otessa, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (London: Penguin Press, 2018)

- Moulier-Boutang, Yann, *Cognitive Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011)
- Mulvey, Laura, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1989)
- Murray, Alex, 'Beyond Spectacle and the Image: the Poetics of Guy Debord and Agamben', in *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life*, ed. by Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron and Alex Murray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 164-180
- Muybridge, Eadweard, *Zoopraxography, or the Science of Animal Locomotion* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1893)
- Newhall, Beaumont, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the present*, 2nd edn (New York: Museum of the Modern Art, 1982)
- Ngai, Sianne, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012)
- , 'Theory of the Gimmick', *Critical Inquiry* 43 (2017), 466-505
- Nieland, Justus, 'Dirty Media: Tom McCarthy and the Afterlife of Modernism', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58 (2012), 569-599
- 'Now, the SI', in Knabb, pp. 174-177
- O'Gorman, Daniel and Robert Eaglestone, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, ed. by Daniel O'Gorman and Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-10
- O'Neill, Joseph, *Netherland* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009)
- Osteen, Mark, *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)
- Pace, Jonathan, 'The Concept of Digital Capitalism', *Communication Theory*, 28 (2018), 254–269
- Plant, Sadie, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992)

- Plato, *The Republic Books VI-X*, trans. by Paul Shorey (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/Heinemann, 1943)
- Podro, Michael, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982)
- Porter, Carolyn, *Seeing and Being* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981)
- Poster, Mark, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975)
- Potter, Jonathan, *Discourses of Vision in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Seeing, Thinking, Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)
- Purdon, James, 'Tom McCarthy: "To ignore the avant garde is akin to ignoring Darwin"', *The Guardian*, 1 August 2010 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/01/tom-mccarthy-c-james-purdon>> [accessed 20 June 2019]
- Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004)
- Rée, Jonathan, *Descartes* (London: Allen Lane, 1974)
- Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2006)
- Riegl, Alois, *Late Roman Art Industry*, trans. and ed. by Rolf Winkes (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985)
- Roberts, John, 'Eleven Theses on the Situationist International', in *Selected Errors: Writings on Art and Politics 1981-90* (London: Pluto Press, 1992) pp. 114-125
- Rogers, Gayle, 'An Interview with Ben Lerner', *Contemporary Literature*, 54 (2013), 218-238
- Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979)
- Rose, Gillian, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978)

- Rose, Jacqueline, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986)
- Rosenblum, Naomi, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd edn (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997)
- Ross, Kristin, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995)
- , 'Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview', in McDonough 2002, pp. 267-283
- Rubin, Isaak Ilich, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, trans. by Miloš Samardžija and Fredy Perlman (Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1973)
- Ruskin, John, *The Works of John Ruskin Vol. III*, ed. by E.T. Cook and George Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903)
- , *The Works of John Ruskin Vol. XV*, ed. by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1904)
- Sadler, Simon, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999)
- Sayeau, Michael, *Against The Event* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Sekula, Allen, 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', in Burgin 1982, pp. 84-109
- , *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984)
- Self, Will, 'The novel is dead (this time it's for real)', *The Guardian*, 2 May 2014
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/02/will-self-novel-dead-literary-fiction>> [accessed 19 June 2019]
- Shields, David, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010)
- Silverstein, Michael, 'Shifters, Linguistic Categories and Cultural Description', in *Meaning in Anthropology*, ed. by Keith H. Basso and Henry A. Selby (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), pp. 11-55

- Simmel, Georg, *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, trans. by K. Peter Etkorn (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968)
- , *The Philosophy of Money*. 3rd edn, ed. by David Frisby, trans. by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004)
- International, Situationist, *The Real Split in the International*, trans. by John McHale (London: Pluto Press, 2003)
- Skidelsky, William, 'Experimental fiction: is it making a comeback?', *The Guardian*, 1 August 2010 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/01/experimental-fiction-bs-johnson-skidelsky>> [accessed 31 July 2019]
- Smith, Adam, *The Wealth of Nations: Volume One* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1910)
- Smith, Terry, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry*, 32 (2006), 681-707
- Smith, Zadie, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009)
- , *NW* (London: Penguin, 2012)
- Solnit, Rebecca, *Motion Studies: Time, Space & Eadweard Muybridge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003)
- Spike, Sara, 'Review: *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* by Jonathan Crary', *Labour/Le Travail*, 75 (2015), 342-344
- Standing, Guy, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011)
- Sterne, Jonathan, *The Audible Past: Origin of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)
- Tracey, Frances, *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International* (London: Pluto Press, 2014)
- Szendy, Peter, *The Supermarket of the Visible: Towards a General Economy of Images*, trans. by Jan Plug (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019)

- Thompson, E.P., 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present* 38 (1967), 56-97
- Tomba, Massimiliano, *Marx's Temporalities*, trans. by Peter D Thomas and Sara R Farris (Leiden: Brill, 2013)
- Truffaut, François, *Hitchcock*, trans. by Helen Scott, 2nd edn (London: Paladin, 1978)
- Tsitsovits, Ioannis and Pieter Vermeulen, 'The Anthropocene Scriptorium: Writing and Agency in Ben Lerner's *10:04* and Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*', in *Ecocriticism – Environments in Anglophone Literature*, ed. by Sonja Frenzel and Birgit Neumann (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017), pp. 193-217
- 'The Use of Free Time', in Knabb, pp. 74-75
- Vaneigem, Raoul, 'Basic Banalities (Part 2)', in Knabb, pp. 154-173
- Vermeulen, Pieter, *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
- , 'The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 58 (2012), 549-568
- , 'Don Delillo's *Point Omega*, the Anthropocene, and the Scales of Literature', *Studia Neophilologica*, 87.sup1 (2015), 68-81
- , 'How Should a Person Be (Transpersonal)? Ben Lerner, Roberto Esposito, and the Biopolitics of the Future', *Political Theory*, 45 (2017), 659-681
- Vermeulen, Timotheus and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 2 (2010), unpaginated
- Vidler, Anthony, 'Terres Inconnues: Cartographies of a Landscape to Be Invented', *October*, 115 (2006), 13-30
- Wark, McKenzie, *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008)

- , *The Beach Beneath The Street* (London: Verso, 2011)
- , *The Spectacle of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 2013)
- Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1983)
- Waugh, Patricia, *Metafiction* (London: Routledge, 1984)
- Weaver, Camilla, *Reading seeing: visuality in the contemporary novel* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2017)
- , 'Restricted Action: McCarthy's Modernist Legacy?', in *Tom McCarthy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Dennis Duncan (London: Gylphi, 2016), pp. 95-119
- Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Whitehead, Colson, *Zone One* (London: Harvill Secker, 2011)
- Wolf-Mayer, Matthew, 'Once More unto the Breach (of capitalism and nature) – jonathan crary's [sic] 24/7', *Somatosphere* (Chicago: Somatosphere, 2014)
 <<http://somatosphere.net/2014/once-more-onto-the-breach-of-capitalism-and-nature-jonathan-crarys-247.html/>> [accessed 1 July 2019]
- Wollen, Peter, 'The Situationist International', *New Left Review* 174 (1989), 67-95

