Terminal Cities: Non-Places in Contemporary American Literature and Film

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Abstract

This dissertation is about non-places in contemporary American literature and film. Non-places are public spaces that are nevertheless transitory, efficient, and impersonal, dedicated mostly to logistics and straightforward tasks rather than community formation or personal identity—primary examples include things like highways, hotel rooms, convenience stores, and airports. I use these spaces here to discuss the challenges of everyday life in the highly mobile and interconnected world that they themselves have helped build, and how its high speeds, complex programs, and loose ties are illustrated and worked through in the popular imagination. On a practical basis, such infrastructure represents a series of simple bargains or trade-offs, as its emphasis on material and economic concerns comes into conflict with those of a more social or civic nature, foregrounding some important changes in how the public sphere is seen to work more generally. And in the texts selected for this study, the overall ongoing transition toward a society predicated on flexibility, uncertainty, instantaneity, disposability, and excess that these developments speak to is seen to have a number of related problems, coming to affect not just the exchange of goods, services, and information, but the lives and lifestyles of people—their outlooks, ambitions, values, relationships, and so on. What this dissertation argues specifically is that in addition to providing the functional backbone of globalization in its various guises and configurations, non-places are also where this still emergent period's primary discontents—a widespread lack of relations, history, and identity—are experienced, articulated, and managed on a personal level, as revealed through the growing presence of these spaces in American fiction.

Résumé

Cette thèse est sur les non-lieux dans la littérature et le film américains contemporains. Les non-lieux sont des espaces publics qui sont néanmoins transitoires, efficaces et impersonnels, dédiés principalement à la logistique et aux tâches simples plutôt qu'à la formation de la communauté ou à l'identité personnelle—les exemples principaux comprennent des choses comme les autoroutes, les hôtels, les dépanneurs et les aéroports. J'utilise ces espaces ici pour discuter des défis de la vie quotidienne dans le monde très mobile et interconnecté qu'ils ont eux-mêmes contribué à construire, et comment ses vitesses élevées, ses programmes complexes et ses liens lâches sont illustrés et examinés dans l'imagination populaire. Sur une base pratique, une telle infrastructure représente une série de marchés ou de compromis, car l'accent mis sur les préoccupations matérielles et économiques entre en conflit avec ceux de nature plus sociale ou civique, en mettant en avant certains changements importants dans la façon dont la sphère publique est perçue comme travaillant plus généralement. Et dans les textes retenus pour cette étude, la transition générale en cours vers une société fondée sur la souplesse, l'incertitude, l'instantanéité, la déposabilité et l'excès que ces développements indiquent est considérée comme ayant un certain nombre de problèmes connexes, venant à affectent non seulement l'échange de biens, de services et d'informations, mais aussi les vies et les modes de vie des personnes—leurs perspectives, leurs ambitions, leurs valeurs, leurs relations, etc. Ce que cette thèse fait valoir spécifiquement, c'est qu'en plus de fournir l'épine dorsale fonctionnelle de la mondialisation du capitalisme tardif, les non-lieux sont aussi là où le mécontentement primaire de cette période—un manque généralisé de relations, d'histoire et d'identité—sont expérimentés, articulés, et gérés à un niveau personnel, comme révélé par la présence croissante de ces espaces dans la fiction américaine.

Introduction

The title of this dissertation is taken from a piece by Eric Drooker, which depicts a man standing at an apartment window. The window is one of a couple dozen in a forest of nondescript high-rises, and the man is the only figure looking out toward the viewer, pensively leaning against the wall. The other apartments are darkened but the shapes of their residents are also visible, each hunched over a keyboard, backs turned, faces and features obscured by the glow of their monitors.

The play is of course on the word terminal, which as an adjective ominously denotes endings and finitiude, and as a noun refers to the most ordinary features of any modern city. In the context of the illustration, it most directly refers to the computers in the other apartments—a city of terminals, linking everywhere to everywhere else. Because cities are really just spaces where crowds of people go to socialize and transact, it is implied, hosting these meetings online has made obsolete the actual sites where they used to take place. But the man at the window is looking outside at the landscape that seems to have been forgotten, apparently relegated to performing society's lower-order operations. From the viewer's vantage point in a neighbouring window, neither street nor sky are visible, obstructed by a wall of identical buildings. The occupants of the buildings are likewise identical, anonymously managing their affairs from behind their screens, the man the only irregular presence in frame. This is the other terminal city, a concrete hinterland so lifeless that someone bothering to look at it is already the most noteworthy thing to be seen there.

This dissertation examines non-places in American literature and film from the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The term 'non-place,' popularized in 1995 by French anthropologist Marc Augé, refers to commonly encountered public spaces dedicated to transportation, transaction, accommodation, and the other logistical challenges of today's world. They are utilitarian, locations "which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity," yet take in countless individuals on a daily basis, most of whom are already heading somewhere else (Augé 77-78). They include highways, hotel rooms, and supermarkets, everything from airports to ATMs, all manner of information kiosks, ticket queues, loading zones, and check-in screens. Designed around the principles of speed, motion, consistency, efficiency, and function, they are eminently short-term, occupied without being inhabited, the spaces of "solitary contractuality" briefly stopped at or passed through on the way to an actual destination (Augé 94). But despite their transitory nature, non-places have become a foundational part of contemporary life in many significant ways, particularly within cities. As "the installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods," they form the basic infrastructure undergirding the highly mobile, interconnected, and informational global society that has rapidly developed over the last several decades (Augé 34). And because of their central importance to urban affairs in this role, they are also forming the backdrop against which the everyday routines of urban populations are carried out, an ever-present fact and facet of the metropolitan experience. Originally intended purely for the fulfilment of specific material needs, in their ubiquity non-places have begun to accrue the same kinds of personal significance as other highly trafficked spaces, and invite the same kinds of critical attention.

Each of the five chapters following this introduction discusses one example of this vital but overlooked terrain, and all are structured around this dual focus on material versus

sociocultural issues. On the one hand, I consider non-places in their capacity as the circulatory system of globalization—a worldwide network tasked with the drudgery of transportation, containment, and exchange at previously unimaginable scales and speeds. The economic applications of this leap in infrastructural might are particularly apparent during the postwar period in the concurrent development of post-Fordist, 'late' capitalism, which functions according to a similar short-term, contingent logic. Now characterized by intense dynamism and interdependency, the world's markets for goods, labour, services, and information rely on these spaces to quickly rearrange assets as needed, shuffling various forms of capital further afield, in greater measures, and with increasing frequency. Moreover, this practice also tends to exacerbate many of the problems it works to solve by accelerating the cycles of displacement that affect production strategies and consumption patterns in the first instance, and thus the pace at which ordinance must be ferried to and from the myriad battlefronts of business, politics, and culture in response. These are the channels that make large-scale human endeavours possible in the new millennium, and the borderlands traversed in order to see them accomplished.

On the other hand, I also examine non-places according to the social and symbolic concerns engaged by their maturation into a crucial part of the international urban fabric. These issues typically also arise from the formal qualities of speed, motion, and dispersal amplified by non-places, and include themes of mass anxiety and insecurity, solitude and social atomization, boredom and apathy, bewilderment at the pace of daily reality, and a 'moral lag' between the facts of this reality and the ability of various institutions to productively address them. Many of the observations made on this front are corollaries of the economic goals noted just above, and are often identified in the same scholarship—accelerated activity at a macroscopic level tends to mean instability for everyone on the ground, who are then forced to adopt similar modes of

impromptu, suboptimal decision-making in a bid to keep up. Keeping in mind the preponderance of well-placed reflections on the austerity of these spaces, they are ultimately built to contain people, along with their thoughts, feelings, relationships, desires, and communities, amongst everything else. The analysis offered here is concerned with how conflicts between these material and social dimensions of daily life arise and are resolved, how the copious benefits of globalization are being distributed problematically or unevenly, and how these discrepancies are addressed in contemporary art. What this dissertation argues specifically is that in addition to providing the functional backbone of globalized late capitalism, non-places are also where this period's primary discontents—the abovementioned lack of relations, history, and identity—are experienced, articulated, and managed on a personal basis, as revealed through the growing presence of these spaces in American fiction.

This introduction covers the three broader academic conversations that have most informed my pursuit of this topic into more specialized territory—one theoretical, one sociomaterial, and one aesthetic in nature. The first concerns spatiality as a popular object of interdisciplinary study, its inherent advantages and disadvantages as such, and the specific ways I use it here, most of which have to do with the complex role it plays vis à vis the ongoing evolution of social life. For my purposes, and in the broadest possible terms, the concept of space takes into account the historical tug-of-war between hard geographical realities and human ingenuity, between the unyielding physical ground that imposes finite boundaries on a civilization's development, and the environments imagined, built, and occupied by civilizations in turn as each tries to improve its respective lot. Non-places in many ways represent an unusual wrinkle in this relationship, an overcoming of the former by the latter so total as to undermine some of the most basic ways we have come to understand and interact with the external world,

with implications to match. The second conversation is an overview of what these implications are, relating mostly to the rise of a highly mobile, fast-paced, interconnected global society, and its more striking features in terms of economy, culture, politics, and so forth. Connected to a large swath of scholarship well outside the scope of this discussion, these observations are organized under the more manageable concept of 'supermodernity,' a term used by Augé to describe the twenty-first century historical situation of which non-places are simultaneously a symptom and a cause. It is an era defined by its youthful inexperience, the creation of brilliant, powerful technologies followed by their inevitable misuse in a series of tragicomic fiascos—digitized swarms of cheap disposable goods and cheap disposable people, the pursuit of short-term wants at the expense of long-term needs, cowed outrage in the face of grievous multigenerational problems, and at bottom confusion, the sense that everything is suddenly, perhaps insurmountably different and must be relearned. The last conversation is about how this turmoil is being channelled into Western art, generating widespread interest in the everyday scenes and routines of globalization. Grown tired of the overindulgent rhetorical grandstanding associated with postmodernism in recent years, fiction writers are again looking back outward toward the non-fictional world instead, in hopes that the old realism might better help them take stock of their new, weird surroundings. Their work, like their lives, is about context, ordinary incidents in common settings given heft and meaning by their placement within some much larger, more compelling whole. The topic of non-places, at the intersection of a massive historical sea-change and the countless minor dramas lived out in its wake, is an ideal starting point for discussing this emerging creative interest in daily life and the conditions that affect it for better or worse.

1. Spaces, Places, and Non-places.

'Space' is a cardinal element of existence in the most basic metaphysical sense and a word with an array of specialized and everyday uses, making it an unwieldy topic for any discussion, let alone an academic one. It is the enclosure within which everything else exists, as extensive as it is indirect in its workings, which tends to be a problem for those trying to deploy the term in any kind of precise way. It invariably demands extra qualification in order to be useful, the work of outlining definitions, carefully considered limits, and justifications for them. This challenging conceptual breadth, however, has also made spatiality a popular object of study across a range of disciplines. Nigel Thrift writes that the so-called 'spatial turn' in the humanities

> has proved to be a move of extraordinary consequence because it questions categories like “material,” “life,” and “intelligence” through an emphasis on the unremitting materiality of a world where there are no pre-existing objects. Rather, all kinds of hybrids are being continually recast by processes of circulation within and between particular spaces. The world is made up of all kinds of things brought in to relation with one another by this universe of spaces through a continuous and largely involuntary process of encounter and the often violent training that the encounter forces. (139)

This inherent attention to context is a particularly effective tool for describing globalization and its own processes of circulation and encounter, the complex reciprocal relationships between localized phenomena and the larger ecosystems that house them. Accordingly, this dissertation uses the topic of space to explore several registers of American society and culture at once, and illustrate how they develop concurrently and according to a shared underlying logic. Similarly, while my specific focus here on literature and film helps put some useful limits on a rather large body of concerns, it also benefits from a wealth of other interdisciplinary research, given that

literary and cultural studies represent only a small corner of the much larger scholarly conversation concerning spatial practice, justice, production, planning, and so forth. In fact, since the terminology around this subject quickly becomes meaningless with so many differing uses and directed toward so many critical ends, it is necessary to look at a few of the more specific ways it is being understood here.

My primary point of reference at the broader, more theoretical edges of this conversation is Henri Lefebvre's seminal *The Production of Space* (1991), written precisely to reduce the "veritable chaos of ideas" surrounding spatiality to some basic structural principles, which are themselves derived mostly from Hegel, Nietzsche, and Marx (21). Looking to replace older, less useful philosophical distinctions between purely 'physical' and 'mental' space, Lefebvre instead emphasizes how space produces, and is also produced by, social interaction—how environments and their occupants reciprocally influence one another. In other words, "(*social*) *space is a* (*social*) *product*," which for Lefebvre comes into being through a trialectic interaction between the categories of 'conceived space,' 'lived space,' and 'perceived space' (26). Conceived space is concerned primarily with "*representations of space* which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations" (33). It is thus "the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers," concerned with hard data, dimensions, and plans (38). Lived space, by contrast, refers to "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols" and "the space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate"—the extremely personal experience of one's surroundings, the ways in which such experiences are expressed, and the goals such expressions might work to achieve (39). These spaces are "*representational spaces*, embodying complex symbolisms […] linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life,

as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces)" (33).

Finally, there is perceived space, what Lefebvre refers to as the space of social practice. This category is characterized by the sum total of actions and relationships carried out within a space, as it "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation" (33). Perceived space can usefully be thought of as the field upon which the other two iterations of space engage one another, allowing the trialectic to work. Oriented toward meeting basic material and organizational needs, conceived spaces are necessarily "in thrall to both knowledge and power" (50) in their capacity as both literal tools and symbolic reflections of bourgeois hegemony "on the basis of an underlying logic and with the help of knowledge and technical expertise, of a 'system'" oriented toward the benefit of that class (11). Conversely, the representational or lived space that stands against this hegemony in the form of individual experiences and impressions is, by itself, "limited to works, images and memories whose content, whether sensory, sensual or sexual, is so far displaced that it barely achieves symbolic force" (50). It is the conflict between these two spaces on a concrete and daily basis within this third 'perceived' space that over time 'produces' and reproduces a society spatially, materially, socially, and symbolically via this process of imposition, appropriation, reimposition, reappropriation, and so forth. In this respect, "the spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectial interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it" (38). Capitalist spatial practice formulated in this way is not merely a fundamental part of the relations of production (e.g. work, economics, etc.) and the social relations of reproduction (e.g. family, sexuality), but is also the engine and site of "the *reproduction of the social relations of production*" in a comprehensive

sense; “that is, [all] of those relations which are constitutive of capitalism and which are increasingly (and increasingly effectively) sought and imposed as such” (32). The history of capitalist space, broadly speaking, can be viewed as this long-term process of negotiation between the dominant and subordinate classes, via the actions and interactions of everyday social life within the places that contain it.

I elaborate on this for two reasons. The first is methodological in nature; this model emphasizes the central role space takes in the simultaneous material, cultural, and social evolution of a society, as well as demonstrates in basic theoretical terms how it functions in that role. Because of these wide-ranging implications, Lefebvre's work has become indispensable to contemporary academic approaches to space, particularly in fields pertaining to critical, social, or human geography, where many prominent thinkers have adopted similar hybrids of Hegelian and Marxist thought. David Harvey, for example, concurs that “we must relate social behaviour to the way in which the city assumes a certain geography, a certain spatial form,” and “above all, to formulate concepts which will allow us to harmonize and integrate strategies to deal with the intricacies of social process and the elements of spatial form” (*Social Justice* 27). Other studies are more specific in their focus, such as Mike Davis's analysis of L.A. in *City of Quartz*, but likewise use space as a way of considering materiality and culture in ways that are comprehensive while remaining analytically useful. “If Los Angeles has become the archetypal site of massive and unprotesting subordination of industrialized intelligentsias to the programs of capital,” Davis writes, “it has also been fertile soil for some of the most acute critiques of the culture of late capitalism,” the most prominent of which for him is noir fiction: “A fantastic convergence of American 'tough-guy' realism, Weimar expressionism, and existentialized Marxism—all focused on unmasking a 'bright, guilty place' (Welles) called Los Angeles” (18).

Another prominent scholar of L.A., Edward Soja, overtly declares his own debt to Lefebvre in *Thirdspace*, the title of which is meant to signal a formal attempt to build on the original trialectic using an approach that, again, "cuts across all perspectives and modes of thought, and is not confined solely to geographers, architects, urbanists, and others for whom spatial thinking is a primary professional preoccupation" (3). Similarly, Lefebvre's focus on quotidian action and interaction, both in *Production* and the equally groundbreaking *Critique of Everyday Life*, has seen further elaboration in work by other multidisciplinary thinkers like Guy Debord or Michel de Certeau, the latter of whom actually coined the term non-place, which was subsequently adapted by Augé. Lefebvre's trialectic understanding of space and spatial practice can thus largely be taken as the theoretical bedrock both of this dissertation, as well as of these and other studies that have informed my thinking throughout.

The other reason I linger on Lefebvre is to establish a vocabulary for describing the broad importance and general logic of Augé's intervention with 'non-places,' as something of a more grounded complement to these theoretical concerns. Augé's definition is considerably different than that of Certeau, who uses this term to describe how the significance or purpose of a space is passively imposed through language, the act of naming for example:

> In the spaces brutally lit by an alien reason, proper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings. They "make sense"; in other words, they are the impetus of movements, like vocations and calls that turn or divert an itinerary by giving it a meaning that was previously unforseen. These names create a nowhere [non-place] in places; they change them to passages. (55)

Certeau's use of the concept here is indicative of his more general interest in the textual depth with which public spaces gradually become imbued—how they are forged symbolically in a

collaborative effort between designers, builders, and occupants. That is to say in Lefebvrian terms that his analysis is located primarily in a robust 'perceived space' which is characterized by this sort of collaboration, negotiable on an historical scale simply by virtue of being inhabited. Augé, likewise concerned with the social significance of geography, integrates this idea into what he calls 'anthropological place': “We include in the notion of anthropological place the possibility of the journeys made in it, the discourses uttered in it, and the language characterizing it” (81). Anthropological place, then, can be considered as the literal physical territory “occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance,” but also in terms of its social or symbolic construction by those “who also detect in it the traces of chthonian or celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography” via commerce, culture, history, ritual, and so forth (42).

By contrast, as the spaces of transit between anthropological places “which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity,” Augé's non-places are meant to signify the growing *absence* of these qualities (77-78). Rather than attempting to account for the complex sociality behind Lefebvrian spatial 'production' as Certeau does, Augé uses the term to describe the obliteration of this sociality across the board, from its chronic manifestations like culture and history to minute everyday expressions of individuality:

> A person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver. […] The only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard, in the silent dialogue he holds with the landscape-text addressed to him along with others, are his own: the face and voice of a solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of

> others. The passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollboth, at the check-out counter. Meanwhile, he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties. The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude. (103)

Though clearly 'read' in the sense of being navigated efficiently, the act of interpreting this landscape-text to which Augé refers is extremely limited in comparison to Certeau's descriptions of public space. Any meaning derived from non-places consists chiefly of "their 'instructions for use,' which may be prescriptive ('Take right-hand lane'), prohibitive ('No smoking') or informative ('You are now entering the Beaujolais region')" (96). Beyond these, the canned imitations of sociality that may be offered "('Thank you for your custom,' 'Bon voyage,' 'We apologize for any inconvenience') are addressed simultaneously and indiscriminately to each and any of us: they fabricate the 'average man,' defined as the user of the road, retail or banking system" (100). Users are simultaneously homogenized and atomized, with unique individual identifiers reduced to the various trackers, tickets, cards, and codes that aid less specialized filters. In a similar way, such spaces "do not integrate the earlier places" that they in many respects supersede, which are instead "listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory'" rather than interacted with directly (78). This switch essentially disrupts Lefebvre's trialectic by eliminating perceived space altogether, which in turn yields a dramatically different form of social control to overcome as space becomes solely 'produced' on the part of power and capital, with little input from the individual needs, opinions, and experiences of occupants that constitute 'lived space.' The primary mode of spatialized domination gestured to by thinkers like Augé thus becomes less about the manipulation or even suppression of social interaction to achieve a desired result, and more about the fact that this interaction is itself no longer required

for these spaces to function, and indeed might be said to only hinder their functioning.

My use of Augé's work here is similar to my use of Lefebvre as a kind of conceptual shorthand, a proxy for the numerous and esteemed scholars working on roughly equivalent phenomena in other fields. In the field of sociology, for example, Augé's distinction between non-places and the anthropological places reminiscent of a Baudelairean modernity where “every thing is combined, everything holds together” (Augé 110) finds an analogue in Manuel Castells's distinction between the 'space of places' and the 'space of flows,' the latter of which refers to the global network that “links up distant locales around shared functions and meanings on the basis of electronic circuits and fast transportation corridors, while isolating and subduing the logic of experience embodied in the space of places” (“Epilogue” 160). A cornerstone of philosopher Paul Virilio's work is the rise of the dromosphere, or 'speed-space,' and consequently the “loss of orientation regarding alterity (the other), [a] disturbance in the relationship with the other and with the world” (“Speed and Information”). In geography and urban studies, Soja speaks to the loss of a coherent organizational scheme—spatially, economically, and anthropologically—in the postmodern city as a result of decentralization and urban sprawl with his concept of the 'exopolis' (ex-opolis/exo-polis being the intended wordplay), the best example of which is probably Los Angeles. And in his work on the homogenization of architecture in the age of globalization, Hans Ibelings contends that “while the area designated as familiar territory is larger than ever before, people find the world less and less meaningful, precisely because a large portion of the known world is familiar only from a fleeting visit, and is not a place, with which people feel some affinity, where they feel at home, where they actually meet other people rather than being simply thrown together by chance” (64-65). Of course, the non-place is not as easily defined in practice. “It never exists in pure form,” Augé notes (78). “Places reconstitute themselves in it; relations

are restored and resumed in it, the 'millennial ruses' of the 'invention of the everyday' and 'the arts of doing,' so subtly analysed by Michel de Certeau, can clear a path there and deploy their strategies" (78-79). Consequently, "place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (79). The broad trend toward high speed, high efficiency, high function, globally situated infrastructures gestured to by these and other thinkers, however, can be seen to substantially impact the processes of identity and community formation in a number of important ways.

2. Supermodernity: Geography, Society, and Culture.

Augé himself outlines three of these ways, all of which are related in their correspondence "to a situation we could call 'supermodern' to express its essential quality: excess." Given the foundational role Augé's work plays in this dissertation, the comprehensive analysis of 'supermodernity' that he offers, and the extent to which this analysis speaks to the wide-ranging concerns I seek to capture here, it is worth elaborating on these basic formal aspects somewhat at length. The first is an excess of events, or an acceleration of history owing to both "our overabundant information and the growing tangle of interdependencies in what some already call the 'world system'" (28). A significant difficulty of possessing the global awareness enabled by a vast assemblage of mobility and communications technologies, is making meaningful sense of the torrent of remote crises, dilemmas, tragedies, and culture wars that one must confront as a result. I say 'must' to indicate that this task generally derives more from a sense of self-preservation than benign interest; due to this growing (economic, cultural, political, etc.) interdependence, the impacts of such events on individual lives or livelihoods are

not always obvious, and potentially devastating. For example, Augé's points of reference here include “the sudden dissolution of regimes whose fall nobody had dared to predict,” as well as “the latent crises affecting the political, social and economic life of liberal countries” (29). And as post-9/11 attention toward U.S./Middle Eastern politics has readily indicated, localized phenomena like these are frequently part of the same larger international dynamic, with mishandled foreign interventionism and retributive terror campaigns sustaining a cycle of fear and violence between the two regions since the early Cold War. In contrast, then, to more orthodox accounts of postmodernism that emphasize a dearth of meaning, supermodern culture contends with the opposite problem: “What is new is not that the world lacks meaning […]; it is that we seem to feel an explicit and intense daily need to give it meaning: to give meaning to the world, not just some village or lineage” (29). For Augé, this preoccupation with global events *in the present*, “very few of which are predicted by economists, historians or sociologists,” crowds out the individual and collective capacity to apply this same process of meaning-making to the past (28). This 'acceleration' or intensification of history is thus in many ways also its erasure, as spontaneous decision-making based on rapidly changing conditions becomes far more useful than presuming the future by situating events on a dubiously stable historical trajectory.

The second excess is that of space. In the same way that globalization has seen widespread attention toward (which is to say awareness of, preoccupation with, anxiety over) events on a global scale, the locations where these events play out are made similarly accessible. Correspondingly, “we could start by saying—again somewhat paradoxically—that the excess of space is correlative with the shrinking of the planet” (29). Augé's remarks concerning this figure of excess are drawn out of these changes in scale, where “our first steps in outer space reduce our own space to an infinitessimal point […] but at the same time the world is becoming open to us”

by way of "rapid means of transport [which] have brought any capital within a few hours' travel of any other," or the "sometimes simultaneous vision of an event taking place on the other side of the planet" (31). Space travel is a useful metaphor for considering the social and political problems diagnosed here; a perspective from orbit offers quantitatively more of the world to view and engage with at one time, but at the expense of nuance. For example, the various forms of online culture slowly emerging from the telecoms revolution are not without drawbacks in this regard: "The broadcast image (which is only one among countless possible others) exercises an influence, possesses a power far in excess of any objective information it carries," and works to "assemble before our eyes a universe relatively homogenous in its diversity" (32). In other words, the optics of globalization "constitute a means of *recognition*, rather than *knowledge*" which is at very best "broadly fictional […] identified with cultures conceived as complete wholes: universes of meaning, of which the individuals and groups inside them are just an expression, defining themselves in terms of the same criteria, the same values, and the same interpretation procedures" (33, emphasis mine). Meanwhile, the precise opposite is true in reality, with 'places' only becoming more complicated as escalating technological advancements, demographic changes, and socioeconomic pressures slowly give rise to "considerable physical modifications: urban concentrations, movements of population, and" of course "the multiplication of what we call 'non-places,' […] the installations needed for the circulation of passengers and goods" (34).

The last excess is that of "the figure of the ego, the individual" (36), which, "in Western societies at least, […] wants to be a world in himself; he intends to interpret the information delivered to him by himself and for himself" (37). As we see above, while the temporal and spatial excesses endemic to supermodernity in many ways imply and work to realize a truly

unified global civilization, they also inadvertently complicate the process of doing so by making obsolete the stable, local, centralized institutions around which people have typically constructed their identities and relationships. Being obviously and heavily interrelated with these trends, this third form of excess can be considered in terms of similar discrepancies: “Never before have individual histories been so explicitly affected by collective history, but never before, either, have the reference points for collective identification been so unstable,” making “the individual production of meaning […] more necessary than ever” (37). In one sense, Augé refers here to an excess of *the individual*: the rise of a globally oriented subject enabled by supermodern knowledge and mobility, formed from increasingly numerous, remote, specific, and obscure sources—events, locales, ideas, cultures, cuisines, histories, arts, artifacts, etc. But because actual proximity to these reference points, or to the means by and through which they are discovered, interpreted, and understood, and to the other people who engage with them, is no longer a necessary component of this process, such a subject becomes probabilistically less and less likely to resemble any other. The more optimistic prospects suggested by an excess of the individual is thus counterbalanced by an excess *of individuals*, as the cultivation of communities based on shared values and norms is disrupted by this shift toward identity formation as a highly personalized and often private activity. Consequently, in addition to supermodernity's systemic temporal and spatial changes, “attention should really be given to factors of singularity: singularity of objects, of groups or memberships, the reconstruction of places; the singularities of all sorts that constitute a paradoxical counterpoint to the procedures of interrelation, acceleration and delocalization” seen elsewhere (39-40).

Comprised of both structural and superstructural elements, what Augé terms 'supermodernity' represents sweeping changes to world economy and culture during the second

half of the twentieth century. The former can generally be summarized as the development of a highly dynamic, decentralized, and informationalized regime of capital accumulation usually called post-Fordism or flexibilism, defined by its departure from the organizing principles of Fordism: mass production and consumption, Keynesian economic policies, welfare statism, and a tense though stable coalition between commercial interests, organized labour, and the state, under what Alain Lipietz calls a "'monopolistic' mode of regulation" (35). In contrast to, and "marked by a direct confrontation with the[se] rigidities of Fordism," flexibilism, as the name implies,

> rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation. It has entrained rapid shifts in the patterning of uneven development, both between sectors and between geographical regions, giving rise, for example, to a vast surge in so-called "service-sector" employment as well as to entirely new industrial ensembles in hitherto underdeveloped regions. (Harvey, *Postmodernity* 147)

Post-Fordism is thus a (if not *the*) principal ingredient of the globalized world in which we now live, encouraging innovation and allowing for a degree of responsiveness in increasingly erratic and interdependent global markets that became valuable during periods of financial turbulence like the American stagflation crisis of the 1970s. It is not without its drawbacks, however, as reliance on high turnover rates in consumption, economies of scope, and small-batch manufacturing necessarily became the chief survival strategy for producers, which ultimately exacerbated the same economic instability it was meant to guard against by incentivizing

novelty, adaptability, formlessness, and change over the predictable if somewhat tedious consistency of Fordist production. Harvey notes, for example, that “the half-life of a typical Fordist product was, for example, from five to seven years, but flexible accumulation has more than cut that in half in certain sectors,” while in others “the half life is down to less than eighteen months” (*Postmodernity* 156). Consequently, “the primary effect has been to emphasize the values and virtues of instantaneity... and of disposability,” a trend which encourages annoyances like the explosion of image and brand-based advertising, planned obsolescence, and more inherently volatile products, electronics in particular (Harvey, *Postmodernity* 286). The continuation of this mode of capital accumulation into the new millennium in the form of globalization, then, is simply part of the overall capitalist goal of eliminating the 'friction of distance' in a bid to offset the production and logistics costs necessitated by the increased demand for flexibility, resulting in even further innovation and the further cultivation of infrastructure capable of meeting those demands (i.e. non-places).

This economic acceleration in turn produces an increase in the preparedness, diligence, and regularity with which everyone must react to its changes, and thus an increase in the speed at which life is perceived to move, a psychosocial condition summarized by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman as 'liquid modernity.' Referring both to the swift, capricious circulation of capital in a flexibilist global economy, as well as the corresponding disorder that it induces in the everyday circumstances of individuals, this sense of 'liquidity' is a growing organizational problem that has already yielded some significant and troubling byproducts: supply-side economic policies, neoliberal political doctrines, systemic job insecurity, disposable technology, penal statism, and a culture of anxiety, risk, isolation, competition, and distrust that manifests in virtually all social and spatial registers. On a collective basis, for example, the mercurial, decentralized nature of

globalization has allowed genuine political power to drift away from the local contexts in which it has typically been engaged with by citizens, rendering ineffective the usual avenues toward self-governance established there:

> Because they are now and are bound to stay for the foreseeable future mainly local, the political agencies which operate in the urban space, on the stage where the drama of politics is performed daily, tend to be fatally afflicted with a grave insufficiency of the power to act, and particularly of the kind of power that would allow them to act effectively and in a sovereign manner. The flip side of that relative disempowerment of local politics is the dearth of politics in extraterritorial cyberspace, that playground of real power. (Bauman, *Times* 82)

And on an individual basis, with this institutional collapse leaving little recourse for resolving the kinds of personal misfortune best dealt with through public channels, an aversion to civic participation tends to take hold in the absence of its once abundant benefits, a disinclination toward openness and vulnerability that Bauman terms 'mixophobia':

> Genuine and putative threats to the body and the property of the individual are fast turning into major considerations whenever the merits or disadvantages of a place to live are contemplated. They have been also assigned the topmost position in real-estate marketing policy. Uncertainty about the future, frailty of social position, and existential insecurity—those ubiquitous accompaniments of life in a “liquid modern” world notoriously rooted in remote places and so staying beyond individual control—tend to be focused on the nearest targets and channelled into concerns with personal safety; the kinds of concerns that are condensed into segregationist/exclusionist urges, inexorably leading to urban space wars. (Bauman, *Times* 77)

Once more, observations like these, pertaining to a social climate of powerlessness and apprehension, speak to a rather large constellation of kindred ideas. Mike Davis observes that "on the eve of the Y2K non-apocalypse, 'Fear Studies'—or 'Sociophobics' as it is sometimes called—had emerged as the hottest new niche in academia," with "dozens of pundits [...] raving about the 'mainstreaming of conspiracy culture,' the arrival of 'risk society,' the 'hermeneutic of suspicion,' the 'plague of paranoia,' the 'mean world syndrome,'" and so forth, topics that reached peak popularity in the aftermath of 9/11, that most supermodern of catastrophes (*New York* 37). For my part, I mostly engage with this body of scholarship along the same lines as Bauman, which is to say in terms of the sociology of uncertainty, instability, and disaster, aided in my understanding by the foundational work of thinkers like Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and Mary Douglas, as well as Gregory Button, Arjun Appadurai, Loïc Waquant, Hendrik Vollmer, Joost Van Loon, and others. These associations are important to my argument for three closely related reasons. The first is simply that they provide a useful impression of the social and political conditions in which the artists I examine here are working, an expansive interdisciplinary body of scholarship against which to read the texts selected for this project. The second is that these extremes of contemporary life—bewildering speed and efficiency, the global mobility of cash and people, social insecurity, depoliticization, etc.—are simultaneously the result of, metaphorized by, and literally manifest within, non-places. A substantial part of my analysis, then, has to do with non-places as a motif that calls attention both to certain changes in the basic elemental structure and usage of space, and to the transformative implications of these changes across a wide range of human experience.

3. The Post-Postmodern Turn in American Art and Elsewhere.

The third reason is that all of these extraliterary issues have become central to the recent literary departure from postmodernism in search of The Next Thing, which articulates what I want to suggest is a distinctly social if not outright activist imperative in response to postmodernism's digressive, excursive, and ultimately asocial and apolitical tendencies. Nicoline Timmer's aptly titled *Do You Feel it Too?*, for example, reviews the work of David Foster Wallace, Dave Eggers, and Mark Danielewski as part of an emergent 'post-postmodernism' she describes as *relational*:

> We can detect an incentive to move beyond what is perceived as a debilitating way of framing what it means to be human: the postmodern perspective on subjectivity. Most notable in the work of this younger generation of writers is the emphatic expression of feelings and sentiments, a drive toward inter-subjective connection and communication, and also a sense of "presence" and "sameness." Their texts perform a complicit and complicate critique on certain aspects of postmodern subjectivity, especially on the perceived solipsistic quality of the subjective postmodern experience world, and envision possible reconfigurations of subjectivity that can no longer be framed, I believe, as "postmodern." (13)

This emphasis on intersubjectivity, in many ways a reaction against the pervasive supermodern social decay described above, is also a part of a reaction against postmodernism's own failures to communicate, in particular the overarching sense of ironic detachment that has largely defined the era in retrospect, as well as supplied much of its initial critical verve. "By offering young, overeducated fiction writers a comprehensive view of how hypocritically the U.S.A. saw itself circa 1960," distanciation techniques like metafiction, decontextualization, magical realism, self-reflexivity, pastiche, etc. originally became popular as ways of undermining the self-serving,

oversimplified narratives pushed by decades of war, postwar, and Cold War propaganda, which in turn "helped legitimize absurdism and irony as not just literary devices but sensible responses to an unrealistic world" (Wallace 182). More recently, however, this sort of rhetorical aloofness has become viewed as a way of avoiding the responsibilities of being a professional thinker, of impoverishing public discourse by elevating cleverness over conviction. "Anyone with the heretical gall to ask an ironist what he actually stands for ends up looking like a hysteric or a prig," Wallace writes. "And herein lies the oppressiveness of institutionalized irony, the too-successful rebel: the ability to interdict the *question* without attending to its *content* is tyranny. It is the new junta, using the very tool that exposed its enemy to insulate itself" (184). Similar commentaries emerge on the academic side of the discussion, from both longstanding opponents and proponents of the style; Terry Eagleton calls postmodernism "the cynical belated revenge wreaked by bourgeois culture upon its revolutionary antagonists" (60), while Linda Hutcheon more generously suggests that its "fortuitous meetings" with feminism in the '80s and postcolonialism in the '90s "worked not only to hone postmodern theory's focus, but also to increase its reflexive awareness of its pragmatic limitations in actual interventionist arenas" (6). Defining what comes next thus largely involves addressing these limitations, by pivoting from a view of art as a mostly abstract inquiry into the process and ideology of representation as such, to a return to its application as what might crudely be called a practical pursuit. Metanarratives inspire no less incredulity, nor do simulacra appear any less hyperreal—yet despite this purported absence of genuine truth, or depth, or history, or affect, or progress, or identity so-called, artists and critics have resolved to carry on anyway, trying to leverage these fictions toward productive ends rather than simply dismissing them out of hand on the basis of some vague moral or intellectual idealism.

Indeed, one of the most noteworthy things about this change is the almost arbitrary suddenness with which it has transpired; in Alan Kirby's words, it is as though we have "essentially asserted that for a while we believed in postmodern ideas, but not any more, and from now on we're going to believe in critical realism" (79). This sense of reluctant awkwardness might be because the material conditions of postmodernity, which are frequently and often convincingly said to give rise to the mode of human thought and expression called postmodernism, appear to have not changed in any substantial way. But the urgency with which the usual approaches to these conditions are now being discarded might well be due to the same reason. The preeminent figure on either front is very probably Fredric Jameson, whose original formulation of postmodernism as 'the cultural logic of late capitalism' has demonstrated to great effect its role in normalizing, obscuring, or reinscribing capitalism's worst excesses, noting that

> for political groups which seek actively to intervene in history and to modify its otherwise passive momentum (whether with a view toward channeling it into a socialist transformation of society or diverting it into the regressive reestablishment of some simpler fantasy past), there cannot but be much that is deplorable and reprehensible in a cultural form of image addiction which, by transforming the past into visual mirages, stereotypes, or texts, effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm, from visions of "terrorism" on the social level to those of cancer on the personal. (46)

Yet nevertheless, "if postmodernism is a historical phenomenon, then the attempt to conceptualize it in terms of moral or moralizing judgments must finally be identified as a category mistake," with all of us "now so deeply immersed in postmodernist space, so deeply

suffused and infected by its new cultural categories, that the luxury of the old-fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other, becomes unavailable" (Jameson 46). Hence the new interest in a direct, politicized response to this postmodern space, how it is structured, and how it structures everything else in turn, a project distinct from wasting further energy on the kinds of malignant solipsism it has seemed to encourage thus far, or ignoring its existence entirely by feebly inventing some novel material situation with which to justify this creative change of tack. Jeffrey T. Nealon's *Post-Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*, for example, seeks to update various aspects of critical theory in light of twenty-first century economic and political trends, consciously aping Jameson's expansive and idiosyncratic analysis of postmodernism to consider the 'cultural dominant' to follow. But unlike Jameson, whose groundbreaking observations were intrinsically linked to the unprecedented developments of post-Fordist late capitalism, Nealon really only finds later capitalism to work with, characterizing this new period as "an intensification and mutation within postmodernism" rather than something more dramatic but less useful (ix).

The more important difference, for Nealon and for myself, pertains to the nature of this mutation, and what it signals about the changing relationship that art has with its milieu at the turn of the millennium. Once preoccupied with the linguistic, semantic, and representational quandaries of "undecidable meanings, undecipherable codes, unconscious desires, uncertain values, unforseen plot twists," and so on, literary studies has now "swerved away from interpreting texts—from pivoting on questions about textual meaning and its discontents—to examining the historical, archival, scientific, biological, and political contexts of literary production" (Nealon 147). Accordingly, "in our critical work throughout the humanities we no longer tend to grasp the revelatory 'part' in hopes of grasping the larger 'whole,'" but rather the

inverse, “start[ing] with the larger, post-postmodern whole (e.g., globalization) of which any particular part (say, postmodern literature) is a functioning piece” (150). This still rudimentary but nevertheless immediate post-postmodern view of 'the world' alters the role that fiction plays in understanding and navigating that world, necessitating a useful move away from a postmodernist 'hermeneutics of suspicion,' and toward a “'hermeneutics of situation'—aimed at offering tools for thinking differently about the present, rather than primarily either exposing or undermining the supposed 'truth' of this or that cultural position” (88). In other words, owing to the increasingly interconnected, fast-paced, and contingent material circumstances directly experienced under globalization “it's not clear that mediated representations or signs matter as much as direct flows of various kinds—money, goods, people, images” (150). This new role of art as 'equipment for living' intended to help navigate daily life under changing material circumstances is a key element of numerous attempts to move on from postmodernist aesthetics, ranging from international movements like Stuckism or the New Sincerity, to new descriptive terms like post-irony, image-fiction, or hopepunk, to a deluge of isms: supermodernism, hypermodernism, metamodernism, digimodernism, remodernism, the apropos but mildly obnoxious post-postmodernism, and still others.

Current scholarship on literary and filmic renderings of urban space, by contrast, remains interested primarily in anthropological places, where textuality, interpretation, and inhabitancy are the means by which power and identity are negotiated. Representations of the city in art serve to highlight these struggles, “a history of territorial politics—a politics over the right to the city, its streets, its parks, its neighborhoods—that has been obfuscated by discourses that have tended to treat spatially marginalized groups as incapable of organized, rational, and sustained positive agency” (Heise 10). For prior studies concerning this intersection between literature and urban

geography—Madhu Dubey's *Signs and Cities*, Carlo Rotella's *October Cities*, Manzanas and Sánchez's *Cities, Borders, and Spaces*, Caroline Rosenthal's *New York and Toronto Novels after Postmodernism*, and Thomas Heise's *Urban Underworlds*—representations of the city speak to a vibrant historically and culturally entrenched sociality that permeates every aspect of metropolitan existence. However, in their emphasis on ghettoization and diaspora, on gentrification, and redevelopment, on discursive and geographical marginalization and so forth, such studies are necessarily confined to specific cities, and streets, and parks, and neighborhoods, under specific conditions, at specific points in time. While such an approach speaks valuably to "the pluralization and inescapable hierarchization of space, and its resultant visible and invisible geographies," its inherent preoccupation with more localized enclaves of meaning and action tends to elide the ongoing overhaul of human geography *in general*—categorically, on a global, structural level—along with all of the immense challenges that this process entails (Manzanas and Sánchez 6). "This latest mutation in space," Jameson notes, "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (44). These dislocations are not only geographical in nature, as Jameson's description most overtly suggests, but social, increasingly unmoored from both everyday small talk and its longer-term dividends in the form of kinship, culture, and history. That is to say that while this dissertation shares many of the concerns engaged by previous work on urban space with regard to systemic inequality and spatial justice, it examines these questions not by way of texts which stress the inexhaustibly complex heterogeneity of place, but rather the slow erosion of place altogether in service of largely economic needs and concerns. Similarly, because of their direct interest in the immediate material changes that underpin supermodernity,

as opposed to the highly eccentric and introspective representational strategies of their predecessors, from here onward I elect to use the term 'supermodern' (or perhaps more properly, 'supermodern*ist*') to refer to the writers and filmmakers considered here, as a means of linking them to the academic work surrounding that concept.

Each of this dissertation's chapters focuses on a different example of a non-place, using their unique facets and functions to discuss related aspects of supermodernity on a more general basis. Each is structured in three parts. The first provides an overview of the non-place in question with regard to its historical development, cultural significance, philosophical implications, or some combination thereof, while the second and third each offer a close reading of a text in which it features prominently. These readings are intended to both complement and contrast with one another in order to provide an assessment that is hopefully as multifaceted as the spaces themselves, demonstrating the extensive and dynamic roles they play in supermodern life.

Chapter one is about road travel and the origins of supermodernity, juxtaposing the rapid decline of beat culture with the flourishing of American highways during the late 1950s, when long-distance driving went from pilgrimages of self-discovery to tedious commutes. Engaged in both at once are Joan Didion and Hunter S. Thompson, their creative legacies built on careers as journalists working from the road in the midst of this changeover. The country they roam is in similarly high gear, still adjusting to permanent fast-forward, nervous about the future and nostalgic for a domestic stability that is largely no longer available. Among our oldest, simplest,

most common, and most consequential structures, roads are used here to show the surprising extent to which societies are reflective of the spaces they fill, the paths they walk ultimately determined by the paths they walk. The mainstreaming of automobility in America, and the acceleration of American life in response, is a dramatic example of this correspondence at work —literally a transformation from the ground up.

Chapter two is about hotels, and the distinction between home and mere housing, in Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel* and Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King*. Hotels play a complicated role in facilitating social contact, being welcoming yet impersonal, an invitation to come but not stay. Reliable accommodations are an important benchmark in the promotion of basic trust and decency, a comfortable spot at the table set aside for strangers. But while hotels grant unprecedented access to the world's countries and cultures, they cannot offer belonging there, are not especially ideal for seeking it out, are indeed explicitly temporary, and expensive to boot. They are Potemkin villages, not occupied long enough to form the attachments and routines which mark the real thing. They are used here as a metaphor for mass displacement in a world on the move, the widening gulf between who people are and where they live, and the subtle but abiding discomforts of a room not one's own.

Chapter three is about convenience stores, and convenience in general, framing the rise of American retail and fast food franchising as part of a more abstract desire for stability in unstable times. These spaces illustrate the value of coordination in a very busy, tightly scheduled, and time-conscious society—marvels of instant, on-demand gratification, so ubiquitous and consistent as to seem stuck out of reality, like fragments of some bountiful pocket dimension. Maintaining this image is of course a lot of work, and requires a lot of workers who, being somewhat overfamiliar with the whole production, tend to find it less captivating than their

customers. Helping investigate this disenchantment are Kevin Smith's film *Clerks* and Ben Ryder Howe's memoir *My Korean Deli*, texts which follow the day-to-day rhythms of convenience stores, perhaps the most nondescript, generalized, transactional non-places commonly encountered. They are used here to look at minimum wage grinds, the engineering of the service industry, and how consumer culture affects more than just the buying and selling of goods.

Chapter four is about airports and some of the dilemmas around how they manage global mobility, stratifying their passengers into various preferred classes or risk pools with a minimum of information, tight time constraints, and an acute awareness of the ever-present non-zero chance of disaster. Airports are used here to represent the celebration and fear of difference in an increasingly post-national era, defined by their careful, almost superstitious observance of the same boundaries they exist to help overcome, be they geographical, legal, cultural, ethnoracial, linguistic, socioeconomic, etc. Inundated with all of the fine distinctions and stressful situations involved in brokering world affairs, they are spaces under extreme pressure, indispensable to international cooperation yet still redolent of the panicked tribalism that tends to surface when the Other is no longer held off at a sufficiently comfortable remove. They reveal our tolerance for dehumanization as part of the cost of living globally, hastily exalting some and condemning others in the name of order, safety, and profitability. Their role as ad hoc judge and jailer, the sometimes questionable rationale behind their rulings, and the *very* different experiences these decisions are capable of producing, are further examined in Walter Kirn's *Up in the Air* and Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal*.

Chapter five is about cyberspace and the body as a place, used here to discuss how global communications networks complicate the processes by which we learn, socialize, and express ourselves. Cyberspace is a realm beyond geography that reveals to us the full extent of our

differences and similarities—it cleaves humanity, amalgamating and dividing it in the same move. Reading two William Gibson novels against various points of interest in posthumanist art and scholarship, this chapter examines individual consciousness as it unfurls across the digital expanse of the Internet, and how our understanding of personhood changes when people and the communities they form are no longer strictly the product of their immediate physical surroundings. The first, his cyberpunk masterpiece *Neuromancer*, envisions a cutthroat dystopian future where nature is obsolete, technology is king, and everything is integrated, exploring the ways in which personal autonomy and identity relate to embodiment, and the ways in which this relationship is destabilized by the wired world that supermodernity largely represents. The second, *Pattern Recognition*, sees Gibson shift from speculative fiction to a contemporary setting that is in many ways no less alien, characterized by a speed and complexity we remain ill-equipped to effectively navigate, and suggestive of our dwindling capacity to actually live in the spaces we have built for ourselves.

Chapter One: Highways

This chapter examines the transformational changes that automobiles and highways have engendered in American life. Though any attempt at tracing the origins of a concept as broad and nebulous as supermodernity back to a single event inevitably tends toward reductionism, I use the creation of the Interstate Highway System in 1956 as my point of departure here due to its almost single-handed introduction of a robust nationwide space emblematic of non-places in a kind of basic formal sense—predicated on speed, movement, dispersal, etc. Moreover, given that roads are a staple motif in American art, the pop-cultural reaction to this change intrinsically involves coming to terms with an America newly based in supermodern imperatives. To live on the road is to live constantly in motion, and those that do so for philosophical, creative, or professional reasons have a wealth of insight to offer into the conditions of such itinerant lifestyles, and the conditions that necessitate leading them. The analysis of highways conducted here thus seeks to identify these conditions in rudimentary terms across multiple registers of the supermodern experience, creating a foundation for examining similar logics at work along other parameters in later parts of the dissertation.

Like the ones that follow it, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the modernization of American roads alongside the modernization of the American road narrative, with special reference to the canonical example of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Though popularly championed as an antidote to the reactionist uniformity ascribed to late '50s American culture, I consider the novel not as a landmark countercultural artifact as was perhaps originally intended, but the natural byproduct of an America already wholeheartedly invested in automobility. The fanfare surrounding its publication, at its height during the construction of the Interstate, does not necessarily represent a subversive reevaluation of American values, but is

instead simply part of the wider fascination toward the principles of speed, motion, and dispersal that were beginning to restructure American economy and society at this time. This section also examines some of the ramifications around this turn of events, with Kerouac's more radical humanist image of highways as spaces of open-mindedness, inclusiveness, connection, experimentation, and so forth mostly subordinated to the material considerations that highway megaprojects were originally meant to address. The primacy of these latter concerns is evident in several ways, from the manner in which the design and construction of highways was originally approached, to the massive expansion of tourist and consumer cultures that they enabled, to the literature and films that glorify such cultures, inadvertently or otherwise. Through this twofold attention to the ongoing mythologization of these spaces on the one hand, and their often problematic realities on the other, this section maps out the historical evolution of highways into supermodern infrastructure via the Interstate project, as well as explains how this development is reflective of a particular set of social and economic priorities.

The following two sections present different takes on driving and highways in the 1960s and '70s, focusing on how on how these topics are considered in the context of a road system that is increasingly advanced, populated, and utilitarian. The writers examined in these sections—Joan Didion in the first, and Hunter S. Thompson in the second—each approach the road as an object of artistic interest, but also as a practical tool due to their common role as professional journalists, influenced by that occupation's attendant guidelines, goals, and responsibilities. This added element of obligation tends to draw their attention to highways as systems dedicated to functional activities like work, the experience of which is then related through the same kinds of introspective analysis found in more explicitly creative pursuits like Kerouac's novel. Didion, for example, is frequently preoccupied with the desirable aspects of anthropological place that she

loses by having to constantly be on the road as part of her job, and brings her own resulting feelings of alienation and precarity to bear on an America largely characterized by the same as mass mobility comes into its own. The parameters of this disconnection are made similarly expansive, including everything from the disruption of a historical or cultural sense of belonging, to immediate breakdowns in familial and social relationships, to paranoia over the physical dangers of high speed travel and perpetual isolation. Meanwhile, Thompson's work laments the erosion of the liberatory connotations attached to highways just a few years earlier, as the countercultural ethos of artists like Kerouac is rapidly replaced by what is perceived as an insipid mainstream capitalist morality. The issues engaged with here include the failures of a mobile society to retain the atmospheres of social inclusiveness and acceptance once provided by anthropological place, and by the same token, the climate of authoritarianism that develops within supermodern spaces in order to orient them toward economic ends which are often asocial or inegalitarian in nature. Taken together, these readings help document the emergence of an accelerated culture, and offer a look at the everyday efforts that go into matching its pace.

1. Highways, Jack Kerouac, and the American Road Story.

In 1919, a U.S. Army major named Dwight Eisenhower joined a transcontinental motor convoy that drove over 3000 miles from Washington D.C. to California. The trip, arranged by the Motor Transport Corps, was intended to test transportation equipment and infrastructure following American involvement in WWI, and demonstrate the need for increased investment in those areas. The nation's highway system at the time was underdeveloped, with many roads used by the convoy unpaved—breakdowns were frequent, and maintenance and tow teams were required on a near constant basis just to keep things running. Eisenhower credits the journey with

instilling in him early in his career an ardent belief in the importance of a well-developed transportation system, recalling that on “some days when we had counted on sixty or seventy or a hundred miles, we would do three or four” (159). And after commanding Allied forces in the European theater during WWII, and “seeing the autobahns of modern Germany and knowing the asset those highways were to the Germans, [he] decided, as President, to put an emphasis on this kind of road building” (Eisenhower 166). Near the end of his first term, Eisenhower signed into law the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, creating the Interstate system and allocating 25 billion dollars toward the creation of public roads, at the time the largest public works project in American history.

In 1957, one year after the enactment of the Highway Act, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was published. It became the centrepiece of Beat fiction largely because of its formal relation to jazz, with its breakneck pacing, improvisational style, and unconventional composition, originally as a single unbroken paragraph on a single unbroken length of paper known as 'the scroll.' These qualities were also evocative of the changing nature of American life as it shifted toward mass mobility after WWII, and their use in tandem with the novel's subject matter resonated strongly with critics and the public as a particularly timely innovation in the road genre. Ronald Primeau notes that “while considerable protest was expressed in poetry and novels throughout the 1950s, the road narrative seemed to be waiting for that special kind of driver who brings the road highway quest in line with his own frenetic pace,” and “the opening sentence of Kerouac's *On the Road*—'I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up'—proclaimed the arrival of that new American road hero” (26). Kerouac became famous overnight.

Road stories date back to well before the automobile, and well before America for that matter, but *On the Road* was important because it was arguably among the first, and certainly

among the most popular, to focus exclusively on the value of the journey itself rather than the act of finally getting somewhere. It broke dramatically from a tradition of literary movement toward what could generally be called a legitimate 'goal,' both geographical and otherwise, expressed in everything from Homer all the way through to more contemporary homecoming narratives by American writers like Thoreau, Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Twain. More importantly still, it signified a break with tradition in other ways, rejecting the oppressive culture and authority that resided in America's longstanding, and thus immobile, institutions. Jason Haslam for example, reading the novel through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, suggests that Kerouac's wanderlust marks an evolution not only of the road narrative, but attitudes toward a postwar American traditionalism erroneously confident in its own staying power. While its rigid social and cultural hierarchies "are implicitly portrayed as contextually specific entities that nonetheless attempt to force a permanence on their existence by asserting their universal applicability," the restless peripatesis of the road "exposes this permanence as a fiction, as the traveller moves through multiple specifics of time and space" (446). Academics have also applied this logic of motion-as-critique to other iterations of the genre, perhaps most notably those which use automobility as an avenue for discussing gender and sexual politics in relation to a domesticity that is not only dreary, but dangerous. Deborah Clarke's *Driving Women*, for example, points out the automobile's capacity for female liberation both in more conventional road stories like *Thelma and Louise*, as well as in texts formally outside the genre, ranging from Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth* to Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*.

Despite the initial impact of the novel, however, and the numerous popular and critical appraisals subsequently declaring its revolutionary potential, the counterculture it birthed faded into the background almost as quickly as it had arrived. Kerouac's later works are darkly cynical

about *On the Road* as a countercultural text, most famously in *Desolation Angels*, where it (or rather the fictionalized version of it, titled *Road*) is described as “a big mad book that will change America! They can even make money with it. You'll be dancing naked on your fan mail” (260). This attitude goes well beyond self-deprecation; in an *Esquire* article published in just 1958, Kerouac goes so far as to suggest the whole enterprise had already been over for quite some time:

> In actuality, there was only a handful of real hip swinging cats and what there was vanished mightily swiftly during the Korean War when (and after) a sinister new kind of efficiency appeared in America […] but the beat characters after 1950 vanished into jails and madhouses, or were shamed into silent conformity, the generation itself was shortlived and small in number. (“Aftermath” 24)

Part of this defeatism likely derives from the usual Beat posturing—Louis Menand, for example, asserts that the term “has nothing to do with music; it names the condition of being beaten down, poor, exhausted, at the bottom of the world” (“Drive” 89). But part of it is simply due to the fact that Kerouac's ideas were no longer as subversive as when first put to paper. Though published in 1957, the bulk of the novel was produced considerably earlier, based on diaries from road trips taken during the late '40s and compiled into a single narrative on the scroll during a now legendary three-week writing binge in 1951. And while Kerouac attributes the gutting of the Beat movement's potential to things like the Korean war or “the universalization of Television,” the 'sinister kind of efficiency' to which he refers might derive primarily from, rather ironically, the growth of highways and road travel after 1956 (“Aftermath” 24). That is to suggest that the conflation of *On the Road* with commercialized road travel following the Highways Act is perhaps the most significant factor in what was perceived by some, including Kerouac himself,

as the removal of the novel's countercultural teeth shortly following its publication. Far from a radical intervention, automobility by this time had already become the watchword of the postwar United States, and more for the benefit of a relatively small cadre of social actors than to realize some kind of democratic or egalitarian ideal. Narratives like Kerouac's necessarily privilege first and foremost the perspectives of drivers, passengers, and hitchhikers, but this focus ignores the fact that the roads themselves are environments built with a purpose, and have certain unavoidable conditions for using them. Regardless of the symbolic importance assigned to the highway system by its occupants, this system dictates experience in ways beyond individual control by virtue of its having been very deliberately planned and constructed, to achieve specific ends in specific ways.

With this in mind, here are a few more facts about this planning and construction. The Interstate system, though accumulating strong symbolic, cultural, and social significance throughout the latter twentieth century, was originally justified almost exclusively through its military, economic, and administrative applications as recognized by Eisenhower during WWII. In 1954, then Vice President Richard Nixon enumerates the several major weaknesses in these arenas that The Highway Act was initially designed to compensate for: “The annual death and injury toll, the waste of billions of dollars in detours and traffic jams, the clogging of the nation's courts with highway-related suits, the inefficiency in the transportation of goods, and the appalling inadequacies to meet the demands of catastrophe or defense, should an atomic war come” (qtd. in Belanger 252). In addition to its conception primarily as a system for expediting the movement of capital and bolstering national defense, the Act was also the conclusion to decades of frustration and infighting between various factions responsible for accommodating the ever-growing influx of private automobiles on American roads. That this struggle was always

rather lopsided in favour of certain moneyed interests, too, is useful for considering the ways in which responses to American mobility and automobility changed substantially during the late 1950s and 1960s. Over the years preceding the Act, a number of less obtrusive methods for dealing with traffic such as lane widening, investment in public transit infrastructure, and the use of well manicured, meticulously planned, and non-commercially oriented parkways, had already been implemented to what was assumed to be their maximum effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. Most of these were hamstrung by a lack of either the requisite space or money to make them work—light rail lines were prohibitively expensive at roughly double the per-mile cost of roadways, parkways were unable to handle large volumes of through traffic with the efficiency of larger arterials, and lane width was limited by existing property in city centres, protected by the wealthy and influential organizations that did business there.

The impracticality of these low-impact solutions to urban traffic congestion shifted favour to the methods of those more amenable to massive freeway projects: state-appointed road engineers tasked with highway development, traffic engineers, transportation planners, the Bureau of Public Roads, and businesses eager to encourage increased traffic from suburbia toward city centres. Consequently, as these groups demanded and acquired greater control over urban highway development nationwide, “design for traffic service and high-speed safety overshadowed earlier proposals to weave expressways into the fabric of the existing city and combine the new highways with mass transit” (DiMento and Ellis 73). Although professionals from other disciplines—landscape architecture, sociology, and most importantly city planning, the very legitimacy of which was at the time tenuous opposite the presumed straightforward empiricism of the engineering fields—had played a limited role even since the '30s, the implementation of the Interstate system marginalized their contributions to the point of virtual

non-existence. Where earlier drafts of the system "did preserve some elements of the parkway tradition of the 1930s, such as limited widths, heavy landscaping, transit medians, and design speeds below 50 mph" and made "some attempt to coordinate arterials with land-use patterns, redevelopment activities, and transit planning […], this more moderate thread of freeway planning doctrine eventually faded under the pressure of mounting traffic volumes and the institutional might of the highway community" (DiMento and Ellis 73). The resulting effects, which were numerous and drastic to an extent unanticipated even by Eisenhower, provide a good starting point for discussing non-places and supermodernity vis à vis the contemporary American road story.

Once underway, freeway and interstate construction promoted the decline of 'anthropological place' in several different respects. Most obviously, it cemented automobile usage as a nearly *compulsory* and *daily* occurrence for those able to own them, as "car-dependent landscapes became central to the basic administrative, financial, and growth strategies of several powerful sectors of the American economy," and "postwar leaders in the housing, retail, and transportation industries capitalized on new transportation and land-use policies to redefine 'development' as 'car-oriented development'" (Wells 254). As a result, the literal physical separation from other human beings necessitated by travel on modern roads led to the decline of city streets as sites of basic social interaction. Arguing for a balanced, holistic approach to urban travel more in line with city planners and architects in response to overzealous freeway proponents, Lewis Mumford calls attention to this erasure of the socializing function of city space in his admonition that "if [one] wish casual opportunities for meeting your neighbors, and for profiting by chance contacts with acquaintances and colleagues, a stroll at two miles an hour in a concentrated area, free from needless vehicles, will alone meet your need" (237). On a larger

scale, “depressed freeways often formed 'great ditches' between neighborhoods,” while “elevated freeways blocked out light and air, generated noise, and the areas beneath them often became blighted zones of rubbish-strewn asphalt” (DiMiento and Ellis 113). Neighbourhoods fortunate enough to be unaffected directly by the actual construction itself were nonetheless homogenized and segregated along racial and class lines, either by the columns of high-speed traffic that sharply demarcated their boundaries and prevented easy movement between and across them, or by the further precipitation of 'white flight' to affluent suburban regions.

Other areas—rural communities, suburbs, exurbs, and the landscapes that connected all of them to major cities and to one another—experienced similar homogenizing effects owing to the large slabs of blacktop running through and around them, unusable by anything other than cars, as well as to the explosion of roadside industries catering to drivers. For example, “U.S. 1 connecting Baltimore and Washington, D.C., was only some forty miles in length, but it was intersected by approximately 1000 driveways, as motels, hamburger joints, clubs, used car lots, and occasionally a home were located along the highway's edge” (Heitmann 166). On a cultural level, beyond the necessities of gas stations, diners, and motels, the road also became a well-recognized opportunity for advertising, resulting in what Catherine Gudis describes as a peculiar combination of technology fetishism, rugged outdoorsmanship, and a kind of glossy premeditated regionalism: “The influx of tourist dollars along with service stations, hotels and 'auto-cabins' (or motels), shops, and restaurants compromised the rural quality of the countryside that tourists wished to experience,” she writes (55). And while “the automobile nevertheless represented the possibility of escape to a pastoral idyll” in a manner akin to something out of *On the Road* or one of its contemporaries, “it did not seem to matter that reaching it was through the modern automotive industry, while experiencing it was through the modern mass-tourism

industry, which were far from unique or individualized affairs" (55).

Finally, and as a more direct manifestation of the ascendancy of massive highway projects over these spaces of localized history and culture, the approval of such projects around metropolitan areas was used as both a tool and justification for combating 'blight,' which was the euphemism used for neighbourhoods that were exclusively low income, and usually black. Mark Rose and Raymond Mohl provide several examples of this at work in their description of the freeway movement's various casualties:

> This rebuilding of the central city in many cases came at the expense of African American communities in the inner cities, whose neighborhoods—not just housing but churches, schools, business districts, even entire urban renewal areas—were demolished in the process of Interstate construction. In other instances, highway builders routed urban Interstates through white working-class and ethnic neighborhoods, historic districts, and parks, but building an expressway through a black community was the most common choice, the ubiquitous experience of urban America in the expressway-building era of 1956 to the early 1970s. (103)

Projects funded through the 1956 legislation, more than 40000 miles worth, were implemented amid heavy public criticism and protest, particularly in major cities like "Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Memphis, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere," including Portland, Houston, Sacramento, San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, Atlanta, Cleveland, Phoenix, Tampa Bay, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and still others (Rose and Mohl 142). These widespread highway revolts illustrate two things. First, they simply show the extent to which excessive construction of and reliance on highways was historically (and in many ways is, currently) perceived to be against the public interest in a general sense. But more

importantly for the purposes of this discussion, they also demonstrate the extent to which the unilateral decision-making of federal and state governments with regard to these projects stands conceptually opposite to the communitarian ideals of the revolt movements, which were comprised of those more interested in preserving cities and surrounding areas as vibrant, heterogeneous, and semantically contested or 'perceived' spaces.

The Highway Act occasionally appears as a point of interest in the existing scholarship on modern road narratives, especially in its relation to *On the Road*. In the field of literary studies, the realities of its purpose and execution generally take a back seat to the escape that mass mobility offered from the drudgery of more conventional lifestyles, for better or worse—an escape from the pretense of stasis altogether, rather than a move toward it in hopes of prosperity, security, or closure, like the burial of Addie Bundren or the Joad family's quest to reach California. What is particularly interesting and instructive about *On the Road* in relation to the Act is not just a question of timing, however, but rather how this convergence between the legal, social, economic, and artistic facets of road travel quickly render automobility both a tool of and metaphor for establishment ambition instead of countercultural liberty. Manuel Luis Martinez, for example, observes that Beat culture was rooted in "a nineteenth-century ideology of the self that celebrated 'self-reliance' as movement and expansion, personified by archetypical icons of individualism: the pioneer, trailblazer, and cowboy," and that "the 1950s abound with these images in popular media" (74). By 1959, eight of the top ten programs on television were westerns, and the film industry was similarly preoccupied with explorers like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone, making Kerouac's use of related motifs "not, therefore, an anomaly, but well in keeping with the 1950s popular imagination" (Martinez 74). The radicalism inherent in his own identity as an artist became similarly ineffectual; Ronna C. Johnson's discussion of his post-

breakthrough appearance on the Steve Allen Show in 1959, for example, implicates him in a capitalist system of relations as a literary celebrity whose mere presence outshines the merit of his work, "a commodified object of nascent postmodern tendencies: a mass media icon" (23). And in a letter from 1961, Kerouac describes his fame in much the same way:

> I can just see the shabby literary man carrying a "bulging briefcase" rushing from one campus to another, one lecture club to another, nodding confirmation with his hosts that he is right, hurrying to the next town […]. This my friend is what I will become if I accept all lecture offers, TV appearances, radio interviews and start arranging with reviewers and critics who want information and my books through me, a great long lifetime in a briefcase proving my work and my work itself stopped dead at the level where I took to proving myself. (qtd. in Kellogg)

Here, the same relentless mobility that made Kerouac famous is no longer viewed as an option, but an obligation—it is exactly that which he originally set out to celebrate that is made the instrument of his misfortune, twisted into what is essentially just confinement by a different name. Indeed, while Lars Erik Larson rightly concedes that "Kerouac's roads grant his protagonists freedom on a great number of different levels, including departures from capitalism, family kinships, adult conduct, heterosexuality, race, and nationality," he also notes that "the novel's desires run both ways, for it also stages a backlash against many of these liberations" (35). The effects of this backlash, already apparent in Kerouac's career and work, would also cast a shadow over his later life. Living with his mother Gabrielle and third wife Stella, and grown notoriously reclusive and suspicious of his own authorial legacy, he would succumb to complications from alcoholism at age 47, three months before the end of the 1960s.

In Kerouac's wake followed a surge of imitators, particularly during that decade, the

golden age of the road movie. Among the best and best-known of these was *Easy Rider*, which "has strong affinities with *On the Road*, and may be seen as a loose film version of the novel," and "attempts like that novel to integrate the search for self with a rediscovery of America by travelling across (and into) it" (Laderman 66). It was important for similar reasons, emphasizing the act of aimless driving as a kind of incorruptible countercultural vision quest. "Once Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper declared 'the American Dream' as their destination," Michael Atkinson writes, "it became obvious that where you were going hardly mattered, and that the Dream was the road itself, even (or especially) if it runs in a circle and ends in hapless carnage" (16). But this tradition, already situated in the socially sanitized roadscape precipitated by mass mobility, also exhibits similar anxieties and frustrations concerning the liberatory potential of the space. For example, David Laderman's work on *Easy Rider* and Arthur Penn's 1966 film *Bonnie and Clyde*, which "taken together […] form a formidable and persuasive origin for the road movie" (66), suggests that both films, despite their aggressive countercultural posturing, imply an "ideological containment of rebellion" that "converges with the end of each film's road, [as] reactionary rednecks crucify both pairs of out-laws" (42). And even where the freedom imparted by the road goes unchecked by various closed-minded malefactors, the simple act of departure is usually arduous. Clarke's reading of automobility in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, for example, identifies Jess Goldberg's motorcycle as a productive site for queer identity formation and enrichment—"as both home and body, as the house so often serves as an extension of the female body"—but also notes that a motorcycle "is much easier to destroy, reflecting how easy it is to become homeless" in both a literal and figurative sense (157). Atkinson's referral to 'carnage' is not insignificant—death and destruction are central to a great number of road films, particularly around this time. This is especially true of '60s exploitation biker movies like *The*

Wild Angels, *The Born Losers*, or *The Glory Stompers*, modelled chiefly after the 1953 Marlon Brando film *The Wild One.* But it turns up just about everywhere, in a range of permutations—suspense films like Spielberg's directorial debut *Duel*, speculative fiction like *Mad Max*, neo-noirs like *Taxi Driver*, comedies like *Smokey and the Bandit*, urban variations like *Speed*, blatant contemporary homages like *Death Proof*, and many, many others.

The real intellectual value of these texts in a broad sense, then, lies in their exploring the contours of a postwar American society in perpetual motion, rather than just superficially rebelling against the idea of putting down roots. Contemporary road stories are not part of a counterculture or subculture, but a *culture*, that revolves around, derives from, and is concurrent with such a society. Implicit in the development of this culture is not only a break from the obsolete concepts associated with an older, more geographically and existentially stable America, but also the continuation, evolution, or expansion of principles central to this new focus on motion and change. Despite the romantic aimlessness of *Easy Rider*, for example, also worth noting is the remarkable conventionality not only imposed on, but *exercised by* the riders in spite of all the risk and danger they subject themselves to, especially when it comes to capitalism, that most pervasive and essential of American values. As Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark note, "while the bikers being on the road testifies to their apparent freedom […] a plastic tube hidden inside the gas tank of Wyatt's bike is the evidence of the pair's own containment by the marketplace of US capital" (3). This conventionality is bolstered by Billy's preoccupation with money as a means of obtaining a vague kind of stability, which is even expressed in terms reminiscent of a mainstream career path or wise entrepreneurial move: "We're rich, man. We're retired in Florida now, mister." On a more symbolic level, Wyatt's alias, Captain America, positions him as an avatar of American ideals instead of someone trying to rebel against them, a

position reinforced by the American flags painted on his helmet and motorcycle. His given name is after Wyatt Earp, who in his capacity as a gunfighter corresponds to the frontier lawlessness that leads some critics to cite westerns as an ancestor of the road film, and in his capacity as a lawman corresponds to the extent to which the riders actually hold up certain unassailable pillars of the American experience.

What I primarily want to indicate by way of these examples is that road narratives from this formative period are not meaningfully *rebellious*, but *conventional*. Figures like Sal Paradise or Captain America are not part of a direct challenge to postwar American values per se, but rather a reorientation of these values toward the new social and material situations produced by supermodern systems like the Interstate. The various phenomena that accompany this change from a stationary society to a mobile one line up well with a great number of road narratives, as well as the existing body of critical work concerning them, and particularly where their darker, more harrowing elements are concerned. But what needs to be pointed out is that the struggles expressed in these narratives are not merely a minor price to be paid for the otherwise freewheeling frontier individualism that their protagonists are purportedly emblematic of. Instead, the problems associated with this life on the road—"the violence of motion, the ragged looseness of road-kinships, the control desired in moments of emotional collapse, and the hunger for certain stabilities of home"—comprise the foundation upon which new forms of social control are being built (Larson 35). *On the Road*, as a cultural artifact, does not mark a successful if problematic escape from, or piercing through the outer boundaries of mainstream American culture. It marks an evolution of that mainstream, one which assimilates and repurposes Kerouac's radicalism—both his labour as an artist, as well as his literal mobility as a motorist—in service of the economic system of which it is a product and part.

Of particular interest to me here, and what the remainder of this chapter is going to focus on, is how the rise of mass mobility and this 'commodification' of road travel impacts the road itself in terms of its practical uses and more abstract qualities (e.g., as a space of self-actualization, independence, etc.), as well as how post-Kerouac road texts perceive these changes. The examples of such that I have selected, from Joan Didion and Hunter S. Thompson, have been chosen for several reasons. In addition to being examples of road texts to varying degrees, they are also mostly examples of journalism to varying degrees, subject to rigid timelines and the editorial oversight of executives and financiers. Consequently, the road in these examples explicitly serves not only as an enabler of capitalist enterprise, but the primary method by which these authors participate in it, and moreover as a metaphor for that participation, with the writer's career trajectory and socioeconomic well-being tied to their physical movement. In this respect, these figures act as more overt examples of the kind of commodified mobility that I call attention to above with reference to *On the Road*. The writer in these instances is not only a writer but very clearly a worker, one who relies on road travel as a means of producing their work, and is thus in the position of being able to comment on this space artistically and with artistic aims, while also expressing the concerns of the mainstream functional road user that even later road genre pieces often ignore. Moreover, in addition to documenting the further evolution of the road into a space governed by supermodern principles, it follows that this work is itself similarly bound up with the harnessing of social or creative impulses to achieve commercial ends. Part journalism, part travel-writing, part diary, and part amateur anthropology—products wrought from records of highly personal, subjective experience—these texts are also part of the nascent post-Fordist informational and affective economies that will see further attention elsewhere in the dissertation.

Although both authors occupy the same role as motorists and in terms of these basic labouring circumstances, however, their approaches to this role are very different and express different concerns, inflected by their backgrounds and the personae they are attempting to cultivate. Didion, approaching the subject from a more law-abiding, upper middle class standpoint, embraces the kinds of conventionality that Kerouac tries, and ultimately fails, to resist. But the road nevertheless offers peril of a different kind—a loss of stability and comfort, rather than a loss of freedom. This insecurity is personal as well as social, both immediate and chronic, concerned with things like physical safety, but also the loss of more figurative forms of protection like family or culture. The associations found here help further illustrate some the difficulties of road travel alluded to above, with the restless individualism glorified by Beat writers and cowboy films recast as danger, solitude, alienation, and rootlessness. As a complement to this look at mainstream automobility, Thompson's work returns to the fringe elements of road culture during the decades following *On the Road*, providing a record of their continued decline during this period. Exploring the bedraggled underclass of a mobile society now overwhelmingly defined by authoritarianism, the pretense of respectability, and the quiet desperation alluded to by Didion, Thompson's rebellious and communitarian disposition sees him at odds with a prevailing highway culture that he enthusiastically disrespects at every turn, but nevertheless must continue being a part of. The issues articulated from this perspective thus involve a desire for the countercultural liberty celebrated by narratives like *On the Road* or *Easy Rider*, but also the same kinds of dread, grown even more frenzied and idiosyncratic. Imbued with a similar rebel spirit, it is also imbued with a similar sense of trepidation, as roadways become increasingly colonized by the presence of big capital and the state, and agents acting on their behalf. These sets of concerns are intended to further investigate each side of the

counter/cultural divide with respect to the American road of the late twentieth century, as a means of foregrounding some of the supermodern tribulations and dysfunctions to be explored in later chapters.

2. Joan Didion: *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, *The White Album*, and Early Fiction.

It is beneficial to begin with Didion as a foil to Kerouac as far as the subject of driving is concerned; though similarly prone to comment at length on the peculiarities of her highly mobile lifestyle, she largely dispenses with Beat romanticism in favour of the utilitarianism that typically defines any other commute to one's job. In fact, it would appear that her desire to remain employed is the main reason she drives at all during her early career, and on the freeway in particular. “I'm afraid to,” she says in a 1978 interview. “I freeze at the top of the entrance, at the instant when you have to let go and join it. Occasionally I *do* get on the freeway—usually because I'm shamed into it—and it's such an extraordinary experience that it sticks in my mind. So I use it” (Kuhel 47). This ambivalence toward driving seems to find its way into Didion's actual prose almost as much as it informs her writing process, one of the more prominent eccentricities revealed by her habit of supplementing a piece with personal anecdotes accrued while working on it. Although the New Journalism is built almost entirely around the idea that news coverage can (and perhaps should) depart from traditional modes of reportage in favour of a more literary style, it is still at bottom, as Gay Talese puts it, “fact reporting, leg work” (qtd. in Weber 69). Writers who are said to fall into this category—including Talese, Tom Wolfe, George Plimpton, Truman Capote, and Norman Mailer—are thus, despite their use of an introspective or even novelistic aesthetic, nonetheless generally on the scene in a given story, and usually stay there. By contrast, Didion spends far more time *off* 'the scene,' or between scenes, than her peers.

The following, for example, is the eighth section of her essay “The White Album,” the first and thematically central piece in a collection of the same name published in 1979. As it is also central to my own thoughts, containing in some form virtually all of the things I want to call attention to elsewhere, it is worth transcribing here in its entirety:

> Driving a budget Rent-A-Car between Sacramento and San Francisco one rainy morning in November of 1968 I kept the radio on very loud. On this occasion I kept the radio on very loud not to find out what time it was but in an effort to erase six words from my mind, six words which had no significance for me but which seemed that year to signal the onset of anxiety or fright. The words, a line from Ezra Pound's “In a Station of the Metro,” were these: Petals on a wet black bough. The radio played “Wichita Lineman” and “I Heard It Through the Grapevine.” Petals on a wet black bough. Somewhere between the Yolo Causeway and Vallejo it occurred to me that during the course of any given week I met too many people who spoke favorably about bombing power stations. Somewhere between the Yolo Causeway and Vallejo it also occurred to me that the fright on this particular morning was going to present itself as an inability to drive this Budget Rent-A-Car across the Carquinas Bridge. The Wichita Lineman was still on the line. I closed my eyes and drove across the Carquinas Bridge, because I had appointments, because I was working, because I had promised to watch the revolution being made at San Francisco State College and because there was no place in Vallejo to turn in a Budget Rent-A-Car and because nothing on my mind was in the script as I remembered it. (36-37)

The excerpt is one of many brief vignettes that comprise the essay's fragmented narrative, a mosaic illustrating the unique mix of terror and absurdity endemic to life in mid-to-late '60s

California. What distinguishes it from the other events recorded there, of course, is that it's not an event—at least not compared to the Tate-LaBianca murders, the San Francisco State riots, the rise of the Black Panther Party, encounters with cultural figures like Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison, or on a more autobiographical level, Didion's own nervous breakdown and subsequent hospitalization just a few months earlier. In fact, not only does the scene take place explicitly *between* events, but in doing so it draws a distinction between the 'place' one needs to arrive at, and the 'non-place' one is presently traversing to get there, because one 'had promised to watch the revolution being made.' Between the Yolo Causeway and Vallejo, between Sacramento and San Francisco, and between SF State student demonstrations and a brief interview with Eldridge Cleaver, she drives.

Didion's writing, especially during the '60s and '70s, spends an inordinate amount of time in transit. Although it is more commonly referred to as a 'Hollywood novel,' the road genre might have equal claim to her novel *Play it as it Lays*, given that protagonist Maria Wyeth's response to the tedium, frivolity, and exploitation of Hollywood is to drive the freeway. What is normally a means to an end becomes an end in itself, as she rises every morning "with a greater sense of purpose than she had felt in some time […] for it was essential (to pause was to throw herself into unspeakable peril) that she be on the freeway by ten o'clock" despite the fact that she has nowhere to actually be (15-16). Unlike Wyeth, however, Didion herself frequently *does* have somewhere to be in her capacity as an employee, which makes her fixation on driving even more striking in the medium of non-fiction. Indeed, several of Maria's more notable experiences with the road appear to simply be a reflection of Didion's own, and the impulse to narrate these kinds of liminal spaces and moments in a journalistic context becomes stronger as the '70s wear on. An almost direct comparison can be made, for example, between Maria's deep satisfaction in

navigating “an intricate stretch just south of the interchange where successful passage from the Hollywood onto the Harbor required a diagonal move across four lanes of traffic” (15-16), and Didion's description six years later of “the Santa Monica Freeway at National-Overland, which is a difficult exit requiring the driver to cross two new lanes of traffic streamed in from the San Diego Freeway” (*White Album* 83). Although the latter piece is ostensibly about carpool lanes implemented by the California Department of Transportation in a poorly planned attempt to mitigate traffic congestion and air pollution, it quickly becomes about the experience of driving itself, or as Didion famously refers to it, “the only secular communion Los Angeles has” (83). Successfully reaching a difficult freeway exit takes mere seconds, she notes in 1976. “But those few seconds always seem to me the longest part of the trip. The moment is dangerous. The exhilaration is in doing it” (83).

While digressions like these help distinguish her from her colleagues, from a traditional standpoint they also handicap her ability to actually report on the matter at hand—to function as a journalist. For critics like Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, such instances are interpreted as a grave shortcoming, a sign of carelessness or even narcissism. “She writes as if her subject were the Pillsbury Bake-Off Contest,” Harrison says of a 1966 essay in *The Saturday Evening Post* about the murder trial of Lucille Maxwell Miller. “No,” she immediately corrects: “in fact, her subject is always herself” (115). This is true in a sense for many New Journalists, who consciously ground their work in their own inner monologues and personal impressions. But for Didion it is often true in a literal way—*she* is driving from Sacramento to San Francisco, playing the radio loud, and trying to erase the line from the Ezra Pound poem from her mind. She is invested primarily in her own direct experiences, not necessarily as a device for segueing into whatever she is currently being paid to write about, but for their own sake, as discrete objects of analysis.

The reason this manages to work for Didion is that her own experiences are in many respects universally applicable to her assignments, not despite but because of the self-absorbed way they are expressed. What these experiences have in common is a sense of detachment and dislocation in a number of different registers that finds its way into her fiction and non-fiction alike. David Geherin, for example, usefully encapsulates the general tone and primary concerns of Didion's oeuvre in his claim that *Play it as it Lays* "is neither primarily a sociological commentary on the values of contemporary American society nor a psychological case study of its heroine," but rather "a personal picture of dread and anxiety, of alienation and absurdity lurking within and without. For although Hollywood is her setting, nothingness is Didion's theme" (64-65). But while Geherin's assertion here is well articulated and observed, the reality is somewhat more complicated: Didion's prose *is* a sociological commentary on contemporary American values, precisely *because* her themes are anxiety, and dread, and nothingness, and because her only subject is herself. This desire to translate personal alienation into a statement concerning American culture writ large turns up repeatedly in her work, but is particularly noteworthy in her first collection of essays *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), so named because of the loss, fragmentation, and discontinuity she reads into Yeats's poem: "The widening gyre, the falcon which does not hear the falconer, the gaze blank and pitiless as the sun; those have been my points of reference" (xiii). The central essay of the collection, which bears the same title, is about time spent with hippies, radicals, transients, runaways, and other marginalized figures in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, and was "for me both the most imperative of all these pieces to write and the only one that made me despondent after it was printed. It was the first time I had dealt directly and flatly with the evidence of atomization, the proof that things fall apart" (xiii).

It is fitting that this coming to terms with social disintegration is accompanied by an emphasis on physical mobility, and the emotional isolation that follows. “The center was not holding,” she writes in “Bethlehem”:

> Adolescents drifted from city to torn city, sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins, children who were never taught and would never now learn the games that had held the society together. People were missing. Children were missing. Parents were missing. Those left behind filed desultory missing-persons reports, then moved on themselves. (84)

The sense of unfettered, almost capricious movement evoked here vaguely recalls Kerouac's vision of the Beat generation in *On the Road*, “the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars” (5). But the contrast between the two does not merely lie in the somber tone of Didion's writing, as though it were intended to counter Kerouac's paradise with a dystopian reimagining. The primary difference is one of scope, and of social acceptability—the missing include not only an idealistic if misguided contingent of youthful rebels, but their parents, and more importantly the author herself, this last being particularly revealing given her class perspective and esteemed role in California's culture industry. Grizzuti Harrison pithily sums up some of the more immediately evident differences between Didion's journalistic persona and the presumed authenticity of literary drifters like Kerouac, Cassady, Ginsberg, and their various fictional analogues: “My charity does not naturally extend itself to someone whose lavender love seats match exactly the potted orchids on her mantel, someone who has porcelain elephant end tables, someone who has chosen to burden her daughter with the name Quintana Roo” (113). It is significant then, that despite the comfortable stability she has at home, Didion too is on the road,

and with all of the negative consequences that such a solitary lifestyle might entail. It is worth noting, for example, that Ezra Pound describes his poem as "trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (467). And it is probably also significant that "Wichita Lineman" and "I Heard it Through the Grapevine" are songs about loneliness.

For Didion, automobiles represent the most immediate confrontation with non-places and their associated concerns—symbolic shorthand for the mass exodus from what might broadly be called civilization. In addition to being the actual instrument with which this act is carried out, cars also function as a kind of echo chamber where the experience of social atomization can be examined and articulated on an intensely personal level. Consequently, her drivers are usually alone. In her overview of Didion's early novels, Michiko Kakutani describes such characters as "habitués of a clearly personal wasteland, wandering along highways or through countries in an effort to blot out the pain of consciousness" (30). They are not only alone because they are driving, but driving because alone, as "they lose their men to suicide, divorce and cancer; their children to abortion, bad genes and history. They are outsiders, but they are also survivors, fatalists who keep on playing the game regardless of the odds" (Kakutani 30). Didion herself is one of these, described by her psychotherapist in 1968 as "a personality in process of deterioration with abundant signs of failing defenses and increasing inability of the ego to mediate the world of reality and to cope with normal stress," as well as someone who "has alienated herself almost entirely from the world of other human beings" (Didion, *White Album* 14). This sense of deterioration is necessarily wrought from the subjective viewpoint of whichever driver happens to be expressing it, and Didion's work in general is notable for its frequently bleak outlook. But the existence of the road as a nationwide space, and the droves of

other drivers in other cars, meaningfully extends this sense of homelessness to a level reflective of a fundamental social condition, rather than circumstances unique to a handful of desperadoes as would be the case with someone like Kerouac.

And it is on the road that the darker edges of this social decay are most palpably felt. The first essay of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream," begins on Banyan Street, the remoteness of which compels Didion to provide the precise geographical layout of the area, exclusively through descriptions of hokey roadside architecture:

> Past the motel that is nineteen stucco tepees: "sleep in a wigwam—get more for your wampum." Past Fontana Drag City and the Fontana Church of the Nazarene and the Pit Stop A Go-Go; past Kaiser Steel, through Cucamonga, out to the Kapu Kai Restaurant-Bar and Coffee Shop, at the corner of Route 66 and Carnelian Avenue. Up Carnelian Avenue from the Kapu Kai, which means "Forbidden Seas," the subdivision flags whip in the harsh wind. (*Bethlehem* 3)

These specifics are necessary if one wishes to reach the spot where a drugged and sleeping Gordon Miller burned alive in his Volkswagen shortly after midnight in October of 1964. The theory that his death was staged to look like an accident by his wife Lucille was accepted by a jury when, based largely on evidence indicating a marriage characterized by years of rancor and infidelity, they convicted her of his murder. Nor is this breakdown of the family unit confined to spouses, as Kakutani indicates above. The first section of "The White Album," for example, mentions "the story of Betty Lansdown Fouquet, a 26-year-old woman with faded blond hair who put her five-year-old daughter out to die on the center divider of Interstate 5 some miles south of the last Bakersfield exit" (13). And at times, loved ones completely disappear altogether —Maria Wyeth's trauma over her mother's death in a car wreck just outside of Tonopah derives

not from the shock of the tragedy itself, but “because the coyotes tore her up before anybody found her” (8). Like many depictions of the road in *Play it as it Lays*, this detail has a real world referent: recounting an interview with a nurse for a story about a similar fatal wreck between Vegas and Death Valley Junction, Didion cites coyotes as the reason that leaving a body alone on the highway is considered 'immoral' by rescue workers. Given the road's status as a liminal space (the accidents occur *outside* Tonopah, *between* Las Vegas and Death Valley Junction), the special contempt directed at this sort of neglect appears in part to come from squeamishness or guilt over a perceived inability to reintegrate the deceased not only culturally, but geographically—to 're-locate' them in every sense of the word. “Whether or not a corpse is torn apart by coyotes may seem only a sentimental consideration,” she writes, “but of course it is more: one of the promises we make to one another is that we will try to retrieve our casualties” (*Bethlehem* 158).

The broad scope of the disconnection identified in these examples suggests that this shift toward mass mobility is far more consequential than a simple fad or countercultural movement. For Didion, mainstream automobility constitutes not only a new cultural phenomenon, but one that also drastically reorganizes the workings of social life, and presents serious and wide-ranging new challenges as a result. In addition to her meditations on personal and familial estrangement for example, this transformation often manifests in her writing as supermodern erasures of history and memory, conditions which plague the anti-heroines of all her novels during this period—*Run, River*'s Lily McLellan laments that those close to her are “afflicted with memory” (246), *A Book of Common Prayer*'s Charlotte Douglas is “immaculate of history” (39), and Maria Wyeth has “trouble with *as it was*” (7). Thomas Mallon emphasizes what might be called the human cost of these erasures, remarking that “the particular distinction of these novels lies in the way they not only insistently face the idea and importance of history, but also present

such full and sympathetic portraits of women who have ranged outside its orbit" (52). This discord is so pervasive and comprehensive as to find its way even into the list of items she takes with her on assignment, which "enabled me to pack, without thinking, for any piece I was likely to do" (34):

> Notice the deliberate anonymity of costume: in a skirt, a leotard, and stockings, I could pass on either side of the culture. Notice the mohair throw for trunk-line flights (i.e., no blankets) and for the motel room in which the air conditioning could not be turned off. Notice the bourbon for the same motel room. Notice the typewriter for the airport [….] It should be clear that this was a list made by someone who prized control, yearned after momentum, someone determined to play her role as if she had the script, heard her cues, knew the narrative. (*White Album* 34-35)

Of course, these attempts at control turn out to be futile as well, regularly negated by her having forgotten the one item she is always in need of but never has: a watch. "I had skirts, jerseys, leotards, pullover sweater, shoes, stockings, bras, nightgowns, robes, slippers, cigarettes, bourbon, shampoo, toothbrush and paste, basis soap, razor, deodorant, aspirin […] but I didn't know what time it was," she writes. "This may be a parable, either of my life as a reporter during this period or of the period itself" (36). Expanding her sense of loss to include other longer-term properties of 'anthropological place'—not just kinship or family, but also history, culture, ritual, ancestry, and so forth—helps demonstrate the wide impact of a permanently mobile culture, as well as offers an forecast of supermodern problems that would become increasingly apparent over the next few decades.

These impressions of existence in a kind of socio-spatio-temporal vacuum—of nothing 'being in the script as I remembered it'—issue directly from Didion's personal experience with

the freeway as a non-place, lived minute-to-minute with little regard for any sort of larger temporal arc or web of personal attachments. The feeling of complete disconnection consistent with these attributes is partially derived from the immediate sensation of driving, which is an activity that requires direct engagement at the expense of anything else that may need attention: "Actual participants think only about where they are. Actual participation requires a total surrender, a concentration so intense as to seem a kind of narcosis, a rapture-of-the-freeway. The mind goes clean. The rhythm takes over. A distortion of time occurs" (*White Album* 83). But it is also a consequence of why she is driving in the first place, with her livelihood dependent not only on navigating freeways, but also navigating the more abstract forms of fragmentation and dispersal that freeways represent. Her meandering and unremittingly novel commutes nominally take the form of road trips, yet are simultaneously characterized by the pressure and drudgery of a more conventional nine-to-five job, and her musings on social atomization, cultures of anxiety, and personal losses of control are generally drawn out of the implications of these and related forms of indeterminacy. Confronted with the Carquinas bridge, for example, she crosses in spite of her apprehension because she has appointments, because she is working, because she is compelled to interview someone who has controversial opinions regarding the bombing of power stations. And while Kerouac balks at the prospect of commercializing the work that his time on the road produced, at least to the extent that it ultimately was, Didion is deliberately ambiguous in her role, going so far as to admit early in her career that "writers are always selling somebody out" (*Bethlehem* xvi). Whereas *On the Road* might have either incidentally or intentionally been reabsorbed into the postwar American zeitgeist to match more conventional sensibilities in spite of its revolutionary aspirations, Didion's work over the following two decades appears to advance an opposing viewpoint, and with different results. She manages to obtain a certain

radical credibility by advancing the notion that virtually everyone has come to spend life on the road, or at the very least some metaphorical version of it, and are now desperate to regain the sense of home, community, and place that Kerouac was originally so eager to escape.

Around the same time that Didion was rising to prominence, fellow New Journalist Hunter S. Thompson had also taken to the road, attaining notoriety in 1966 with the publication of *Hell's Angels*. Whereas Didion's writing, though not deliberately, overtly, or insistently bourgeois, nevertheless contains enough of that sensibility to accrue criticism like Harrison's, Thompson is aggressively countercultural in a way more in keeping with traditional readings of Beat writers, a posture with its own rabble of detractors; Menand refers to him as "essentially a writer for teenage boys" ("Stone Age" 176). Accordingly, and as his subject matter might suggest, he is considerably more at home in the type of transient lifestyle led by hippies, bikers, and the otherwise permanently mobile. A basic example lies in the contents of their cars; while Didion's inventory consists mostly of clothing and toiletries, Thompson's is devoted to a practically mythical collection of drugs and liquor, which in the opening to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* are exhaustively catalogued in much the same way. While these sorts of details ground Thompson's overall narrative voice in a socioeconomic stratum markedly different from that of Didion, however, his immediate reasons for being on the road are ultimately the same. In Thompson, as in Didion, the use of roads and automobiles to achieve goals that cannot be adequately categorized as purely artistic or purely professional effectively erases the boundary between a road trip and a commute, and the conflation of these two distinct types of automobility suggests a number of related conflations—of the personal and public, of the creative and the vocational, of financial success and self-actualization, of chaos and routine—that become an increasingly large part of American life under supermodernity.

Observed from the struggling vestiges of an outcast subculture overwhelmed by more workaday sensibilities, however, these ambiguities present a different set of issues. Rather than bewildered by the speed and violence of a highway system still working to organize itself effectively, Thompson's anxiety pertains to the control exercised in pursuit of that organization. Although his own journeys are characterized by the same kinds of camaraderie, exuberance, and nonchalant mayhem found in those of other countercultural motorists like Kerouac, these qualities easily become eclipsed by the civilizing forces of business and government as they vie for their stake in the space. Moreover, and in spite of himself, Thompson too is already contained within this increasingly confining process of function and exchange, his adventures implicitly (and often poorly) organized around the professional responsibilities that have him on the road to begin with. How he negotiates and discusses these conflicting allegiances are intended to act here as a variation on the themes of precarity and social decay seen in Didion from a more marginalized class perspective, as well as a more direct look at the kinds of post-Fordist capitalist assimilation revealed by other examples of countercultural road art as discussed in the first section.

3. Hunter S. Thompson: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Hell's Angels*.

In a letter penned during the height of Kerouac's literary success with *On the Road*, a then twenty-one year old Hunter S. Thompson refers to the author as “an ass, a mystic boob with intellectual myopia” (*Proud Highway* 140). The remark is perhaps surprising given their common concerns and narrative strategies, with Thompson's idealism, flamboyant countercultural rhetoric, and use of peculiar pseudonyms all largely in keeping with traditional Beat techniques. But the distinction that may explain Thompson's antipathy lies in his job title;

like Didion, Thompson acts and is generally perceived as a journalist, rather than a novelist. The distinction becomes even finer given Thompson's brand of 'gonzo' journalism, marked by his endeavour not only to report in subjective narrative form like other New Journalists of the day, but to also insert himself as a primary, if not *the* primary actor in that narrative. Nevertheless, the detail is an important one, with his work heavily influenced by the kind of dropout ethos characteristic of Beat culture, but also shaped by the professional grind that this ethos largely seeks to oppose. Raoul Duke, the alias deployed for his magnum opus *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, has become an iconic literary figure, a rampaging larger-than-life version of Kerouac's Sal Paradise. Unlike Paradise, however, the persona is by all accounts extraordinarily distant from the actual writer, a fact that plays a key part in a good deal of criticism surrounding the book. Biographer and friend William McKeen notes that Thompson, despite being frequently confused with his addled, clownish alter-ego, was "a serious man who would sometimes labor for hours—in the company of friends and bourbon, of course—over word choice," whose "greatest literary creation was probably that exaggerated version of himself" (7).

Exaggerations of this nature position Thompson as an interesting counterexample to Didion's more detached and anxious tone where the experience of being an intrepid if somewhat harried journalist is concerned. Although already comfortable with the kinds of lawlessness that someone like Didion would be averse to, his role as a journalist holds him to certain undesirable obligations that are more, for lack of a better term, 'square.' In the early '70s he confesses feelings of having not lived up to his reputation as an agitator, writing that "the treacherous realities of the worlds I especially work in forced me to abandon that purist stance a long time ago. If I'd written all the truth I knew for the past ten years, about 600 people—including me—would be rotting in prison cells" ("Super Bowl" 71). Similarly, if Didion reluctantly endures the

contingency and chaos of the freeway for the sake of employment and in spite of an otherwise stable home life, Thompson, also for the sake of employment, must come to terms with the inverse. For example, in “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved” he repeatedly expresses his discomfort with covering the race not only because of the upper class activities, interests, and behaviours observed there, but also the prospect of having to literally return home, given that it is held in his birthplace of Louisville. This sort of uneasiness toward concepts like 'home' or 'homecoming' is largely absent from the work of Didion, for whom the act of driving itself is cause for worry, and whose deep emotional and historical attachment to Sacramento makes departure a strictly necessary evil.

By contrast, Thompson and his several literary avatars are reluctant when it comes to arrivals, the inevitability of which is a source of considerable tension. The opening chapter of *Fear and Loathing* provides a particularly good example, beginning as it does with the same sense of geographical imprecision found in Didion: “We were somewhere around Barstow, on the edge of the desert, when the drugs began to take hold” (4). Thompson, unlike Didion, celebrates this dislocation, as it provides a geographical parallel to the multiple planes of consciousness contained in his trunk, a literal space to act and think beyond the scrutiny of the mainstream, and the law. Lindsey Banco neatly describes this correspondence using the double meaning of the word 'tripping,' referring both to travel and hallucinogen use, in relation to Henri Lefebvre's characterization of 'lived' or representational spaces as “extra-logical or irrational, prone to emerging from things like intoxication 0and effective at countering hegemonic totalities” (153). In the same way that Thompson's drug stash quickly becomes less “a formal means of documenting reality” and more “an account of the seemingly endless ways reality can be created and recreated by the psyche of drug users,” the ambiguity of his physical whereabouts

on the road renders him perilously disconnected from civilization, but also happily free of its constraints (Banco 159). And Las Vegas, as possibly the most postmodern city on the planet, is an ideal urban extension of these qualities. Robert Venturi et al., writing on roadside Vegas as a paradigmatic example of cultural acceleration in the late twentieth century around the same time *Fear and Loathing* was published, describes it as "a new landscape of big spaces, high speeds, and complex programs," where "styles and signs make connections among many elements, far apart and seen fast. The message is basely commercial; the context is basically new" (8-9). Or, from Thompson's somewhat less abstract perspective: "In a town full of bedrock crazies, nobody even notices an acid freak" (12).

But this dislocation, and the lack of censure and restraint that accompanies it, is repeatedly intercut with reminders of the actual job at hand—the need to become located, to be in a specific place at a specific time, and to play a specific role befitting that location. The first of these reminders appears early, in the book's second paragraph:

> Press-registration for the fabulous Mint 400 was already underway, and we had to get there by four to claim our sound-proof suite. A fashionable sporting magazine in New York had taken care of the reservations, along with this huge red Chevy convertible we'd just rented off a lot on the Sunset Strip... and I was, after all, a professional journalist, so I had an obligation to cover the story, for good or ill. (4)

Aside from simply getting in the way of an otherwise hedonistic endeavour, the rapid transition from the intentionally vague ('somewhere around Barstow') to the begrudgingly specific (the Mint 400, the soundproof suite, by four) implicates Thompson in a system of upper class exchange that does not match well with his countercultural image. This is owing both to his obligations and status as a working professional, as well as the fact that the instrument of his

newfound mobility, an ostentatious convertible dubbed the Great Red Shark, has been rented for him by 'a fashionable sporting magazine in New York.' More importantly, the imperative also robs him of the anonymity necessary to function in the manner that Banco, through Lefebvre, describes above. The most immediate, obvious, and grave consequences of this, and those to which Thompson refer most frequently, involve clashing with authority figures, usually the police. “Until about a year ago,” he notes, “there was a giant billboard on the outskirts of Las Vegas, saying: DON'T GAMBLE WITH MARIJUANA! IN NEVADA: POSSESSION – 20 YEARS! SALE – LIFE! So I was not entirely at ease drifting around the casinos on this Saturday night with a car full of marijuana and head full of acid” (20). And while Thompson is responsible for several crimes throughout the trek, it is not necessarily criminality, but idleness or inattention, the mistake of being located, that places one at risk. “The mentality of Las Vegas is so grossly atavistic that a really massive crime often slips by unrecognized,” he says, before launching into an anecdote about a drifter acquaintance who spent a week in jail for 'vagrancy': “he was standing on a street corner near the Circus Circus, watching the multi-colored fountain, when the cop-cruiser pulled up. Wham. Straight to jail. No phone call, no lawyer, no charge” (79).

This logic of location versus dislocation appears repeatedly throughout much of Thompson's work, not only geographically, but in social and stylistic respects. Bill Reynolds notes “the way he could pull the reader's leg at times, and would dance on filigrees of imagined scenarios for a paragraph or two before getting back to the actual, the factual, and the journalistic job at hand,” and much of his humour clearly derives from the straight-laced element invading his space as a consequence of his occupation (53). Indeed, these various forms of 'locating' Thompson depend upon and react with one another across registers, as the social threat presented by such figures—hitchhikers, hotel maids, cops, waitresses, casual onlookers, assorted clerks,

bouncers, and barmen—derives from their potential to give Thompson away, or turn him in. Moreover, this threat is itself exacerbated by the flights of fancy Reynolds calls attention to, ranging from tall tales to full-blown psychoactive meltdowns. “Can we *maintain*?” is among the first questions asked in *Fear and Loathing*, when picking up a hitchhiker on the way into Vegas (5). It is also among the first answered, in the negative, as a heavily impaired Thompson invents a bizarre story about murdering a heroin dealer named Savage Henry in retaliation for a theft. This departure from strict journalism (along with any pretense of fact whatsoever) is indicative of the entertaining digressions, free association, and general weirdness found in a road narrative like *Easy Rider*, and corresponds to the lax social guidelines of the space. But it also unnerves the hitchhiker, and the prospect of his contacting local police negates these qualities by threatening to locate Thompson in a literal, geographical sense: “He'll report us at once to some kind of outback nazi law enforcement agency, and they'll run us down like dogs” (5). Instances like this suggest that the pseudonym Raoul Duke serves not just a literary function, but an immediately pragmatic one; when a hotel clerk delivers a telegram with his real name on it and inquires about payment and the condition of the room, Thompson (as Duke) insists that his 'associate' is still in L.A. and is able to skip out on the bill undetected. Not only is it difficult for the reader to find Thompson, even in name only, as an authorial presence in the text, those populating the narrative itself are unable to find him either.

Alongside and related to this decidedly practical aversion to being arrested, are Thompson's more philosophical reasons for preferring the road as a space of dislocation—a continued belief in the road as holding the potential for important interaction with fellow travellers. In contrast to Didion's solitude, Thompson rarely drives alone, and his indiscriminate association with the array of colourful but like-minded individuals who join him are reflective of

his attitude toward the revolutionary potential of the sixties, which is found in the unlikeliest of places (or non-places, as the case may be). This is generally true of *Fear and Loathing*, as a lingering focus on the unusual partnership between Duke and Dr. Gonzo, the fictional analogue of Chicano lawyer and activist Oscar Zeta Acosta, adds the 'buddy' genre to the narrative's already rather long list of cultural lineages. “I want you to understand that this man at the wheel is my attorney! He's not just some dingbat I found on the Strip,” Duke says to the hitchhiker. “This man is extremely valuable to me” (5-6). But it is especially true of *Hell's Angels*, much of which has directly to do with the road as a site of community formation, and the way these communities interact with 'places,' rural towns in particular. “Despite the anarchic possibilities of the machines they ride and worship,” the Hells Angels “are intensely aware of belonging, of being able to depend on each other” (41). Referred to and self-identified as outlaws, they are an unapologetically overt iteration of the extralegal tendencies of Thompson himself, in addition to being a quality example of the kinds of eccentrics that are drawn to the road, and the kinds of eccentricities permitted there. And like Thompson, their collective interactions with authority, and by extension their own survival as a culture, can easily be reduced to the problem of location versus dislocation. The bulk of Thompson's report, for example, concerns the tension surrounding the Angels' Labour Day run to a small resort community called Bass Lake, and the scramble for law enforcement to contain, reroute, exile, and otherwise manage the outlaws along the way. The first step of this process is simply to find out where they plan to appear: “The destination of a run is kept secret as long as possible,” Thompson notes, “hopefully, to keep the cops guessing” (81). Similarly, their inclusion of outsiders in club activities is largely dependent on geographical factors. One must either be likewise mobile like Thompson or a member of another motorcycle club (the guarded respect between the almost exclusively white Angels, and

the exclusively black East Bay Dragons MC comes to mind), or otherwise be invested in protecting the Angels from police surveillance and influence:

> On one of these crowded holidays a convoy of Angels is going to disappear like a blip shooting off the edge of a radar screen. All it will take is one of those rare gigs the outlaws are forever seeking: a ranch or big farm with a friendly owner, a piece of rural turf beyond the reach of the fuzz, where they can all get drunk and naked and fall on each other like goats in the rut, until they all pass out from exhaustion. It would be worth buying a police radio, just to hear the panic. (81)

Passages like this one link the preservation of anti-authoritarian cultures and values to physical spaces where they can be expressed without condemnation. Beyond the road, the most notable example of such a space is perhaps Thompson's coverage of Ken Kesey's house parties in La Honda, where the Angels make inroads into the intellectual community and discover an affinity for LSD. But, like many of Thompson's depictions of the law, it also demonstrates the severity of the threat posed to these spaces by those seeking to impose a more mainstream propriety for financial, political, or 'moral' reasons.

Indeed, as much as Thompson's work glorifies the road as a space of independent thought and action (of 'tripping,' so to speak), it is ultimately more a eulogy than a call to arms, a record of the mass colonization and commercialization of this space and erosion of what is seen as its desirable aspects. As someone for whom this development presents an immediate danger, Thompson usually chooses to express it through the language of authoritarianism and pathologization. While songs like “Wichita Lineman” comprise the soundtrack to Didion's road writing, “One Toke Over the Line” is what blares on the radio as Duke and Gonzo drive across the Mojave, and accompanies the pair's cautious dealings with the hitchhiker. It reappears as

Thompson flees Vegas in a fit of paranoia after trashing his room at the Mint and a close call with an amiable highway patrolman in nearby Baker:

> The pig had done me on all fronts, and now he was going off to chuckle about it on the west edge of town, waiting for me to make a run for L.A. […] If these righteous outback predators ever got their stories together... and they would; it was inevitable in a town this small... that would cash my check all around. I'd be lucky to leave town alive. A ball of tar and feathers dragged onto the prison bus by angry natives. This was it: The crisis. (42)

And while the extent of this sort of colonization and the force with which it is administered is more imagined than not in *Fear and Loathing*, the reality of it is front and centre in *Hell's Angels*, where in spite of the subject material the road is depicted as heavily policed both by those with and without badges. Aside from the general condemnation of the Angels by motorists, the taxpaying public, and even the majority of their fellow motorcyclists, a number of passages concerning the logistics around the Bass Lake run indicate that the road is more a space of confinement and control than the wild-west style lawlessness implied by popular media and art. During the event, Thompson reports that "Angels were being rounded up and driven north along Highway 156 toward the county line," and "side roads were blocked by state troopers while dozens of helmeted deputies—many from neighboring counties—ran the outlaws through the gauntlet" (12). At times, these efforts veer into somewhat more unreasonable displays, such as the tactic, later used against Berkeley anti-war protestors, of "seizing people at random and running radio checks on their driving records, [and] if the person being detained had even one unpaid traffic or parking citation he would be 'taken off the street'—a police euphemism meaning 'put in jail'" (23). Thompson's confrontations with such figures—including officers who refuse to be taped while answering questions, a civilian mercenary at Bass Lake who threatens him with a

pistol, and various casual participants in the hysteria on the day of the run—reflect the fallout from some of the sensationalism surrounding the Angels, and the ambiguously valid attempts at curbing criminal activity in places from which it is likely to originate. But they also work to document the broader change in aesthetics, behavioural codes, and other indicators of 'respectability' that characterize American highways in the era of mass mobility.

Disheartening interactions like these are instructive, as Thompson's work is ultimately about the way these kinds of changes in spatial boundaries and attributes are reflected personally and interpersonally. His use of Duke and similar personae, or even his chosen genre of writing for example, augments his own credibility as someone who could believably carry on such a lifestyle, and provides a lens through which to chronicle such developments from a relatable subjective viewpoint. Like Didion, he strives to exist on 'both sides of the culture,' taking into account large social shifts in American life and those invested in seeing them continue, but also those who are made to deal, usually for the worse, with their impact. The contrast between the two is a key component of his illustrations of Las Vegas, where "once you get blacklisted on the Strip, for any reason at all, you either get out of town or retire to nurse your act along, on the cheap, in the shoddy limbo of North Vegas... out there with the gunsels, the hustlers, the drug cripples and all the other losers" (71). This merciless ecosystem, where "the shark ethic prevails," renders protagonist Duke increasingly paranoid and alienated over the course of the novel as he sheds important companions and resorts to increasingly audacious measures to avoid discovery (Thompson, *Vegas* 33). Jason Vredenburg, commenting on the novel in relation to the political philosophy of Agamben, Negri, and Hardt, goes so far as to suggest that Thompson's character fashions himself after *homo sacer*, "a character in Roman law who had been banned from the law and therefore could be killed by anyone without punishment," and who "is

abandoned to a state of nature, no longer protected by the state of law from violence by the state or by anyone else" (153). This equivalence, while extreme when applied to *Fear and Loathing*, might be said to derive from the fugitive mindset cultivated in Thompson while embedded with the Angels, reinforced by roughly twenty years of casual violence in associated films and literature.

Indeed, the effect is even more pronounced in *Hell's Angels*, where the outlaws as a class must contend with law enforcement following a spate of bad press, and directly opposite tourists and vacationers as a more wholesome iteration of American road culture. There was absolutely no precedent," Thompson writes, "in the years after World War II, for large gangs of hoodlums on motorcycles, revelling in violence, worshipping mobility... to whoop it up with other gangs of cyclists in some country hamlet entirely unprepared to handle even a dozen peaceful tourists" (37). In several examples both within and outside the scope of the narrative, cops compensate for this obvious lack of numbers by fracturing the group both socially and geographically, by way of bylaws prohibiting motorcyclists from riding in close formation, classification of the Angels as a criminal organization, and showing up in person during events to scatter and compartmentalize members. Vredenburg's analysis applies here just as readily, as the Angels' antagonistic attitude is continually reinforced by negative and often dangerous interactions with those they encounter. "The highways are crowded with people who drive as if their sole purpose in getting behind the wheel is to avenge every wrong ever done them by man, beast or fate," Thompson writes. "A motorcyclist has to drive as if everybody else on the road is out to kill him. A few of them are, and many of those who aren't are just as dangerous" (38). For his part, Thompson is likewise made to navigate the fragile social climates that result from these problems as he attempts in vain to track down various figures of interest for the book—Fresno's chapter president, for example,

“exists in some kind of mysterious limbo and can only be found by means of a secret phone number, which changes constantly”—or at the narrative's conclusion, when he calls out an Angel for domestic abuse and is abruptly and savagely beaten for it, ending his affiliation with the club (81).

Finally, these disciplinary measures taken by law enforcement against various categories of undesirables appear to be mostly invested not in curbing any criminality or even deviance on the part of such groups, but in reclaiming the spaces they frequent and redefining how these spaces are to be used as mobility becomes a primary characteristic of Western civilization in the late twentieth century. Much of this effort, put in the most general possible terms, has to do with power. “American law enforcement procedures have never been designed to control large groups of citizens in rebellion, but to protect the social structure against specifically criminal acts, or persons,” Thompson observes in *Hell's Angels* (58). “More and more often the police are finding themselves in conflict with whole blocs of the citizenry, none of them criminals in the traditional sense of the word, but many as potentially dangerous—to the police—as any armed felon” (58). The Angels are tentatively included in this category (by Thompson, but also by myself), given that in most cases of legal trouble mentioned by the narrative no actual crimes are found to have taken place, and thus provide an excellent example of how some of the more general characteristics of non-places—speed, functionality, privacy, solitude, a lack of individual or collective identity—do not necessarily occur naturally, but are imposed on a space by way of a concerted endeavour to socialize its inhabitants according to specific guidelines. The transition of the highway from 'place' to 'non-place' in this manner is also a substantial ingredient of *Fear and Loathing*'s most crazed detours, as Duke's inner monologue repeatedly gets sidetracked by imaginary conversations with what he thinks are his eventual, inevitable captors, eventually

succumbing to an exaggerated version of a kind of aggressive mainstream morality:

> Sweet Jesus, I am tired! I'm scared. I'm crazy. This culture has beaten me down. What the fuck am I doing out here? This is not even the story I was supposed to be working on. My agent warned me against it. All signs were negative [….] Jesus Creeping God! Is there a priest in this tavern? I want to confess! I'm a fucking sinner! Venal, mortal, carnal, major, minor—however you want to call it, Lord... I'm guilty. (38-39)

And like Thompson's alter-ego, at times the Angels flirt with mainstream sensibilities simply as a result from being in contact with them, and over an unexpectedly short time period. “Barger and his people get along pretty well with the cops,” he writes in an aside that would later become controversial among those of both groups. “In most cases, and with a few subtle differences, they operate on the same motional frequency. Both the cops and the Angels deny this. […] Yet behind the sound and fury, they are both playing the same game, and usually by the same rules” (21). This begrudging preoccupation with things patently against their own ethos—mostly media attention, and the money, prestige, and influence that accompanies it— implicates rebel figures like Thompson or the Angels in the same exchanges of power as their adversaries, in large part owing to their mutual fixation on these spaces through which power has come to be organized.

It is this constant, unfaltering presence of opposition, real or imagined, that makes it considerably easier to appreciate a text like *On the Road* as an expression of genuine anti-authoritarian sentiment than anything by Thompson, since the former was written during the early '50s at a time where the open road still strongly held connotations of meaningful rebellion. While Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty certainly encounter their share of heavy-handed intimidation and bogus charges from authority figures, these instances are minor speed-bumps in their larger quest for individual and collective actualization. In 1971, however, well after

Kerouac's meteoric rise to literary stardom and the construction of the Interstate, this hopeful rebellious spirit is a wave that has already broken and rolled back. Thompson's oeuvre, then, functions better as an update on the shabby state of Kerouac's original vision, than as an independent and mostly self-contained countercultural project. His use of position and geography described above is significant not just because it functions well as a metaphor for the social unrest of the '60s, played out through petty turf wars or elaborate high-stakes games of hide-and-seek. It is also significant because it shows Thompson, and those like him, increasingly on the losing side of these contests. Though himself enabled by an increasingly refined infrastructure of incalculable benefit to the public, he also harbours an awareness of that public's reactionary potential, a constant low-level suspicion of perhaps having said too much or acted too strangely. His accounts of these moments in his own professional life on the road translate to a culture war waged covertly across American highways as his own freewheeling attitude, and literal freewheeling, are reflected in the strange anarchic factions of proud degenerates who likewise find their autonomy under threat. These skirmishes are the growing pains of supermodernity, the introduction of complicated new changes to public space and the changes in public life that accompany them.

The Interstate system set America into motion, its citizens no longer penned in by the vast distances that once made lighting out from home a daunting and relatively uncommon undertaking. Upon their departure, however, the realization set in that finding the way back again might not be possible, and even slowing down was likely out of the question. As this change of

pace eventually became a complete way of life, many of those propelled out of their stable, familiar lives in search of the ample rewards to be had on the road found little recourse but to keep driving, their final destination continually disappearing around the next bend. In keeping with Eisenhower's original vision of the Interstate as an important enabler of mass mobility, increased commerce, and national defense, road infrastructure is among the foremost examples of the kinds of systems we engineer around ourselves in order to grow ever more prosperous and further secure our wellbeing as a species. However, it is also a useful object lesson for considering the new challenges, difficulties, and pitfalls that this progress itself entails; Paul Virilio glibly notes that "to invent the family automobile is to produce the pile-up on the highway" (*Accident* 10). The various approaches to the subject of highways outlined here are meant to have provided a basic, practical example of how this balancing act works in a supermodern setting, and how it comes to structure human life on an everyday experiential level. Highways are a modern extension of the American frontier mythos, having largely democratized the dramatic act of leaving home. In the next chapter, I elaborate further on this sense of homelessness in relation to the space of the hotel as a symbol for the decline of those anthropological places most associated with stability, comfort, and social and psychological growth.

Chapter Two: Hotels

This chapter examines hotels in relation to home, housing, and hospitality. Read in the context of the previous chapter, which is in many ways about a symbolic loss of home induced by the rise of mass mobility, this chapter can be taken as a look at how the actual concepts of home and homelessness have evolved in response to this loss. Of all domestic spaces, hotels are perhaps the least so, catering to a form of dwelling that is readily achievable, but contrived—they provide the safety of a roof and four walls, but none of the qualities of stability and permanence that generally define where one 'lives.' This faux-domestic quality is the basis of my use of the hotel here as a supermodern equivalent of home: a system of hospitality that satisfies the basic human need for shelter in highly adaptable ways and with a minimum of practical inconvenience, but which consequently also suffers from a lack of the social, historical, or cultural connectedness that designates 'home' as the space perhaps most constitutive of one's personal identity. As a kind of surrogate home, hotels both symbolize and contribute to the miraculous ease of contemporary travel, a bed and amenities available wherever one wishes to stay. But they are not actual homes, nor are they viewed as such, and the reasoning behind this distinction helps elucidate how supermodern mobility affects the material and discursive construction of this most elemental of anthropological places.

The first section of this chapter foregrounds these various constructions of home through a consideration of hospitality, a term meant specifically to comment on the convergence of social and spatial elements in a domestic context. Using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the concept as a theoretical guide, this section outlines two equally compelling and valid approaches to how hospitality works—one predicated on intimacy, exchange, and recognition, and another that sees such things as cumbersome, instead emphasizing an indiscriminate sense of welcome,

unfettered personal agency, and privacy. These two versions of hospitality are then mapped onto a consideration of hotel spaces themselves, and used to illustrate how they change architecturally and geographically going into the post-Fordist period, as well as how these changes speak to a shift in emphasis from anthropological places to non-places on a social and symbolic level. Accordingly, the analysis offered here indicates a trend similar to that observed in the previous chapter, with hotels becoming more popular, more efficient, and more expansive in scope, but also less invested in fostering a sense of civic identity or social inclusiveness. As a means of addressing the effects of these changes on the popular perception of hotels and similar spaces during this transitional period, this section is also followed up with a few general remarks on how they are thematized in popular American art along these lines.

The second and third sections turn to close readings of hotels in novels by Karen Tei Yamashita and Dave Eggers, intended to help unpack the some of the broader social and cultural implications of hospitality working in these two modes. How the cultivation of personal identity changes in response to globalization has been a question central to the careers of both of these authors, and the literary hotels that appear in the novels discussed here are useful metaphors for exploring this question due to their uncertain distance from the idea of home and the various facets of identity connected to that idea. The titular hotel of Yamashita's novel *I Hotel*, for example, can scarcely be called a hotel at all, having been appropriated by its tenants as long-term housing, and having subsequently acquired the more abstract qualities of a structure holding that status. This disjunction between the implied transitional logic of the space as a hotel, and the practical use of it as a permanent home, allows Yamashita to demonstrate the interdependencies between spatiality, sociality, and identity, and how these things operate differently under different conditions. The residents of the I-Hotel, almost exclusively immigrants of widely varying

description, forge a new hybrid culture through their close proximity to one another in the shared living space of the hotel, but also through their shared experiences acclimating to a new homeland that is itself only tenuously based on principles of global cosmopolitanism. But the anthropological place nurtured here is easier to destroy than create, as the vagaries of urban redevelopment and globalized capitalism continuously threaten to dislodge this community from the space it calls home and scatter its members once again across the American landscape.

The intensification of this sociospatial instability going into the new millennium is explored more fully in Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King*, which follows a white American businessman attempting to rebuild his life from a Hilton in Saudi Arabia, made globally itinerant in the aftermath of Western deindustrialization. Estranged from his family, racked by social and sexual dysfunction, and hoping for a long-overdue win in his professional life, Eggers's protagonist can largely be read as a victim of the same structural disorder that simmers forebodingly at the edges of Yamashita's novel. This personal instability and isolation is not only reproduced in the non-place where he resides, but in the waning attachment he has to his American identity as he is forced to abandon his homeland in pursuit of short-term financial goals just to stay afloat. Here, the hotel is positioned as part of a larger global system that indifferently contains, filters, and circulates capital worldwide, including the workers of all kinds that are made likewise migratory as part of and in pursuit of it. In this role and in comparison to the hotel of Yamashita's novel, it documents both the increased sophistication and acceleration of this system over time on a functional material basis, as well as how this process further complicates or sidelines the other social or psychological needs that concepts like home have typically served to address.

1. Hotels and Hospitality.

As a discussion about hotels and hotel space is inevitably a discussion about 'hospitality,' which is a deceptively complicated phenomenon, it is beneficial to begin by looking at this term in the abstract. A particularly helpful line of thought for my purposes here comes from a seminar by Jacques Derrida, who examines hospitality as comprised of two oppositional concepts. The first of these concepts takes the form of a dialectical relationship between host and guest. Derrida illustrates this dialectic at work using the trial of Socrates, who requests to be treated like a foreigner during his defence:

> What does he [Socrates] say in presenting himself as *like* a foreigner, at once *as though* he were a foreigner (as a fiction) and *inasmuch as* in effect he does become the foreigner by language […], a foreigner accused in a language he doesn't speak, a defendant required to justify himself, in the language of the other, before the law and the judges of the city? […] They speak as (or like) judges, the citizens who speak in the name of their citizenship. Socrates turns the situation on its head: he asks them to treat him like a foreigner for whom marks of respect can be demanded, a foreigner because of his age and a foreigner because of his language, the only language he is used to; it is either that of philosophy, or everyday language, popular language (as opposed to the clever language of the judges or of sophistry, of rhetoric and juridical jargon). (17)

Socrates's legal gambit here is a shrewd one due to the paradox that Derrida identifies in the hospitality he asks for: though by definition someone who does not belong, a foreigner shown hospitality *does* by definition belong, *because* they are being shown hospitality. In a simplistic sense, it is a plea for mercy, as this trial is Socrates's first experience with the punitive arm of the Athenian legal system at the somewhat out-of-touch age of seventy. But the real genius of the

request lies in the fact that hospitality defined in this way is the principle upon which democracy itself rests. Derrida's point is that the foreigner does not exist in a vacuum. Welcoming foreigners as guests ostensibly means welcoming what they represent—their names, families, cultures, backgrounds, histories, opinions, etc.—and finding a way to integrate them within the existing structures of a society. Socrates, as all guests do, is imposing on his hosts, thereby obtaining a certain authority or dominance over them by asking to be accepted. To treat him like a foreigner forces the judges to recognize him as someone who does not belong, speaks differently, and holds different views, but welcome him anyway as the citizen that he, legally speaking, already is. To do otherwise and execute him for his 'crime' of publicly criticizing the Athenian power elite would be fundamentally inhospitable and thus undemocratic, proving true the 'impious' statements that got him arrested in the first place.

The second version of hospitality that Derrida offers is characterized by an *absence* of this host/guest dialectic. Here, hospitality does not have the social elements that underpin Socrates's interactions with his government. It is an automatic imperative, free of the interpersonal complexities surrounding acceptance or mutual recognition, and extended to all regardless of identity. Consequently, it is designated by the term 'absolute hospitality':

> Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place that I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. (25)

Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality in this way helps refine how we think about it in a contemporary context, with the disparity between these two definitions inviting a number of

important questions. They include:

> Does hospitality consist of interrogating the new arrival? Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer (which seems very human and sometimes loving, assuming hospitality should be linked to love—an enigma that we will leave in reserve for the moment): what is your name? […] Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question *and* the name? Is it more loving to question or not to question? to call by the name or without the name? to give or to learn a name already given? Does one give hospitality to a subject? (27-29)

These questions are essentially to ask: does hospitality consist of treating the 'Other' as a foreigner, or as an 'absolute, unknown, anonymous other,' what Derrida calls the 'barbarian'? How *this* question is answered has implications for how we understand virtually any socio-spatial phenomenon in any register, including concepts like 'home,' or 'belonging,' or 'citizenship.' Consequently, Derrida suggests, the issue of how we define hospitality is implicitly central to any discussion that revolves around such concepts, including national and international politics, cultural identity, commerce, immigration, emigration, travel, tourism, civic pride and rivalry, right down to the act of visiting in its simplest incarnations, all within and across countries, regions, cities, and neighborhoods.

The answer to that question, of course, is a nebulous, unsatisfying combination of 'both' and 'it depends.' But simply raising it is useful for understanding the ways in which hotels, as infrastructure dedicated solely to providing hospitality, have transitioned from places to non-places, as well as the reasons for this change. A.K. Sandoval-Strausz describes several broad transformations activated by a system of institutionalized hospitality in early American history, suggesting that the invention of the hotel is among the primary ingredients of what would

eventually become globalization. For example, hotels helped integrate the settlements in which they were located “into expanding networks of commodities, capital, and information that were vital to community prosperity in the formative decades of national and international capitalism” (Sandoval-Strausz 3). Alongside this development of hotels as hubs of economic activity, however, is an equally important and compelling view of them as social technology, precisely because they encouraged the kind of dialectical confrontations described above by Derrida. American hotels were relentlessly egalitarian from their inception, growing out of the inns and public houses of the 1700s, which in addition to providing food, drink, and entertainment for locals, also provided lodging for travellers, and were often run directly out of the proprietor's residence and staffed by the proprietor's family. Even as the first major hotels proper were initially designed by Federalists as bases of political operation and socialization designed to keep out the lower classes, “the exclusionary nature of hotel sociability was recognized as such by Americans of less exalted status, who in response scorned their presumed superiors and their new playgrounds” (Sandoval-Strausz 44). Such strident resistance rendered these hotels economically unviable, and they were quickly replaced with inclusive meeting places optimistically referred to as 'palaces of the public.'

Hotel space was thus largely characterized by a kind of melting pot ethos similar to Derrida's illustration of a hospitality that can be described as 'social,' 'conditional,' or 'dialectical,' predicated on mutual recognition of, negotiation between, and coming to terms with the differences embodied in the figures of host and foreigner/guest. In other words, “when a city or town opened a hotel, it was demonstrating a willingness to welcome outsiders [and] was thus a material manifestation of cultural tolerance, a significant episode in the development of the modern idea of a pluralistic, cosmopolitan society” (Sandoval-Strausz 3). Hotels signalled a

commitment to facilitating the crossing of boundaries geographical and otherwise, which helped expedite the difficult work of organizing those of different dispositions under one literal, but also conceptual, roof. The social atmospheres that these spaces cultivated in turn yielded cultural and commercial relationships that were increasingly sophisticated, multifaceted, broadly beneficial, and global in scope. Owing to these characteristics, the emergence of hotels as institutions designed not only to receive foreigners, but to meaningfully integrate them within communities of hitherto unseen diversity, supplies a powerful example of the benefits of 'anthropological place' in one of its most historically consequential forms.

This use of hotels as social beacons persisted well into the early twentieth century, as the hotel lobby gained traction as both a space of unparalleled decadence, as well as a space that made itself accessible to a number of marginalized demographics previously unable to enjoy such luxuries. Early hotels like Boston's Tremont House made a name for themselves by “aiming exclusively for the top and richest stratum of European and American visitors” with “international cuisine, private guestrooms with locking doors, free soap and washbasins, bellboys, and indoor plumbing” (Watkin 15). The additional amenities bankrolled by such patrons, however, were readily extended to the wider public, and lobbies became spaces of relatively affordable entertainment where most demographics found meaningful representation. Sandoval-Strausz notes that “bars, dining halls, and assembly rooms offered ways to enjoy a hotel's amenities without having to pay the full cost of a stay,” in addition to luxuries uncommon to most such as “well-upholstered furniture, elegant paintings and drapery, and gaslight at no cost whatsoever” (65). The example set by these prosperous urban landmarks was soon imitated elsewhere, as “the expansion of America, the great distances between towns and the lack of traditional patterns all encouraged the growth of hotels,” and “every town in the burgeoning new

country eagerly sought to have its own Tremont House as a symbol of success and popularity" (Watkin 15). Hotels became known for hosting events held by various working class associations —of farmers, labourers, mechanics, artisans, and the like—and even those wealthy patrons who requested private meals in their rooms to avoid dining in the presence of the less affluent were often refused. The early to mid 1900s saw the rise of iconic hostelries like New York's Plaza Hotel, built in 1907, as well as a counter-movement in the proliferation of the first major hotel chains. The Buffalo Statler hotel for example, built in 1909 with the average traveller specifically in mind, was the prototype for a new mass market hospitality system that sought to increase circulation through major city centres with the slogan: 'A room and a bath for a dollar and a half.'

The creation of these chains marked a transitional period in the construction, management, usage, and symbolic connotations of hotels. During this period, even chain hotels retained their status as centres of urban life, reflected in their distinct and stately architecture. But the hotel business became increasingly challenging as the infrastructure began to see use by increasingly wider demographics, and buildings grew to provide lodging for thousands. "Despite all the 'labor-saving' devices" implemented by architects and engineers to adapt to this growth, "these hotels employed one to two people *per guest*, requiring a management organization that rivaled the most complicated corporations" (Berger 180). To offset these difficulties, hoteliers like E.M. Statler "capitalized on the cultural movements of standardization, efficiency, and mass consumption but also promoted the idea of perfect service as part of a holistic system that included architecture, engineering, and human service" (Berger 180). While working to retain the elements of hotel design conducive to Derridean 'social' or 'dialectical' hospitality, these modifications also suggest the beginnings of an opposing trend: the gradual decay of these inclinations concurrent with the decentralization of American city space that really began in

earnest during the latter twentieth century. “Like the self-contained superblock, the privatized space of the metropolitan hotel could be said to have turned its back on the city” around this time, Marc Katz notes (137). And yet “at the same time, the hotel recuperated urban life on terms that extended its own ability to manufacture desire. The hotel was not just an airbrushed city within the city; it also sold the city outside, the dirty city, a distinctly cosmopolitan self-image (Katz 137). Similarly, while more modest hotels oriented toward business and middle-class travel offered only a bedroom, “making it easier for a wider range of people to stay in cities cheaply and respectably, […] for the parlors, dining rooms, and lounges that had long mediated between hotel patrons and the city, the guest at a businessmen's hotel had to go elsewhere” (Cocks 88).

As globalization accelerated and intensified in the decades following WWII, these trends continued, with modern hotels of all kinds and catering to all demographics becoming increasingly homogenized, functional, asocial, and symbolically detached from the urban landscapes in which they were situated. As the hotel's former role in promoting urban sociality is apparent in different ways across market segments, so too are there a few different manifestations of this counter-trend toward decentralization and disintegration that are worth examining. On the one hand, there is the evolution of the luxury or major metropolitan hotel, which had by the '60s begun to suggest what could be described as an almost complete architectural disinvestment from the surrounding urban fabric. The most prominent example is John Portman's Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, famously described by Fredric Jameson as a paradigmatic example of postmodern spatiality: “The glass skin achieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation of the Bonaventure from its neighborhood: it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel's outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself, but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it” (42). A number of related architectural

developments follow: the Bonaventure lacks a front entrance befitting a well known international hotel—one enters through walkways elevated high above street level, or an unassuming pedestrian entrance that somewhat resembles a concrete bunker. And once inside, it is discovered that neither of these lead directly to the lobby, just one example of the bewildering interior of a space designed to dislocate and disorient. Alongside this architectural trend toward dislocation within the hotel space arrives one of more a sociocultural bent pertaining to the space outside: the use of the hotel as a conference centre that offers neither a striking encapsulation of its home city in microcosm, nor encourages an exploration of it outside the confines of the tourist infrastructure already set up. Donald McNeill notes that "in Atlanta—again, the Portman laboratory—the local Tourist bureau apparently boasted that it is possible 'to attend a conference in the city without ever having to set foot outside'" (386).

On the other hand, at the other end of the economic spectrum, and perhaps the more patently obvious major manifestation of decentralized city space, is the ascendancy of the motel, which was created to support the growth of American automobility as discussed in the previous chapter. Motels, like their more historically entrenched urban counterparts, actually also began as a social technology at least somewhat invested in 'anthropological place.' They originally grew out of the motor camps, courts, cottages, and villages of the '20s and '30s designed to bring tourists and migrant labourers to smaller towns where large hotels were unnecessary and too costly to build. In a similar fashion to the hotel lobby, many "contained coffee shops or restaurants as part of an integrated complex," the most well-known example of which is probably the Sanders Court and Cafe, which would eventually become fast-food juggernaut KFC (Jakle et al. 43). In the years following WWII, motels were run primarily by mom-and-pop outfits, an umbrella term for businesses run by pairs or small groups "including closed corporations,

multimember partnerships, as well as husbands and wives, which, in fact, represented the largest group of motel entrepreneurs from the 1930s to the 1960s" (Jakle et al. 57). This era of motel ownership generally emphasized and represented a localized, individualized, almost folksy form of entrepreneurship. Such groups not only usually financed the venture out of pocket or with substantial help from the government, but also erected the actual facilities themselves using prefab kits or by making renovations to existing buildings—indeed, "the petit-bourgeois ideology of the Jeffersonian vision for America seemed to be confirmed. And, it seemed to be further confirmed by the rural and small-town places in which the mom-and-pop tourist cabins sprang up" (Jakle et. al 64).

As the postwar years wore on, however, motel ownership became more difficult, motels themselves became more homogenous, and the rift between proprietors and their customers widened. This is due in some part to demand that came from the Highway Act, but even more so to a change in the tax code in 1954 that "not only stimulated new construction but also tended to limit the life expectancy of motel buildings, thus precipitating short-term ownership and cyclical renovation and modernization" (Jakle et al. 45). Jakle et al. describe the long-term effects of this change in legislation as depriving motel spaces of their more unique aspects, historical character, and ties to family ownership, as well as further exacerbating the precarity that would become endemic to other areas of the flexibilist economy in later years:

> Owners took part of their profits by disinvesting their buildings, which meant providing only minimal maintenance and repair. Buildings deteriorated until a change in ownership brought renovation, often embracing the latest fads and fashions in construction and styling. Architectural integrity in motel buildings was often short-lived. [...] It also encouraged builders to put up junky, flimsy buildings and to otherwise foster

> impermanence on the roadside. In 1960 the average lifespan of a motel building was calculated to be only nine years. (45-46)

As this ownership strategy took hold and the industry became more chaotic as a result, older forms of motel entrepreneurship gradually became untenable. “Mom and Pop were engulfed in the rising tide of big investors by the 1960s,” culminating in an explosion of corporate franchising and mass-marketing which would then find its way into mid-market hotel chains like Hilton, Sheraton, and Mariott (Jakle et al. 79). While these changes helped mitigate financial risk for the parties involved in running the business, the disadvantages to such a system were also considerable, having in general to do with a loss of connection between different levels of the business hierarchy. “For the franchisor,” for example, “there is a lack of involvement at the point of final sale and a potential loss of quality control. For the franchisee, there is a loss of independence, since only the prescribed product or service and the related business format can be adopted” (Jakle et al. 152). And for the customer, “the enhanced predictability that standardization brings becomes monotonous,” and “choices are circumscribed as fewer and fewer corporations come to dominate each retail sector through business format franchising. Along the American roadside, the same brands of gasoline, fast-food, and motel services appear over and over” (Jakle et al. 152).

What I want to identify in these examples is the transition of hotels away from their origins as social, egalitarian, geographically embedded 'anthropological places' indicative of a hospitality I have described elsewhere as 'social' in nature. By contrast, these new imperatives—homogenization, isolation, function, privacy, a lack of inbuilt public spaces or personalized models of ownership, and a symbolic placelessness or 'lifting out' of the surrounding landscape—are indicative of non-places that correspond to Derrida's descriptions of an unconditional,

anonymous, and fundamentally asocial 'absolute hospitality.' Returning to Derrida's questions regarding the distinctions between these two versions of hospitality, this change from social to absolute hospitality reveals a shift in priorities as the advantages of function begin to become more important than those of connection. Absolute hospitality corresponds well to the post-Fordist requirements of flexibility, convenience, and dynamism, because it permits movement unimpeded by the difficult process of integrating foreigners—of, in Derridean terms, questioning the foreigner, dealing with the question of a given foreigner (i.e., the symbolic and literal baggage they bring with them), and engaging the question of foreignness on a conceptual level. However, the loss of this social friction entails the loss of the host/guest dialectical confrontation, and consequently the loss of mutual recognition that Derrida suggests might indicate 'love,' which is to say the love implicit in approaching one's guest as a foreigner instead of a barbarian. This lack of connection or recognition gives rise to various forms of social discord like solitude, loneliness, and perhaps most importantly alienation, as both host and guest are, under these theoretical conditions, unable to discern the character, personality, or motives of the other.

These changes in spatial orientation, and the correspondent changes in hospitality and sociality that follow, are readily apparent in the art in which hotels appear. Douglas Tallack, writing specifically on the appearance of the hotel lobby in American literature and film, observes that “when examples do come to mind they tend to do so not as specifically memorable spaces but as spaces associated with events and even stories. […] Consequently, a starting definition of the hotel lobby might be that it is a space which *takes place* in narratives,” its textual character produced through the intersection between its fixed functions and routines, and the spontaneous events that it invites as a highly frequented local meeting place—chance meetings, stakeouts, rendez-vous, etc. (141). A primary example is the 1932 adaptation of the

German novel *Grand Hotel*, where "the stories of the five main characters in Goulding's film criss-cross the lobby in a succession of meetings, collisions, gazes and glances. There is constant foreground and background action as deals are struck, cons perpetrated, and relationships instigated, developed and broken" (Tallack 141). A similar dynamic informs the hardboiled crime fiction of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, as well as an obscure Sinclair Lewis novel called *Work of Art*, the title of which refers to the lobby of the protagonist's hometown hotel after being converted into a beloved centre for social activity. In 1907, Henry James wonders whether "the hotel-spirit may not just *be* the American spirit most seeking and most finding itself," as "a conception of publicity as the vital medium organized with the authority with which the American genius for organization, put on its mettle, alone could organize it" (105). Even Poe, famous largely for his chronicling of social rifts, estrangements, and antagonisms, begins "The Man of the Crowd," a story about obsessively seeking connection with the unknown and unknowable Other, in the lobby of a hotel.

But the appearances of hotels and motels in American art after roughly 1950, including other examples used by Tallack, offer a distinctly dissimilar illustration of lobby space: as a barrier or gateway, complete with gatekeeper in the form of a reception clerk. "At this stage there is sometimes an element of fiction or storytelling," he notes, "as in the excruciatingly embarrassing arrival of Nabokov's Humbert and Lolita at The Enchanted Hunters or Benjamin's prolonged efforts to book a room for himself and Mrs Robinson in *The Graduate*" (142). Stephen Schneck's 1965 novel *The Nightclerk* is particularly cynical on this point, quipping that "the pseudonymous and transient tribes of Smith, Jones, Johns, Brown, White and Gray have left veracity no room on the page. Reality has been crowded off the register. Names are regularly changed to protect the guilty" (qtd. in Tallack 142). In these cases, the lobby is no longer to be

lingered in, but passed through as inconspicuously as possible in order to reach one's room, “the site of exaggeratedly private acts” (Tallack 142). The tension yielded by this scenario has become particularly commonplace in American film, where focus has overwhelmingly shifted from lobbies to the private rooms themselves, usually to depict things like illicit sex, black market dealings, flights from law enforcement, extreme acts of violence, or, in the case of films like *No Country for Old Men*, *Natural Born Killers*, *True Romance*, and *Scarface*, several of these at once.

In keeping with Derrida's conception of 'absolute hospitality,' the hotel thus becomes eminently welcoming, but also indiscriminately so, casting hotels as spaces of functional convenience, but also of a certain menace and risk. For example, the more dramatic descriptions above simultaneously rely on both an undiscerning openness *toward* guests, and an intense atmosphere of privacy *between* them—as highly accessible, anonymous, and ephemeral versions of domestic space, hotels become even more ideal for criminality than a perpetrator's own permanent residence. This spatial orientation can be readily rephrased in terms of an absence of social exchange between host and guest, instances of hospitality involving a shifty barbarian and a host that doesn't ask questions—and I indeed wish to suggest that these associations, too, apply in various respects to all of the examples mentioned in the previous paragraph, as well as a great many others in literature, in film, and on stage. But the social dysfunction inherent in such a state of affairs is most baldly apparent in the horror film, where hosts and guests are either immediately pitted against one another, as with *Hotel Hell* or *Vacancy*, or slowly become estranged from one another over time, as with *The Shining* or *Identity*.

The best and best-known example, of course, is *Psycho*, which highlights a number of these socio-spatial dynamics at work. It begins in a cheap hotel room, where Mary Crane and

Sam Loomis meet in secret “so we can be secretive.” Their romance is characterized repeatedly as lacking propriety, partly owing to its existence exclusively in such spaces, as opposed to legitimately domestic places where a 'real' courtship might take form: “We can see each other. We can even have dinner. But respectably. In my house, with my mother's picture on the mantle, and my sister helping me boil a big steak for three.” Fleeing from the law after robbing her employer in a desperate attempt to finance a marriage to Sam, Crane ends up at a motel so removed from even the highway that it looks “like it was hiding from the world.” She signs the register with a fake name. The social and spatial estrangement of guest from host forms the governing logic of the film from here onward, as the murder of Crane by proprietor Norman Bates, Bates's subsequent crimes, and the suspense produced by those attempting to unravel the mystery, all result entirely from attempts at bringing these domains together. Crane is killed because Norman falls in love with her during their initial meeting in the motel's office, which encroaches on the codependent relationship he has with his mother. Arbogast is killed because he crosses this same line in a more literal way by investigating the Bates residence, which stands directly next to the motel but is made to appear worlds away through some creative camera work and its location on a tall hill with a winding stone staircase. Each of these transgressions is revisited in the film's climax, as Sam tries to draw information out of Norman at the motel, while Mary's sister Lila sneaks into the house. Finally, the murder of Mrs. Bates at the hands of her son, committed long before the events of the film, is the result of her taking a lover, which threatens the existing family structure in much the same way that Crane does. These instances collectively reinforce a socio-spatial dynamic of atomization and secrecy that stands opposite the cosmopolitan sociality found in renderings of hospitality infrastructure just a few decades earlier.

Psycho is also intensely personal in scale, and while it serves as an excellent study of this

host/guest-public/private disruption on this level, there is much to be said about the same phenomenon in the larger arenas of business, politics, and culture. Recalling the expansive terms of Derrida's argument, “this pact, this contract of hospitality that links *to* the foreigner and which *reciprocally* links the foreigner,” he notes, is “a question of knowing whether it counts beyond the individual and if it also extends to the family, to the generation, to the genealogy” (21). For Derrida, hospitality entails not only a meeting of host and guest, or an avoidance of this meeting, but also corresponds to the sum total of experience and identity embodied in these figures. The following discussions of Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel* and Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King* are therefore intended to expand the dimensions of this problem of hospitality to include not only questions of individual identity, but questions of collective identity of all kinds, in relation to the environments in which they develop.

In both novels, hotels are the direct setting in which characters work to define their identities in a variety of respects. But given their overt role as a form of housing, and thus ambiguously a form of home, hotels also function as a means by which to examine how this process can itself be stimulated, disrupted, or modulated by the spatial context in which it occurs. Yamashita's novel is a fictionalized account of the Yellow Power movement in 1970's California, which took shape largely within the shared space of a hotel appropriated as long-term housing by Asian American migrant workers since the early twentieth century. The unique status of the building—as an ostensibly temporary dwelling that nevertheless acquires a distinct history and culture because of this appropriation—provides Yamashita the opportunity to explore the ways in which a sense of home, as the concepetual foundation upon which identity is built, is dependent on anthropological places that support that process. Despite substantial differences between the existing identities of the hotel's tenants and visitors with respect to culture, creed, political

affiliation, and so forth, these differences slowly cohere within the space under the broad inclusive label of Asian American, which in turn provides a new vocabulary with which to articulate shared experiences, interests, and desires. Conversely, the eventual demolition of the hotel in 1977 signifies both a literal and symbolic loss of the home that it has become, as the destruction of the space also endangers the Asian American community that has formed within it. Yamashita uses the shifting, indeterminate status of the hotel to demonstrate how spatial elements work to shape the meanings of concepts like home, community, and foreignness, and how different manifestations of these concepts interact with one another within and across boundaries. For example, not only does the hotel serve to document the formation of a distinctly Asian American community, it also circumscribes and situates this community geographically within other sociospatial contexts, the most important of which is America itself. Doing so allows for an interrogation of what these various iterations of home entail both separately and in relation to each other, the ways in which they conceptually overlap or remain at odds, and how people seek to resolve these discrepancies.

By contrast, although the Dave Eggers novel engages many of the same themes as Yamashita concerning the equivalences between identity, community, home, and place, it does so through a use of hotel space emblematic of the absence of these things, rather than their presence. Like Yamashita's *I Hotel*, *Hologram* uses issues of foreignness and hospitality to explore identity formation in both an immediate personal sense, as well as the ways it links up with concepts like national identity, belonging, and citizenship. Whereas Yamashita accomplishes this by looking at a minority American population struggling to organize and assert itself within its wider surroundings near the beginnings of post-Fordist globalization, Eggers turns this dilemma on its head, setting his novel in the present day and placing a struggling

American businessman alone in a chain hotel overseas. The result is an entirely different approach to these topics, with the hotel providing a setting through which to discuss American deindustrialization, the forms of liquid modern instability that have followed in its wake, and the ways in which this instability has come to preclude anthropological place and its various byproducts—family and social connections, job security, cultural cohesion, etc. Rather than acting as an unexpected site of belonging and community in spite of its putative status as temporary lodging, the form of home offered by Eggers's hotel is aggressively impersonal, his protagonist's existence there solely the consequence of short-term economic circumstances. My use of hotel space as a concern common to these two novels is intended as a metaphor illustrative of the decline of anthropological places invested in social, conditional or dialectical hospitality and the sociality it implies, and the rise of the asocial absolute hospitality associated with non-places. The ways in which these comprehensive changes are experienced on a personal level as related by these two authors help provide a more detailed look at the interrelated intricacies of home, identity, hospitality, the spatial distribution of these concepts, and how they change alongside the rise of globalization over the course of the post-Fordist period.

2. Karen Tei Yamashita: *I Hotel*.

Karen Tei Yamashita's 2010 novel *I Hotel* is named after a real hotel—the International Hotel, informally known as the 'I-Hotel,' on the corner of Kearny and Jackson in San Francisco. It also, in its sizeable 600-plus pages, rarely makes direct reference to this hotel, or any other hotel for that matter. This omission is both thematically important and somewhat necessary given the novel's primary focus, which has little to do with the hotel itself, and everything to do with the cultures and relationships that flourish within it. Indeed, there is scarcely any room for

technical details in Yamashita's treatment of this sociality, which is best described as 'sprawling,' 'exhaustive,' or 'kaleidoscopic,' words applicable to her work in general. Reviewing the state of scholarship on Yamashita during the same year *I Hotel* was published, Pamela Thoma notes that all of her novels to date "present multiple perspectives and points of view, contemporary contexts and historical connections, physical and psychic distances," and use these various forms of difference to address a broad spectrum of contemporary issues, including "economic policies and inequalities, the migration of people, cultural flows and consumer culture, information and digital technology (i.e. 'informatics') or new types of knowledge, global ecology, the dynamic borders of nation states, and the re-organization of community" (6). *I Hotel* is likely the most ambitious version of this project, comprised of ten loosely associated novellas chronicling the years 1968-1977 (one novella per year), starting with the Tet Offensive and ending with San Francisco police storming the eponymous hotel to evict its remaining, mostly poor and elderly, tenants. Each novella is titled to indicate the diverse impressions and uses of the building—"Eye Hotel," "I Spy Hotel," "I-Migrant Hotel," "Aiiieeeee! Hotel," "Ai Hotel," and so forth. Each is bursting with characters from different races, age groups, nationalities, faiths, political factions, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds, terminology that is Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, regional American, anachronistic, or otherwise relatively obscure in origin, quotations from numerous political and cultural figures ranging from Lenin to Paul Valéry to Charlie Chan, and heavily involved discussions over little-known or completely made up texts, anecdotes, or traditions. Prose comes in the first, second, and third person, and takes frequent detours through an ostentatious array of tropes and media: poetry, songs, fables, recipes, tableaux, comics, mythology, choreography, elaborate frame narratives, and several play and film scripts, complete with meticulous notes and stage directions.

As much of Thoma's vocabulary suggests, however, Yamashita's foremost preoccupations are ultimately geographical in nature, as she tracks the spatial trajectories and intersections of each of these elements, be they people, groups, ideas, cultures, or collective memories of a shared watershed experience, as they evolve throughout the course of the novel. In addition to their titles, each novella is even accompanied by a box diagram resembling an unfolded Chinese take-out container with key information written on the sides pertaining to characters, setting, and themes, because as Yamashita herself notes, “I wanted to have a three-dimensional quality to it” (Chiapella). The major point of convergence for this colossal amount of material, and the only point where it all sees representation simultaneously, is at the I-Hotel, where the surviving characters unite with their community in the brief final novella, simply titled “I-Hotel,” as part of a failed attempt to save it.

Yamashita's penchant for engineering these kinds of monumental convergences is evident in her earlier work, particularly her third novel *Tropic of Orange,* where the physical geography of the Earth is rearranged to witness the final showdown between the first and third worlds: a wrestling match in a Los Angeles stadium, between the immortal wanderer Arcangel and a titanium-clad behemoth referred to as 'SUPERNAFTA.' Here, Sue-Im Lee observes, the symbolic freight of the contest consists of defining what a global community might look like, how one might function, and who might be in charge. “In the transnational, transgeographical flow of people, labor, capital, and culture, Yamashita suggests that a coming together is inexorable,” making it imminently necessary to focus on “the task of conceiving a new singular collective 'we' and of conceiving a new use for universalism” (505). She continues:

> *Tropic*'s denunciation of the global village celebration is an indictment of the imperialist nature of the few who presume to speak for all, whose particularity presumes the status of

> the universal. In *Tropic*, the First World's deployment of a global intimacy and shared fate is the latest rendition of imperialist—that is, unidirectional—universalism. In its stead, the novel postulates another model of global collectivity, a different rationale for a globalist "we" that can express the transnational, transcontinental nature of human existence without imperialist dimensions. (503)

I Hotel's focus on the Yellow Power movement during the '60s and '70s in many ways sees this idea at work under more narrowly specific and challenging parameters, allowing Yamashita to explore it in greater depth and comment at length on its limitations. More specifically, by providing an actual historical example of the kind of nascent globalized 'we' that Lee describes in the form of the Yellow Power movement, in doing so it also confronts the realities around that proposition, including the eventual destruction of the (anthropological) place where it originally developed. The history of the movement offered here is chiefly a history of the immense difficulties surrounding its theorization, emergence, and decline.

This transition from theory to praxis in Yamashita's oeuvre is signalled by her choice of central metaphor. Like *I Hotel*, *Tropic* expresses considerable interest in the distinctions between place and non-place—one significant plot thread, for example, involves the shutdown of a stretch of the L.A. Harbor freeway, and the community of homeless and other transients that forms in the space as a result. But these concerns are attended to primarily through a spatial logic of infinite variability: the magical orange carried by Arcangel from Mexico to California on his way to the apocalyptic brawl literally drags entire continents together as part of the novel's commentary on the global circulation of goods, people, and culture. Emphasizing the point even further is the figure of Arcangel himself, who fights under the handle 'El Gran Mojado,' which translates approximately to 'The Great Wetback.' By contrast, the fixed state of the International

Hotel and the landscape of which it is a part provides Yamashita the opportunity to evaluate similar ideas as governed by the immutable spatial boundaries of the hotel itself, as well as those of the surrounding Asian American neighborhoods, and San Francisco, and the United States. Rather than making its claims by gradually reorganizing the world around a given site of interest, the engine of *I Hotel*, in both a technical and intellectual sense, is fuelled by the conflicts that exist between those already drawn to such a focal point. This basic switch in how Yamashita approaches her usual topics of interest—namely, global systems and the things that circulate through them—shifts attention away from the complexities of globalized movement that are examined in *Tropic*, and toward the complexities of trying to stay still. Central to this attempt at staying still in the I-Hotel, at forming the sort of community that is simultaneously heterogeneous and unified, is cultivating the kinds of mutual recognition, acceptance, and dialogue that are characteristic of anthropological place, in every possible permutation.

The challenges that this task poses with respect to Asian-American diaspora and hybrid identity are obvious. I open this section with a basic rundown of the many variations of form and content offered by the novel not because they are each virtually indispensable in developing a proper understanding of it (they aren't), but to illustrate the sheer extent of the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic polyvocality that Yamashita is attempting to account for on both an individual and collective basis:

> What's the point of this circus of Siamese twins fathered by a hapless outlaw? Come to America, and your children all come out hyphenated. Half this-half that. Nothing whole. Everything half-assed. And it's more complicated than that. One half trying to be the other half and vice versa. As they say, duking out the dialectics. Working through schizophrenia and assimilation. Poor man. These kids drive him nuts. He's taught them

> everything they know, but still they have no respect. They think they're supposed to be free in Asian America. (231)

For Yamashita, 'duking out the dialectics,' in any case and in any register, first entails addressing the need for an anthropological place to do so, given that Asian America is not an actual location which exists and in which one can congregate with others. This lack of physical spaces that reflect, invite, and accommodate the cultural dissonance experienced by 'hyphenated Americans' is a problem that shows up repeatedly throughout the novel, including the play from which this excerpt is taken, where the phrase 'Asian America' is usually followed by the question '*where's that?*' in parentheses. The usefulness of the I-Hotel as a symbol around which to organize the rest of the novel, then, lies chiefly in its capacity to be such a place: “Of course we knew our voices, like our eyes and ears, to be many and multiple at one time, but on the night of August 3, 1977, and into the following morning, our voices sounded as one voice, and the I-Hotel spoke, and, although for the last time, spoke loudly” (581).

This role of the I-Hotel as the epicentre of the Yellow Power movement, and the medium through which the movement articulates itself, is closely linked to its use as a site of hospitality. 'Hospitality' in this case, of course, describes the literal function of the building; though essentially appropriated as long-term low-income housing by the community decades before its demolition, it was an actual hotel for actual travellers, its tenants mostly comprised of retired Chinese and Filipino migrant labourers who settled there after decades of working up and down the American West coast. I also use the word to invoke its more abstract associations, as the coalescence of the movement within this space at the conclusion of the novel is reminiscent of the transcultural exchange suggested in Derrida's work as described above with regard to 'dialectial' hospitality. “If we remembered the history of our city, we would remember how

frontier towns began: with a trading post and a saloon with a second floor of lodging rooms," Yamashita writes. "We remembered that people have always come from distances and had to be accommodated, given shelter and a bed, and what we used to call board. And it wasn't as if you could get this board for nothing; you had to pay or have something to exchange. That exchange was its own respectability, a kind of citizenship" (589). As part of the novel's focus on a transnational universalist praxis, the forms of exchange seen in the I-Hotel are both economic and cultural in nature, calling to mind Sandoval-Strausz's illustration of the hotel as infrastructure designed not only to bring material prosperity to an area, but also to imbue it with a sense of worldly cosmopolitanism. Perhaps the best example of both is the story of Ria Ishii, a sansei student radical who starts a cooperative garment factory in the hotel's basement, and trains her seamstresses in American history and the English language to integrate them more fully into the facility's business dealings with various distributors and middlemen: "Something inside the mind tells you that your thinking can be powerful. But then, the thinking has got to be put into practice, and how many middle-class activists checked into factories to find out what it's like to work? […] Maybe there were others, but one was Ria Ishii" (383). Other significant events in the daily life of the hotel include a wedding, a pig roasting contest between Hawaiian and Filipino cooks that quickly draws a sizeable crowd, and various projects pertaining to academic pursuits, activism, or the arts, all of which further reinforce the significance of the hotel as a cosmopolitan, yet distinctly 'Asian-American' space.

At the same time, however, the internationalist qualities ascribed to the hotel, and by extension the community it serves, render it vulnerable to the global flows of capital, culture, and power to which it is attached. "The movement in Yamashita's representation is both genuinely liberating and profoundly ambivalent," Jinqi Ling notes, "a process crisscrossed with

conflicting agendas and variable influences, and everywhere in negotiation with national imperatives, transnational possibilities, and the limits set by established cultural and political conventions" (149). It bears mentioning directly that these imperatives, possibilities, limits, etc., are not only those with which actual proponents and members of the movement may or may not comply, and which by themselves already make the process of organically forming a fully realized collective identity a difficult one. In the novel, the most immediate source of conflict outside of the movement itself is the U.S. government, representatives of which take advantage of the public nature of spaces used by the movement in order to discredit it, usually under the aegis of COINTELPRO: "Infiltration is like this. It isn't just spying—it's about undermining trust. So you have a real idealist-activist type, but the infiltrator goes in there and spreads shit so his cohort suspects him to be an agent. His own people do him in themselves. It's not pretty" (177).

Perhaps even more consequential and insidious are the large conglomerates that have an economic stake in the area without having any social connection with it. One instructive example is Gintetsu, "the corporation that now controls twenty-five percent of Nihonmachi [SF's Japantown neighborhood], that being half of the Japan Trade Center plus the Miyako hotel" (152). The company's extensive holdings are compared to the area's derelict former businesses in the aftermath of a wave of evictions during redevelopment in the mid-'70s for which the company, along with a small group of affluent citizens, is held largely responsible: "Pan of J-Town streets, pausing on passing people and particularly on businesses and houses marked for removal or demolition: Wong's Bait Shop, Yamato Garage, Spear's Barbershop, Roy's Barbershop, Weldon's grocery, Kintoki Restaurant [etc.]" (153). Conceptually opposite these locations, which are patently small-scale, locally entrenched, and presumably the primary

sources of their respective owners' livelihoods, examples like Gintetsu illustrate a different facet or component of internationalism based in the concentration of global capital rather than the multicultural assemblage of human beings. Even the properties it owns deal mostly in recreation, travel, and transport, industries that thrive on *increasing* geographical circulations of people, which in turn further destabilizes already marginalized local populations: “These guys are saying they are insiders protecting Nihonmachi interests, but all they want is a tourist town, to bring in business. […] Their aims are selfish and do not account for the lives of longtime renters who have lived and operated their businesses in Nihonmachi for generations” (153, 159). As these corporate entities acquire more property and reinvest their profits into other ventures elsewhere, existing J-Town residents are deprived of the capital that sustains them, their families, their businesses, and by extension the social communities they have established over time.

Alongside the interpersonal tension *within* the 'Asian America' of the I-Hotel, then, Yamashita adds related challenges pertaining to what is ambiguously *outside* of this community. Foremost of these challenges, as far as hospitality is concerned, is simply discerning where inside ends and outside begins. If the symbolic purpose of the hotel is to act as a space of social inclusiveness and integration, the question then becomes what is included and integrated, and what is not, and who has the right to make those choices. And in a supermodern context, where shared culture and experience is of dwindling consequence, inclusion becomes mostly a function of wealth and political power, rather than social acceptance. That is to say that in addition to the problem of dialectical hospitality intrinsic to the formation of the Yellow Power movement, globalization introduces additional problems around absolute hospitality, as the movement and the space it calls home becomes increasingly colonized by the 'absolute, unknown, anonymous other' of capital and the state with no recourse to stop it. This form of hospitality, without

cultural exchange, without limits, and without agreed upon terms, is normalized in a highly networked society, Derrida argues, because in such a society the boundaries between the categories of 'inside' and 'outside' are increasingly arbitrary:

> From the moment when a public authority, a State, this or that State power, gives itself or is recognized as having the right to control, monitor, ban exchanges that those doing the exchanging deem private, but that the State can intercept since these private exchanges cross public space and become available there, then every element of hospitality gets disrupted. [...] Now if my "home," in principle inviolable, is also constituted, and in a more and more essential, interior way, by my phone line, but also by my email, but also by my fax, but also by my access to the Internet, then the intervention of the State becomes a violation of the inviolable, in the place where inviolable immunity remains the condition of hospitality. (51)

This abuse of the ambiguity surrounding what constitutes personal space and what doesn't, for Derrida, is more than an invasion of one's home. It renders the concept of home obsolete altogether, because there is no clear sense of who is hosting and who is imposing as a guest. There is "no hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one's home," Derrida writes, "but since there is also no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence" (55). The broad cosmopolitanism that enables the Yellow Power movement to exist is largely the product of the intercultural openness that develops alongside globalization. But it is precisely this process that also perpetually threatens the movement's undoing.

The conclusion of Yamashita's novel depicts this undoing, of the movement and of the space it calls home—the former infiltrated and undermined by agents provocateur on behalf of

state and federal governments, the latter purchased and demolished by commercial real estate firm Milton Meyer and Co. in collusion with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, the director of which referred to the neighborhood as “too valuable to allow poor people to park on it” (qtd. in Feagin and Parker 251). The struggle of establishing the hotel as a cosmopolitan space, and cultivating a cosmopolitan movement within it, is one that Yamashita spends the entire novel working to overcome. But while this goal is ultimately achieved for a brief period of time, its efficacy is short lived, as the same perpetual global displacement that made 'Asian-American' a necessary category in the first place does not abate in the face of resistance against it:

> Even though the city required our labour and allowed us housing in cheap hotels, in time we came to know that labouring people are necessary but considered transitory. […] We did not own our homes. We may have had families, but hotels were suspect places to raise children, and so we were suspect families. Our communal lives in hotels with shared bathrooms and shared dining, shared genders, shared ethnicities, and heaven forbid, shared thinking that might lead to shared politics, were suspect. Hotel life might even be subversive. A famous scholar who studied our hotel life warned us that when there are no homes, there will be no nation. But what did he mean by *home?* And, for that matter, what did he mean by *nation?* (Yamashita 590)

In its capacity as an international, cosmopolitan space, the hotel is both the primary instrument of the Yellow Power movement, as well as a metaphor for it. But the metaphor is significantly more complicated than can be summarized through the simple depiction of community formation in Lefebvrian 'perceived' space, because as Yamashita notes in this passage, global currents of people, capital, and culture cannot be said only to move centripetally toward a given

point, but also centrifugally outward again. The eviction of the hotel's tenants at the conclusion of the novel can in many ways be said to be inevitable, and closely tied to the same forces that necessitated their congregation. That is to say that the trend toward globalization is the primary impetus both for the formation of diasporic enclaves like that which takes root in the I-Hotel, as well as for the geopolitical instability and rapacious business practices that undermine these communities. Though the two phenomena might appear to be contradictory if not mutually exclusive, they are actually inseparable, being the product of the same historical dynamic of globalizing capitalism.

These competing associations encourage an interpretation of Yamashita's hotel as a space caught between binary oppositions—between the public and private, the conceived and lived, the global and local, the homogenous and heterogenous, the unified and dispersed, home and housing, dialectical hospitality and absolute hospitality, place and non-place—and as the fulcrum on which these concepts rest. "The simultaneously transient and permanent nature of the hotel as a dwelling place in areas both porous and constricted is a perfect metaphor for the status of the hotel occupants," Linqui notes, "and, by extension, the migrating populations in any ethnic community in the city, who are at once excluded and contained, nomadic and suppressed in their existence" (169). *I Hotel* offers an historicized alternative to the compression of global space previously achieved through the magical realism of *Tropic*, but goes further by examining the consequences of this compression, what happens when such an arrangement becomes untenable, and the way these processes of doing and undoing become rapidly cyclical under globalization.

Despite its focus on events that occurred roughly four decades before its publication, Yamashita's novel is still in many ways about the present, as the broad sense of uncertainty that darkens its conclusion has only intensified with time. The I-Hotel is just one early example of

the continual supermodern destabilization of spaces that serve as incubators for the most immediate and intimate of social relations, making it beneficial to turn to a more contemporary and less historically specific example in Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King* to help round out these initial impressions. Like *I Hotel*, among this novel's foremost concerns are issues of home and hospitality as they are impacted by globalization, and how the erosion of these ideas comes to affect more expansive forms of belonging in terms of nation, culture, or history. But rather than examining the tenuous status of these concepts in relation to a minority population attempting to establish and maintain its own collective identity in harmony with the postwar American melting pot, Eggers depicts a world in which all pretense of any category of belonging —American, Asian-American, and anything in between—has been outpaced by the restless worldwide circulation of capital and people in response to market forces. Set well past the turn of the millennium, the novel chronicles the personal travails of a single individual awash in the currents of supermodern exchange, unable to forge relationships with anyone, let alone join in the formation of anything approaching the community seen at the I-Hotel. Although the unstable relationship between place, home, and identity remains central to the experience of the hotel room, Eggers deploys this space not as a symbol for the drive toward the kinds of cosmopolitanism made plausible by globalization, but rather the various forms of isolation experienced when these hopes for widespread transnational social connection fail to reach fruition.

3. Dave Eggers: *A Hologram for the King*.

Like Yamashita's I-Hotel, the presence of the Jeddah Hilton in Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King* receives little direct narrative attention, yet is a foundational element of

the novel's commentary on spatial politics and globalization. Unlike the hotel of Yamashita's novel, which assumes the role of place and non-place simultaneously and acts as a physical record of the gradual transition from the former to the latter, Eggers's hotel is already firmly at odds with any notion of entrenched culture and history, establishing its role as a non-place from the outset. The description of the hotel is as follows: "They had built the hotel to bear no evidence of its existence within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The whole complex, fortressed from the road and sea, was free of content or context, devoid of even a pattern or two of Arabic origin. This place, all palm trees and adobe, could have been in Arizona, in Orlando, anywhere" (21). This change makes sense given the historical circumstances addressed by each author, with Yamashita's novel examining the cosmopolitan space of the hotel around the time that a post-Fordist world economy is beginning in earnest, and *Hologram* seeing these trends considerably further along in their development. Part of this development is the clear separation of the various binaries previously contained in the same highly contested space of the hotel, as well as the clear ascendancy of one set of characteristics over the other. The Jeddah Hilton is—again, like the I-Hotel—a real hotel, one considerably more opulent than its San Franciscan counterpart but no less a product of its environment, which exhibits a similar kind of placelessness: "They sped through Jeddah and it all looked very new, not unlike Los Angeles. Los Angeles with burqas" (Eggers, *Hologram* 26). The novel follows a broke, lonely, washed-up American consultant named Alan Clay as he travels back and forth between the hotel and the King Abdullah Economic City, a politically and culturally progressive desert megacity which is more than anything the result of the Saudi monarch's determination to see it realized, along with an unspeakably large amount of state funds. There on behalf of aptly-named telecoms firm Reliant, Clay is competing for the portion of these funds earmarked for building the city's IT

infrastructure. Success would be a transformative professional and personal event for him, as the massive commission from the deal would ensure his own financial stability after a series of disastrous failures in the manufacturing sector, and consequently strengthen his flagging relationship with his daughter Kit, who is struggling to pay for her college education alone.

KAEC (pronounced 'cake') is also a real place, announced by Abdullah in 2005 upon his claiming the throne. But it is not real in the same way that San Francisco, or even the Jeddah Hilton is—it is real only on paper, mostly in the planning stages and looking for investors. In the novel, the city consists of only three locations: the 'Black Box,' a squat, opaque base of operations for higher-level officials overseeing KAEC's construction; an unfinished condo building where a few of these officials have taken up residence; and a dark tent with spotty Wi-Fi set up for Alan's presentation. The centrepiece of the presentation is Reliant's new hologram technology, showcasing the kind of advanced communications network befitting a metropolis intended to foster a "reformist spirit" and "small acts of progress" (Eggers, *Hologram* 213). Indeed, the utopian promise of KAEC resembles the kind of opened, cosmopolitan, multicultural society found in Yamashita's novel. But the city itself is in many ways its own hologram for the king, impressive sounding but immaterial, the feasibility of its very existence repeatedly called into question by the Saudi citizens Clay encounters. Importantly, this is not for lack of resources, but rather the difficulty of sowing relationships in a supermodern age where favourable conditions can change abruptly: "There was fear about the viability of Emaar, the development company. There was concern about having the Bin Laden family contracting company involved. There was, above all, the concern that the city would die with King Abdullah" (*Hologram* 213). While the Yellow Power movement briefly coalesces in 1977 to speak through its space before both are torn apart in the countervailing tides of global capitalism, in 2010 the architects of

KAEC are not even able to cobble together such a space to begin with, and for similar reasons: “It won't happen. It might have happened at one time, but there's no more money. Emaar's a bust. They're going broke in Dubai. Everything was overvalued and now they're busted. They owe money all over the planet, and now KAEC's dead. Everything's dead” (*Hologram* 39). As Yamashita's novel indicates, imbuing a place with its 'placeness' is difficult and time intensive, and with virtually no existing social or historical connection to the anthropological place that KAEC is *supposed* to be, the project is already widely considered doomed. It is too financially risky to help create a city from nothing, and money is the only reason to be there.

In fact, in a novel driven almost completely by the transactional imperatives of global supply and demand rather than the communitarian ethos of *I-Hotel*, money is the only reason to be anywhere. Jeffrey J. Williams, forecasting a trend in American art that attends to neoliberal themes and subject matter, describes *Hologram* as a text that focuses “on the white-collar workers who carry out the global work of the super-rich and their corporate arms and who suffer precarious fates,” and in doing so “shows the poles of power through the eyes of the downsized, as well as the international reach of capital” (96). Eggers's strategy for registering this kind of precarity elsewhere in his work tends likewise to be spatial in nature, and international in scope. His characters, especially those based on real people, are repeatedly, arbitrarily, and geographically unsettled by forces vastly beyond their control, and sometimes from halfway across the planet. “The most predominant disidentifications in *Zeitoun*,” Valorie Thomas notes, “occur in the interrogation of place, home, and belonging as functions of racial and national identity, both by the title figure himself and on Zeitoun's behalf by Eggers's narration and editorial strategy” (273). And in *What is the What*, his 'autobiography' of Sudanese Lost Boy Valentino Achak Deng, “the promised freedom and equality for all that emerges from

conceptions of a universal humanity is continually offset by the realities faced by the relocated southern Sudanese refugees" (Peek 116). A similar relocation, geographical and otherwise, is at the heart of Eggers's own life story in his memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. The book opens with the deaths of his parents months apart from one another, leaving the then twenty-one-year-old writer destitute, homeless, and responsible for his younger brother Toph: "Our house sits on a sinkhole. Our house is the one being swept up in the tornado, the little train-set model house floating helplessly, pathetically around in the howling black funnel. We're weak and tiny. We're Grenada. There are men parachuting from the sky" (17).

This destabilization of concepts like home, place, belonging, and so forth that informs Eggers's other projects is fully present from the very beginning of *Hologram*, with all of the spaces Alan frequents lacking any relation to any aspect of his identity whatsoever. The first paragraph of the novel, for example, is: "Alan Clay woke up in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It was May 30, 2010. He had spent two days on planes to get there" (3). Bookending the paragraph are statements of spatial marginalization at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of geographical scope, with Alan's location in Jeddah denoting his solitude in a macroscopic (national, cultural, ethnic) sense, and his time spent alone on planes for two days suggesting a private life that is goal oriented but mostly asocial. But this comprehensive sense of isolation is nowhere more apparent than in the sterile faux-domestic environment of Alan's hotel room, where he mostly gets drunk by himself, makes half-hearted attempts to write to his daughter, and prods with worry at the noticeable mass that appears to be growing on his spinal column. His former residence in Boston, put on the market as a way to raise tuition money for Kit, has become similarly impersonal: "Until it's sold, you live in a version of your house, a better version. There is more yellow. There are flowers and tables made of reclaimed wood. Your own belongings are

in storage. […] Renee rented artwork. Noncommittal abstractions, she called them. They were in every room, canvases with agreeable colors, vague shapes signifying nothing" (14-15). Whereas the I-Hotel becomes a permanent home for those drawn to it despite its nominal role as temporary housing, in *Hologram* an opposing logic is at work. Not only does Alan's temporary housing make impossible the kinds of appropriation seen at the I-Hotel, his role in the nomadic informational workforce of globalization means that this housing is the most permanent form of home available to him. In this way, the hotel room acts as a microcosmic analogue to the larger forms of socioeconomic discord emblematized in KAEC. Though boasting the promise of domesticity and its connotations (belonging, togetherness, community) in a superficial way, there is no practical basis for actually making these things possible in reality, because the reasons for one's being there in the first place are not tied to spatially entrenched constructs like family, ancestry, or heritage, but to the ceaselessly roiling quicksands of global economics.

The novel's use of the Jeddah Hilton as austere economic infrastructure rather than the basis for meaningful social connection casts it, along with everything connected to it via flows of currency and labour, as a space of Derridean 'absolute hospitality.' Though both the hotel and the Economic City are eminently welcoming to prospective inhabitants, this welcome is volatile and impersonal to the point of meaninglessness, being solely predicated on transaction and thus highly subject to change in relation to various material factors. By extension, Alan takes the role not of foreigner, but of the anonymous barbarian—he is accepted in his functional capacity as a worker, but not his social capacity as person. Accordingly, his boss back at Reliant headquarters is unreasonable and demanding, while his underlings, two engineers and a marketing director all twenty years his junior, view him as "a human who was more burden than boon, more harm than good, irrelevant, superfluous to the forward progress of the world" (*Hologram* 75). In addition to

Alan's purely economic relationships with those in Saudi Arabia, his purely economic reasons for moving there effectively erase his former life behind him, as his now permanent residence in temporary housing suggests. “Deindustrialization did not simply put many working-class men out of work, it undermined the resources that they relied upon to construct their identities,” Sherry Linkon observes. “Those consequences extend beyond the lives of those who were laid off when plants closed. Their sons inherited that loss. Having lost both employment opportunities and the role models of their blue-collar fathers, the sons face continuing challenges as they attempt to reconstruct masculinity in the absence of industrial work” (150). The literal geographical homelessness emphasized by Alan's stay in the Hilton thus induces a more figurative social homelessness in the near complete erasure of Alan's past. The hotel's shabby facsimile of home acts as an immediate physical manifestation of his estrangement from his ex-wife Ruby, his blue-collar pro-union father Ron, and his previous work in an increasingly nonexistent American industrial economy. By the same token, it signifies his inability to begin meaningful relationships with those he encounters in the present. Though such spaces are stereotypically a favourite spot for trysts for example, the solitude of Alan's room also signals a breakdown in his sexual and romantic relationships, as he finds himself either unable or unwilling to respond to the advances of the women he encounters. Alan is never not alone in his hotel room.

These sketches of personal alienation and professional failure, specific to Eggers's protagonist, are also situated in the broader context of post-Fordist deindustrialization, which expands *Hologram*'s discussion of homelessness and hospitality to include the wider arenas of national belonging and other such forms of collective identity. “If landscapes of industrial ruination and urban decline are slippery and unfixed,” Alice Mah writes, “then legacies are even

more difficult to map. Legacies of ruination and decline are related to inheritance, historical traces, and generational change," and "the diffuse social, economic, cultural, psychological, and environmental impacts of industrial and urban decline on people and places" (13). In the novel, it is the decline of Western industrialism that ultimately deprives Alan of the American landscape he was once a part of. But this in turn also deprives him, and everyone else, of America's legacy as a country built on manufacturing, and the various sociocultural byproducts of the stability that it induced. These concerns are tied together by Alan's own role in destroying that legacy, with his previous work for Schwinn bicycles seeing him involved in union busting and the outsourcing of American labour to Taiwan, China, and Eastern Europe:

> Alan had spent a few decades with bikes, then bounced around between a dozen or so other stints, consulting, helping companies compete through ruthless efficiency, robots, lean manufacturing, that kind of thing. And yet year by year, there was less work for a guy like him. People were done manufacturing on American soil. How could he or anyone argue for spending five to ten times what it cost in Asia? And when Asian wages rose to untenable levels—$5 an hour, say—there was Africa. The Chinese were already making sneakers in Nigeria. Jack Welch said manufacturing should be on a perpetual barge, circling the globe for the cheapest conditions possible, and it seemed the world had taken him at his word. (13)

Complementing *Hologram*'s depiction of the individuals who profit and perish from this decoupling of labour from geography, then, is a depiction of the U.S.'s uncertain future amongst other great powers on the rise, newly minted under a form of capitalism it was largely responsible for initiating. Robert McLaughlin, for example, suggests that the novel continues the work of *Zeitoun* and *What is the What* by "deflating claims to US economic, ideological, and

moral dominance by showing the ways the rest of the world, the space the United States seeks to dominate, is infiltrating and remaking US economic, ideological, and moral spaces" (293). This outside economic influence in the once distinctly American purview of manufacturing destabilizes Alan's identity as an American, which was formerly predicated on the geographical and social cohesion encouraged by that form of labour. But it also complicates the whole concept of Americanness itself, as the country must now find new rallying points for its citizens to build their identities around.

In this way, Alan's rootlessness within the frenetic currents of globalized capital and labour proclaims not only his own lack of place, but also an erosion of the notion of anthropological place in general. This erosion of place, and specifically of a socially and culturally cohesive America under industrialism, likewise operates according to a logic of absolute hospitality due to the impersonal nature of economic exchange: "Elsewhere, relationships no longer mattered, Alan knew this. They did not matter in America, they did not matter much of anywhere, but here, among the royals, he hoped that friendship had meaning" (20). The hope for any sense of security expressed by workers like Alan are reflective of similar hopes within the larger organizations that hire or govern them, and the fact that these hopes are also generally futile further imperils any prospect of stability in any context or register. One anecdote from a former colleague of Alan's is particularly instructive: he discloses how his company exhausted considerable resources developing security glass for the new World Trade Centre building, "only to have a Chinese company use that technology to build the glass, cheaper, and sell it back to the Port Authority, which was attempting, at least, to resurrect something like pride and resilience in the white-hot center of everything American" (131). Here, the shared American trauma of 9/11 is registered geographically in its attachment to the physical

location where it took place. And because of this equivalence between geographical proximity and social belonging, the economic intrusion of an overseas firm is seen as an insult precisely because the firm has no historical or cultural stake in the area: “The whole thing was underhanded and it was cowardly and lacking in all principle. It was dishonor. And at Ground Zero. Alan was pacing, his hands in fists. The dishonor! At Ground Zero! Amid the ashes! The dishonor! Amid the ashes! The dishonor! The dishonor!” (131). These various interlocking tales of economic, social, cultural, and geographical instability, all of which result from the same general conditions of globalization, collectively highlight the comprehensiveness with which Derrida uses the concepts of foreignness and hospitality to designate huge macrocosms of symbolic entanglement. The instability Eggers grapples with here entails not just the loss of Alan Clay's home in America, but the loss of America itself as a home.

The Ground Zero anecdote also foreshadows the novel's conclusion—Abdullah finally appears for Alan's presentation after a long, Godot-like series of absences and false starts, only to then immediately award the contract to the Chinese. The monarch's disregard for Alan and his staff, more the result of inattentiveness than animosity, is only the most prominent example of the noncommittal attitude that finds its way into all of the business relationships pursued throughout the novel, again in alignment with the facilities where they take place. The Black Box, for example, the very name of which implies closed lines of communication, is host to several versions of this idea. On a more immediate interpersonal level, Alan's daily efforts to make contact with their foreign liaison in this building in order to secure necessities for the presentation are thwarted by the receptionist downstairs, who in a breezy professional tone lies about the liaison being elsewhere on his behalf. The space itself likewise signifies a lack of meaningful exchange between America and Saudi Arabia on a broader cultural level, being

oriented primarily toward privacy, containment, and compartmentalization according to nationality and culture, but also class, and at times gender: “A few dozen men and women whisked by in various directions, equally split between those in Western business attire and local garb. The offices and cubicles were almost entirely blank, free of all signs of anyone taking root or assuming longevity” (93). This same aversion to lasting connection in the professional world is mapped onto domestic spaces. Despite its connotations of home, for example, the atmosphere of the Jeddah Hilton is cordial, but nevertheless remains socially detached in much the same way, redolent of an aggravating politeness that affirms only an absence of genuine sociality: “Hash browns to his room in five minutes. Impossible unless he was eating food prepared for someone else. Which he realized he was” (16-17). Interactions like these add an intercultural dimension to the absolute hospitality discussed thus far with reference to more individualized forms of alienation and cultural collapse. The flippancy applied to meaningful contact among individuals is expanded to include the universes of significance that individuals carry—in the same way that Alan's circumstances lock him into an asocial present with little hope for salvaging relationships from his past or forging new ones in the future, these circumstances also impede the building of new cultural 'homes' following the loss of a collective American identity founded on industrialism.

It is exactly this ill-advised project that Alan nevertheless attempts to initiate at the conclusion of the novel, deciding to stay in Jeddah for the vague possibility of a future there, his final running leap at a target well beyond his field of vision. The move is a curious one, reading as a kind of matter-of-fact optimism bordering on delusion: “He wasn't being sent away, after all, and he couldn't go home yet, not empty handed like this. So he would stay. He had to. Otherwise who would be here when the king came again?” (312). But it is as appropriate a choice as any

other really, after the novel's anticlimax puts an end to Alan's remaining belief in his own personal agency opposite "the downfall of a nation and the triumph of systems designed to thwart all human contact, human reason, personal discretion and decision making," because "most people did not want to make decisions. And too many of the people who could make decisions had decided to cede them to machines" (*Hologram* 139). Ultimately, his realization that his own decision-making is mostly useless in matters given over to these systems finally frees Alan up to focus on that which he can actually influence: repairing the damaged relationships he has accrued throughout the novel, and trying to cultivate a sense of home the old-fashioned way. These relationships, too, are characterized by a certain aura of general cross-cultural discord. In perhaps his only genuine foray into the realm of places, for example, Alan is invited to help hunt the wolf harassing his acquaintance Yousef's home village, only to infuriate everyone there by almost shooting a child in his clumsy, gung-ho enthusiasm to do something heroic in what might well be a comment on the common perception of U.S. military forces as de facto world police. While the novel takes care to linger agonizingly on these awkward and occasionally perilous attempts to connect, however, the overall process represented by these incidents is also the source of the sort of unorthodox cultural synthesis seen above at the I-Hotel. In one sense, Alan's collection of failures against stacked odds signify his powerlessness opposite the kinds of material circumvolutions that constantly structure and restructure his life. In another sense, though, his newly gained awareness of this fact absolves him of having to continue fruitlessly chasing opportunity around the planet, presumably because the futility of doing so means that waiting for opportunity to reappear where one already is, is just as prudent as exhausting oneself trying to predict where it will appear next. And while Eggers by no means shies away from the extraordinary danger inherent in this proposition, he also recognizes its

potential for introducing important new situations, innovations, and partnerships. His novel ends where Yamashita's begins: with the harrowing genesis of an intriguing fledgling community struggling to cohere amid the turbulent conditions that have produced it.

Of course, the plausibility of any of this is left completely unexplored, an appropriate omission in a text that essentially functions as a cross between *Death of a Salesman* and *Groundhog Day* set in the era of globalization—a hardscrabble run through the gauntlet of American enterprise in the new millennium that in practice mostly consists of long bouts of nominally pointless but vaguely meaningful faffing around. In fact, whether the decision is intended to represent Alan's newly acquired wisdom or continued naiveté is almost beside the point given the chain of events leading up to it, in which the capriciousness of late capitalism gives and takes so arbitrarily that its victims attain a sort of perilous equilibrium; the conclusion of the novel is simply another incidence of Alan being gently delivered back to where he more or less began, with not much to show for his trouble. This tendency to periodically reset itself locks the narrative into the kind of permanent present tense that often afflicts texts like cartoons, in which the high drama of one episode is completely forgotten in the next, the affected characters and settings mysteriously returning to their default states. Alan tends to produce this brand of amnesia in himself regularly, both his fortunes and mood fluctuating with record speed as he repeatedly bounces back from his latest faux pas with exhausted, idiotic gusto:

> All this was his. These beds were his. The desk, the walls, that big bathroom with the phone and the bidet. He walked over to his second bed and looked at this things, his electric razor and itinerary and binders and folders, spread out, ready. He looked at the pillows at the head of the bed. You are so white, he thought. […] And then he finally understood why people drink alone, and drink more than they should alone. An adventure

every night! It made a hell of a lot of sense. (105-106)

Scenes like this, in which Alan self-reflects and self-medicates in the privacy of his hotel room, help illustrate him as a somewhat pathetic yet almost unreasonably resilient individual, gracelessly steadfast throughout the slow-motion collapse of his own life: “He loved this room. Could that be true? But he did love the room, and he touched the wall to prove it. […] I really love this world, he thought. The making of this wall. I love the people who did it. They did good things here” (104-105, 107). Alan is both literally and figuratively contained by this space he calls home, kept in limbo, jogging on the freelance consultancy treadmill, the proverbial carrot forever dangling just out of reach. But he also learns to appreciate this containment and its benefits, the room tidied in his absence as though by some spectral benefactor, fresh tools and amenities as a baseline on which to rebuild—an unusually comfortable rock bottom, and a feeling of stability in absence of the real thing.

Hologram is a novel in which promising things are always just on the verge of happening. It earnestly showcases Eggers's faith in the kind of disseminated cultural cosmopolitanism that would justify the chaos of globalization, while simultaneously plodding toward this goal at a maddeningly slow pace, encumbered by circuitous detours, delays, roadblocks, and setbacks. Despite his willingness to pursue the American dream regardless of the country in which he actually has to do it, Alan's adjustment to his unusual new homeland is constantly endangered by the contemporary bogeymen of mass displacement and economic freefall that originally placed him there. Similarly, the novel's rendering of supermodern marginalization and solitude through spaces like the hotel appears to continue the work of Yamashita's novel in suggesting that prolonged socializing and socialization is untenable in the context of late capitalism, liquid modernity, and non-places. But Alan's final resolve to stick

things out in Saudi Arabia also seems to suggest that isolation is equally untenable, that the sheer desire to cultivate a genuine sense of cosmopolitan place will inevitably be rewarded given enough patience, fortitude, and ingenuity—Mamdouh Al-Harthy, a Saudi journalist and key collaborator with Eggers on the novel, notes that "Saudi is part of a global movement. We have Internet; we have young people. It won't be easy to contain and close the society as in the 90s or the 80s" (Eggers et al. 82). Ready to wager everything for a role in this process, Alan returns to his makeshift home at the Jeddah Hilton to await an uncertain and rapidly oncoming future, perpetually in preparation for what is next.

Intrinsically related to anthropological place, home is an old concept worth revisiting in an era marked by impermanence. It does not just consist of where one is living, but where one *has been* living, comprising whole fields of routines, relationships, and associations that develop over the years, decades, and centuries. Stretching through the dromospheres of globalization, these myriad webs of attachment can now continue developing across borders, over oceans, and in real-time. But the exertion nevertheless takes its toll, rendering them thinner and more brittle, needy in a way distinct from the effortlessness of direct contact. Hotels are reflective of this sense of drift, living spaces dedicated to getting away, or moving on, or starting over, symbols of both acceptance and exile. As such, this chapter has used them primarily to discuss how supermodern dispersal impacts the most well-worn and intimate corners of social life, requiring more and more homes to be found in transition or for the time being, bags kept packed with the next inevitable departure in mind. In the next chapter, I too depart from anthropological places

altogether, to look at much more impersonal forms of exchange in the world of retail and service work, non-places of commercial-grade efficiency and function.

Chapter Three: Convenience Stores

This chapter examines retail and service spaces, focusing in particular on convenience stores in Kevin Smith's film *Clerks* and Ben Ryder Howe's memoir *My Korean Deli*. In the previous chapter, hotels were examined in relation to home and hospitality to illustrate how supermodernity has destabilized even the most foundational of anthropological places, as well as the fundamental aspects of personal and social identity attached to them. As a contrast to those themes, the following chapter looks at spaces more overtly supermodern from the outset, in both form and function—explicitly commercial, strikingly homogeneous, and dedicated to particularly petty and regular exchanges involving little money, little time, little thought, and little interaction. These include fast food restaurants, malls, supermarkets, and other corporate chains, but I take convenience stores as a particularly apropos point of focus. Convenience is a key byproduct of the supermodern era, holding out the alluring and increasingly rare prospect of uncomplicated transactions, easily acquired resources, or reliable information. It is also central to my discussion of these spaces here, which applies this logic of convenience not just to things like architectural features or merchandise, but to virtually every aspect of their operations. Alongside their standardization on the basis of layout and decor, for example, I also outline how their social workings are rewritten as part of this process, reduced to their own carefully designed routines. Simultaneously host to the exchange of cash, goods, services, and labour, these environments of quotidian buying and selling are inherently subject to material demands. But they are also increasingly organized with these demands solely in mind, an attempt at optimization that allows such businesses to expand their presence as widely shared and highly frequented public spaces, while at the same time encouraging them to meticulously sanitize the social interactions they play host to in service of that goal.

The first section opens with a brief overview of older, more rooted, stable, and centralized retail spaces in the form of grand department stores, and the components of these spaces that fostered a sense of anthropological place in ways roughly equivalent to that of fin de siècle hotels as examined in chapter two. As with previous chapters, this section then follows their supermodern equivalents into the post-Fordist era, outlining the ways in which they have been reconfigured in response to various external pressures, and how this process impacts their social climates in a general sense. I organize these developments around the term 'convenience,' defined here as an emphasis not only on timing, availability, or a minimum of guaranteed quality, but the feeling of reliability or personal control that these things induce, and used in this sense to illustrate the rationale behind these changes. In some respects, convenience takes a similar role to that of absolute hospitality in chapter two, as a way of both summarizing the logic behind these material, social, and spatial transitions to supermodern conceits, as well as helping explain the kinds of difficulties that result from them. Whereas that chapter pertains mostly to guests of these transitional and transactional locales, however, the present focus on retail spaces is intended specifically to address the other regular presence there: employees. Convenience is a valuable concept in this regard, relating not only how supermodern spaces are experienced by customers, but also how those that serve them produce this experience. Though it clearly applies to the purchase of goods, for example, it also neatly illustrates a similar modular, on-demand approach to the purchase of labour, and gestures to the ways in which those who do this labour are likewise made homogeneous, interchangeable, and expendable. Accordingly, the development of convenience spaces sketched out in this section is accompanied by a parallel consideration of how the jobs performed in them have taken on similar attributes, becoming increasingly deskilled and devalued to meet the material needs of these chaotic supermodern workplaces.

That is to say that while this understanding of convenience applies (and is applied, here) meaningfully to many different aspects of contemporary retail businesses, it is also meant to highlight specifically the subject of work, particularly the flexible, contingent forms of work associated with late capitalism, and how it evolves alongside and is shaped by the environments it supports.

The close readings that comprise the following two sections use the motif of convenience stores to discuss how convenience principles and retail employment intersect at an everyday experiential level, each from a different class perspective. In the first of these sections, Kevin Smith's film *Clerks* is considered in relation to the slacker archetype that appears in 'Generation X' fiction during the early 1990s. The film's setting, a dreary suburban convenience store called the Quickstop, serves as an ideal foundation for Smith's scathing critique of work at the lowest levels of the service industry, derived from his own experiences behind a counter. Plagued by boredom, resentment, insecurity, and helplessness, his characters are exemplars of the decidedly inconvenient lives that retail employees must lead in order to maintain the convenience enjoyed by their customers. The store's blandscape of generic junk products reflects the social marginalization of its workers, who struggle to keep up with the unique challenges of their jobs, and of supermodernity more generally, as they attempt to find direction, satisfaction, and connection where there is little to be had. Beneath the film's avalanche of expletives and slapstick lies a tirade against the problematic ways in which service workers are broken down and refashioned in the image of their work, forced to adopt the same short-term resourcefulness emblematized by retail spaces to the detriment of their own long-term happiness and self-actualization.

Examined in the second reading is Ben Ryder *Howe's My Korean Deli: Risking it all for*

a Convenience Store, which situates these grievances in a wider socio-economic context by approaching them from an outsider's upper-middle class standpoint. Unencumbered by Smith's animosity, or experience, the author is initially excited about the prospect of buying an NYC convenience store with his wife and going into business with her mother, an uncompromising, no-nonsense Korean immigrant who has spent most of her life in minimum wage service roles. This excitement quickly gives way to obligation and not much else, however, as the effort required to run the business leaves little room for actually enjoying what was supposed to be a retreat from the white-collar labour of his previous job. Though frequently in the role of clerk, like Smith and his characters, Howe is also constantly forced to make difficult decisions as an owner, the memoir chronicling his futile attempts to act in the best interests of his family, his employees, and his community simultaneously. Constantly switching back and forth between these various class and labouring positions finds Howe at a crossroads between the idealized sociality of anthropological place and the impersonal efficiency of supermodern convenience, the latter of which only becomes more necessary, intensified, and self-sustaining over time. Taking a broad view of convenience as it applies to different parties in this web of mutual and mutually exclusive interests—those of consumers, employees, managers, and owners—these readings explore spaces of everyday trade and turnover at their most accelerated, the forms of social dysfunction endemic to them, and how these trends develop out of similar principles of rapid short-term disposability.

1. Service Spaces, Deskilled Labour, and Convenience.

Similar to the growth of hospitality infrastructure observed in chapter two, retail spaces evolved into major urban landmarks during the nineteenth century, with the first modern

department stores appearing in the mid-to-late 1800s. Like the development of inns and public houses into grand hotels precipitated by a range of social and economic factors during this time, industrial age advancements in production, infrastructure, and commerce gradually enabled the conversion of dry goods and specialty stores into sprawling, opulent shopping complexes. These functional material changes soon engendered more abstract semantic ones, as shopping became less about acquiring basic necessities and more about self expression through buying products, and frequenting the spaces where such products were bought. Of the Bon Marché, the foremost example of these changes in action, Elizabeth Carlson writes that “from its inception, the Paris department store was likened to theater, a tourist attraction cited in guides alongside the Opéra and Folies-Bergère” (117). And “by the 1910s,” William Leach notes, “American business was beginning to alter the meaning of goods through dramatic treatment, investing them with a significance that set them off and above other things” (66). This was frequently accomplished through architectural changes like display windows and mannequins, as well as the “glamour, 'riotous color schemes,' luxury, escape, adventure, and leisure activities [...] invoked in the windows to attract customers to the goods” (Leach 66). These so-called 'monster shops' included Whiteley's and Harrod's in London, Marshall Field's in Chicago, Macy's in New York, Stewart's in Baltimore, and a second Bon Marché in Seattle among numerous others, marking a significant innovation in the advancement of international trade and a new way of drawing the upwardly mobile to flourishing urban centres.

As with hotels, the competitive drive toward centralized shopping centres of ever increasing grandeur imbued retail spaces with the kinds of social, spatial, and historical significance that designates anthropological place. In their secondary role as monuments to human resourcefulness and creativity, department stores became an important part of a city's

identity—the measures implemented to keep these spaces both navigable and well trafficked rendered them "*the* place to go to see the latest architectural innovations and technological marvels" (Paquet 151). And in their primary role as commercial hubs, they sustained rich social atmospheres on both sides of the counter. A new class of consumers, in large part the wives of affluent working professionals, were encouraged to wander, mingle, and shop, "to go about and see things, whether one wants them or not, to pick up a bargain here and there, to take a bite at one of the store restaurants, and to return home with stories of lovely things that are being sold..." (qtd. in Abelson 22). At the same time, alongside the influx of capital under industrialism came the need for a system with which merchants could better organize and distribute it, and the technical demands behind making this system work encouraged a similar social cohesiveness amongst their employees. Responsible for a myriad of store operations—cashiering and customer service, but also maintenance, transportation, bookkeeping, debt collection, and other general duties as demanded by a given situation—retail clerks were generally rewarded commensurate with their expertise, and aspired to the same emergent middle class that they serviced. Whereas shops were once small enough to be run by the owner's family and at most a few apprentices, "department stores eventually needed thousands of people to keep them running," and "in many cases, these people lived in store dormitories, ate in company cafeterias, and generally let the supposedly benevolent store owner watch out for their welfare" (Paquet 147). This combination of economic prosperity and close proximity to each other, their employers, and the urban centres in which they lived, enabled these workers to form new social and economic groups that grew to prominence alongside the businesses they helped manage.

The presence of clerks in urban economic and social life, as "the most overt expression of the age's new emphasis on buying and selling," was drastic enough to constitute a significant

threat to the status quo in a number of ways (Zakim 569). Freed from the rigours of farm labour, and with a comparatively good deal of disposable income and spare time, clerks became a point of contention in the nineteenth century culture wars, painted by social conservatives as "a 'fast race of billiard-playing, whiskydrinking, horse-hiring, catfish-suppering upstarts'" (qtd. in Zakim 569). In addition to representing a growing disregard for propriety and property ownership as de facto markers of social authority, clerical workers were also to some degree implicated in the identity politics of the era. The overwhelming need for clerks revealed "the failure of occupational categories to delineate racial, ethnic, and class differences [...] as foreign-born men and even a few African Americans made inroads into their occupation," the latter often in a bid to construct a social and economic identity for themselves after acquiring their freedom, legally or otherwise (Luskey 56). Similarly, due to rising demand for clerical work and workers through the turn of the century, "the 1910s and 1920s saw impressive increases in the proportion of women going into clerical work, as well as the increasing feminization of those jobs" (England and Boyer 311). Naturally, this is an overly simplistic rundown of a scholarship that is altogether perhaps too cheerful, relating what Paul Attewell describes as a "false nostalgia regarding skill and the clerical work process" (357). But even the less pleasant realities surrounding clerical work at this time—the occasional blending of intellectual tasks with manual labour; the exploitation of less connected hopefuls trying to find opportunity; the discord around the arrival of women and minorities into a typically white, male workforce; denouncements of clerks in the media as harbingers of moral bankruptcy and hedonism—all revolve around attempts to contain the power that clerks came to wield. "In the nineteenth century, strivers contended, the origins of success came from within rather than from outside assistance," because the entrepreneurial career paths opening up under experienced merchants meant that clerks now "had opportunities

to advance economically and socially outside the constraints of hierarchical relationships" (Luskey 21). Operating at the heart of an increasingly complex system of international trade, these workers not only enjoyed considerable material compensation, but a greater presence in social and cultural affairs opposite an entrenched but stagnating upper class morality.

However, the same factors that contributed to this prosperity would soon render many clerical roles precarious and unrewarding, as the retail industry transitioned through the Fordist and into the post-Fordist era and subsequently developed more sophisticated ways of doing business. Both sustaining and sustained by the "'centripetal force' of persons, goods, and money set into motion by industrial opportunity," clerks became disempowered as capitalist exchange continued on its natural trajectory toward optimal efficiency and responsiveness, "their very impermanence mimick[ing] the perpetuum mobile of the commodity exchange they had come to the city to administer" (Zakim 568). The scholarly discussion around this devaluing of clerical work has had largely to do with deskilling, the implications of which are perhaps most succinctly described by Harry Braverman in terms of what he calls the detailed or manufacturing division of labour—the breaking up of a single occupation into smaller tasks according to Fordist and Taylorist principles. Unlike the social division of labour, which "divides society among occupations, each adequate to a branch of production," the manufacturing division of labour "destroys occupations considered in this sense, and renders the worker inadequate to carry through any complete production process" (50-51). This is intended to produce value by having employees focus on a smaller range of tasks to increase their efficiency, as well as expanding the pool of qualified candidates to include less skilled and thus less expensive workers in order to drive down the price of labour and strengthen managerial control. And while this approach typically has limited utility in more highly specialized corners of the service economy, often in

traditional office-type settings for example, its widespread use in contemporary retail and fast food has nevertheless shifted the popular impression of clerical work far closer to Douglas Coupland's definition of the McJob: “a low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future job in the service industry,” and a far cry from analogous work performed a century prior (5). In fact, this rigorously streamlined labour is expressed so overtly and regularly in such organizations that George Ritzer is compelled to situate it within an organizational paradigm he calls 'McDonaldization,' predicated on “efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control through nonhuman technology (that is, technology that controls people rather than being controlled by them)” (*McDonaldization* 15). Ritzer uses the example of the fast food giant to illustrate the everyday overreach of what he, borrowing from Weber, refers to as rationalization, the kind of precision bureaucracy that has come to characterize “such disparate phenomena as fast food restaurants, TV dinners, packaged tours, industrial robots, plea bargaining and open-heart surgery on an assembly-line basis” (“McDonaldization” 100). Indeed, as this very wide applicability might suggest, the term has not so much to do with the workings of McDonald's itself per se, or even with the industry in general, but “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world” (*McDonaldization* 1).

This view of rationalization here as a diffuse, comprehensive process at work across contexts and registers helps clarify the relationship between highly systematized non-places like fast food restaurants and the more generalized supermodern needs that they work to fulfil. Elizabeth Shove's look at the sociology of convenience, for example, suggests that the chief advantage of rationalized systems does not consist merely of their speed, efficiency, availability, affordability, etc., but the overall feeling of responsiveness generated by these things working in

tandem, “the capacity to shift, juggle and reorder episodes and events [...] in the context of an increasingly fragmented temporal environment” (170). In this formal respect, convenience is simply a mass attempt at keeping pace with flexibilist acceleration, interdependence, and change, relating “to an increasing intensity of small tasks and to a reliance on individualized modes of co-ordination,” which itself “is made more complex because other peoples' time is also fragmented and less formally controlled” (180). And non-places, as the most immediate manifestation of retail's move away from the large, centralized emporia described above and toward the spatial homogenization, decentralization, and dispersal seen in things like the McDonald's model, are only one consequence of this broader dynamic. The retail behemoths at forefront of these trends aspire to a ubiquity and uniformity that borders on omnipresence as a means of effectively managing expectations for consumers, which then helps them do the same for themselves as businesses.

The problem with this strategy, Shove goes on to argue, is that convenience tends to suffer from the same kinds of recursive intensification seen elsewhere in the work of thinkers like Augé, Harvey, Bauman, and Virilio. She notes, for example, that “there is a rather direct relation between individual and collective modes of co-ordination, a decline in one almost always leading to an increase in the other,” because “devices that promise to increase autonomy and allow individuals greater discretion over the timing and scheduling of activity will, if successful, generate multiply idiosyncratic schedules that in turn increase the problem of co-ordination” (180-181). In other words, since the preferred response to this dearth of collective coordination is to compensate by further empowering individuals through ever newer and better forms of convenience, the supermodern disorderliness that such measures try to address is actually exacerbated by the means taken to address it:

> Demand for convenience (and its continual respecification) arises as individuals struggle to cope with the contemporary challenge of allocating activities and co-ordinating them and other people in time and space. The resulting dynamic has a life of its own: each solution adding to the menu of problems that future solutions seek to resolve. The practical consequence of all of this, and the consequent valuing of convenience, differs for those who have the power to control their own schedules and those who do not. But in general, the cumulative effect is to engender and legitimize new, typically more resource-intensive, conventions and expectations built around the successive appropriation of convenient solutions, these representing a self-evidently sensible response to the unending problems of organizing life in a "do-it-yourself" society of the schedule. (183)

And, as Shove obliquely indicates in this excerpt, not only are the benefits of convenience continually negated as the pace of everyday life increases in proportion, these benefits are distributed unevenly in the first place, the underprivileged chronically lacking the kinds of freedom in scheduling choices that convenience simultaneously encourages and complicates. Again, in her words: "Effective planning depends on being able to modify and co-ordinate what other people do," and "it is as well to notice that the powerful generally have greater capacity to exert autonomous control over their own trajectories through time and space, and to subordinate the schedules of others to their own" (181). Returning to the obvious example of the fast food restaurant, this inequality is readily apparent in something like a drive-thru, where the convenience of both consumers and managers is ensured solely by those actually operating the window, who are rigorously controlled through various metrics, technologies, and procedures. What is more, as "concepts of service are revised and redefined as a consequence of the measures people take in coping with the ever increasing challenge of 'keeping on top of things'

and 'holding it all together,'" this control often becomes more overbearing and authoritarian over time as a means of continuing to chase the proverbial dragon that convenience represents for those struggling under the demands of supermodern life (Shove 170). What emerges from this state of affairs is the runaway growth of "unreasonable systems that deny the humanity, the human reason, of the people who work within them or are served by them," and subsequently the conflicts that this state of affairs tends to encourage (Ritzer, *McDonaldization* 123).

In large part, this logic of convenience has its origins in the rise of the automobile as the dominant mode of American transportation observed in chapter one. Jakle and Sculle note that "the automobile promised not only speed in movement, but the convenience of door-to-door travel, something that the railroads, for example, could not provide. And one's car could be used whenever need dictated for travel was not tied to corporate timetables" (40). As a consequence of automobility, convenience also quickly became a defining part of doing business by the roadside, particularly where fast food was concerned, as opposed to the more upscale tea rooms and family restaurants in urban downtowns. "Relatively few roadside stands, judging by the commentary of the day, were considered attractive," widely condemned for their slapdash construction and lack of upkeep until the National Standowners Association worked to encourage "better waste disposal, restroom construction, improved parking lots, and better night-time lighting" (Jakle and Sculle 45). Perhaps the keenest student of these reforms was Howard Johnson, who pioneered business-format franchising in the 1920s and '30s as a way of expanding more rapidly and safely than his competitors. Whereas other corporations had exclusive ownership over every location bearing their respective names, Johnson established a system whereby he retained 50% of the stake in each new restaurant opened, with the remainder going to the franchisee in exchange for splitting the initial investment. He also kept control over the decor and architecture of his

buildings, which “were designed for instant visibility and intended to instill customer loyalty through ready brand recognition,” with “white stucco or clapboarded walls, turquoise-blue cupolas, and orange roofs, coupled with large driveway signs” (Jakle and Sculle 51). It was in this manner that the standardization of these spaces, in order to ensure customer convenience, became the norm for fast food ventures. Tapping into a distinctly American set of cultural references, with restaurants aping the style of New England colonial-era public buildings like churches and town halls, Howard Johnson's became popular by presenting itself as something already familiar—Stephen Kurtz writes that “nothing calls attention to itself; it is all remarkably unremarkable. The sense of *deja vu*, so strange in other circumstances, is commonplace here” (23). Even the food was standardized in order to more fully reflect the range of choices popularized by other fast food joints—the hamburger, for example, was relatively unknown in the U.S. before being popularized by early chains like White Castle and A&W.

Nomenclature, decor, and cuisine were merely the first considerations, however, in a lengthy process of standardization that would only genuinely begin around the late 1950s. It was then, Thomas Dicke writes, that “perceptive entrepreneurs realized that, to use a popular example, there was more money to be made selling hamburger stands than in selling hamburgers” (3). Alongside stylistic considerations came “the creation of a wide variety of specialized services and managerial tools such as professional advertising and sophisticated accounting services,” as small business owners “found their success depended on applying the principles of mass production to the bundle of services they provided to their franchisees” (Dicke 3). These forms of standardization came to affect a huge range of organizations, with new innovations continuously rising to prominence in one industry and then being applied in others. Although they were originally by and large native to the fast food industry, for example, it is

necessary to turn elsewhere to observe these advancements in their most recent and sophisticated permutations:

> Today's globalization differs from that of even a few decades past because of the big-box retail chains—the big buyers that have often displaced the large manufacturing firms that once reigned supreme as the central pillars and most consequential entities in the capitalist economy during most of the twentieth century. The Walmarts, Home Depots, and Carrefours sit atop global supply chains, along with brands such as Apple and Nike. They make the markets, set the prices, and determine the worldwide distribution of labour for that gigantic stream of commodities that flows across their counters. (Applebaum and Lichtenstein 2)

Again enabled by the extensive travel and communications networks of supermodernity, such businesses thrive in large part by avoiding the expense of having to actually manufacture what they sell. Instead, they import from contractors and subcontractors working in other countries with weaker labour laws and a strong interest in free trade, so much so that it is not uncommon for competing products to come from the same factory. With these wares essentially selling themselves through brand recognition, a concept which is itself predicated on convenience, the retailers stocking them are capable of being even more sparse and samey than their fast-food counterparts. From the 1980s onward, "the building in the traditional sense was no longer important; instead, it was a big, low box fronted by enormous, highly visible parking lots that represented convenience. In addition," and "in keeping with the merchandise contained within, the general approach by retailers to the stores was one of practicality, economy, and efficiency, with little interest in urban or architectural possibilities" (DeJong 124). The overseas export processing zones where most of these goods come from are also invested in a similar kind of

placelessness, for reasons mostly having to do with avoidance of public scrutiny and control over workers—"These pockets of pure industry hide behind a cloak of transience," Naomi Klein observes. "The contracts come and go with little notice; the workers are predominantly migrants, far from home and with little connection to the city or province where zones are located; the work itself is short-term, often not renewed. […] These are factories built not on land, but on air" (261).

Meanwhile, a similar race to the bottom is being run in the servicescapes of the Western world, where deskilling has brought workers to heel to help satisfy the prevailing desire for efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control that their workplaces largely symbolize. These employees are trained to function like machinery—but they are also more readily *treated as such*, both by their employers and by their customers, each a trend with some important implications. In the former case, the primary consequence is institutionalized labour precarity, with those occupying such deskilled roles left without recourse to bargain for better employment situations or otherwise assert their needs to management. Royle and Towers observe that "although fast-food MNCs have at times introduced teamwork and employee involvement practices, independent employee representation is absent":

> The imperative behind such practices is the maintenance of a highly disciplined employment relationship and standardized systems of control and service that preclude any serious national or local autonomy. In this context, and by this logic, effective employee representation has no place. It is also relatively easy to avoid, given the frequently transient and acquiescent nature of the fast-food labour force. The outcomes, as already indicated, are endemic low pay, no effective voice for the workforce and, wherever possible, the avoidance of collective bargaining. (201)

In the world of low-level service work like retail and fast food, the commodity status of labour is expressed in uncommonly bare and overt terms, overwhelmingly prioritizing the business over the stability, prosperity, or well-being of its employees. With full-time and permanent staff swapped for part-time contingent staff in order to better adapt to demand and decrease overhead costs, "the whole emphasis of the McDonald's and other fast-food systems is the flexibility of the workforce," which is generally gamed for maximum profit in the same way one might deploy budgeting software or market research (Royle, *Unequal Struggle* 72). Labour relations, an exchange with a cumbersome but necessary set of social obligations, has adopted a sense of detachment more akin to ordering off a menu or shopping the sales, accomplished by way of "low wages, minimal benefits, tight staffing, and efforts to intensify labour," all of which are "the predictable results of strong competitive pressure in a legal and cultural setting that grants employers remarkable discretion and does not guarantee workers a voice in influencing employment conditions" (Leidner 13). In addition to these issues plaguing the service industry in the West, the overseas manufacturing industries that supply businesses like big box retailers already operate according to a similar version of this logic, as writers like Klein indicate.

In the latter case, with regard to social relations between worker and customer rather than worker and employer, the primary consequence can be summarized as a problematic instrumentalization of human feeling, affect, and social connection. "Unlike manufacturing," Warhurst and Nickson write, "the service production process is simultaneously produced and consumed, employees directly interact with consumers, the 'service encounter' between employee and customer is intangible, contingent, spontaneous and variable and, finally, employees are part of the product" (105). Similarly, and closer to the point, Lynne Pettinger argues "that sales assistants are components of how store brands are performed for consumers,

along with the inanimate store design, layout and marketing and advertising practices" (166). This encroachment on personal agency and expression, too, is an attempt to hedge against supermodern risk and instability, with the consistency of a brand's message providing a ready-made rallying point for both the marketers who craft it and the consumers they craft it for. "The secret behind Starbucks's magnetic pull on consumers," for instance, "lies in the extraordinary amount of control it exercises over its image. At Starbucks, nothing is accidental. Everything the customer interacts with, from the obsessively monitored store environment down to the white paper cups, is the product of deliberation and psychological research" (Clark 88). And to use another well-known example, Royle notes that "just about everything that is used and sold in a McDonald's has to be approved by the firm" ("Americanization" 251). It bears mentioning directly at this point that 'everything' includes employee appearance and behaviour, control over which is "achieved through the careful selection and socialization of franchisees as well as highly detailed rules and procedures which are regularly monitored by the corporation" using a variety of methods ("Americanization" 251). Long-term, these trends find the reliability of convenience ranging into the kinds of toxic orderliness and self-regulation explored in work like Hochschild's *The Managed Heart*, where flight attendants describe the odd sense of depersonalization brought out by the 'affective labour' they perform: "Sometimes I come off a long trip in a state of utter exhaustion, but I find I can't relax. I giggle a lot, I chatter, I call friends. It's as if I can't release myself from an artificially created elation that kept me 'up' on the trip" (4).

In many ways, this lack of power and voice is reproduced in the fiction that features service workers, where their quite serious grievances go largely unexamined. Though the subject of work is a substantial part of the American cultural conversation for obvious reasons, for

example, it is a rare text that focuses specifically on the kinds of deskilled labour found at the lowest levels of contemporary fast food or retail conglomerates. McJobs and the non-places in which they are performed rarely appear together despite the ubiquity of both in American art, and when they do it is usually on a momentary or outright incidental basis. Service work is almost always set within anthropological places, establishments usually owned and operated by a main character, distinctly a product of that character's personality, and dedicated to socializing in general—the majority of examples are films about high-end eateries (*Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, *Ratatouille*, *Chocolat*), but the best example might be *Cheers*, the tagline of which is overtly predicated on this idea. Conversely, where non-places do appear as such, it is usually from the perspective of a patron rather than a worker. Supermarkets feature prominently here, from the wistful longing for Walt Whitman's America that informs Allen Ginsberg's trip to "A Supermarket in California," to the grim conclusion of Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives*, where Joanna's comely but vacant stare resonates thematically with the gleaming aisles of her local grocery store, to The Clash's "Lost in the Supermarket," the denouncement of suburban conformity that helped garner the band mainstream attention in the U.S. In some cases, the frictionless, mechanical movement through multiple iterations of this infrastructure comprises a considerable portion of a text's narrative and social commentary, as with Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, which traverses ATM kiosks, motels, malls, and of course, supermarkets. In others, service jobs appear solely for the sake of a sight gag, usually in the form of a character wearing a goofy uniform, examples which help underline the demeaning tendencies of this sort of work, and which turn up absolutely everywhere. Sometimes, characters have these jobs only to immediately quit or get fired from them, usually as a way of framing the work as in some way beneath the individual—*That '70s Show*, *Half Baked*, *Reality Bites*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont*

High, etc. Sometimes, this brand of professional malaise is the impetus for discussing a different, more specific social ill, like *9 to 5*'s madcap exploration of sexism in secretarial work, or the racial tensions that bubble over in the conclusions of *Car Wash* or *Do the Right Thing*. Sometimes, placelessness is precisely what a character is looking for, providing either low stakes in comparison to something else, as with *American Beauty*, or safety in obscurity, as with *Breaking Bad*. And sometimes, the unusual rhythms of these workplaces *are* lingered on, but as a kind of superficial contrast to the rich social atmospheres that come to reveal them as anthropological places after all—examples like *Empire Records*, *Mystic Pizza*, *Adventureland*, and *The Office* come to mind.

Whether by framing these jobs as disposable and readily disposed of, by placing them in the background of some more intimate coming-of-age story, or by avoiding the subject entirely, however, none of these examples actually speak to the issues mentioned above in any kind of substantial way. Making these elisions more striking is the fact that on the brief occasions that such labouring situations *are* explored, they are revealed to be rather unhappy indeed, despite the comedic tone with which they are usually presented. Mike Judge's *Office Space*, for example, juxtaposes the soul-death experienced in the cubicle farms of '90s corporate America with the McDonaldization of casual dining, including a scene in which an employee is passive-aggressively admonished for not decorating her uniform with enough gimmicky trinkets called 'pieces of flair': “Look, we want you to express yourself, okay? Now if you feel that the bare minimum is enough, then okay. But some people choose to wear more and we encourage that, okay? You do want to express yourself, don't you?” The joke of course is that the items are merely another part of the job, a fact not lost on the increasingly agitated waitress, who finally chooses to 'express herself' by flipping off her manager and resigning. In season seven of *The*

Simpsons, this same dynamic has an ethnocultural dimension added to it when Kwik-E-Mart mainstay Apu Americanizes his store not only to keep from losing his job, but to keep from being deported after anti-immigration fever sweeps Springfield. Here, the effacement of identity ranges into not only a specific kind of professional dress or demeanor, but the complete obliteration of Apu's heritage as he fakes an American accent, pretends to enjoy baseball, and gets rid of the personal iconography on his counter: “Who needs the infinite wisdom and compassion of Ganesha, when I can have Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman staring at me from the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* with their dead eyes?” The most frequently recurrent example, however, is likely *Married... with Children*'s Al Bundy, whose downward trajectory since his high school years is chiefly illustrated through his dead end job at a ladies' shoe store:

> Every morning when I wake up, I know it's not going to get any better until I go back to sleep again. So I get up, have my watered-down Tang and still-frozen Pop Tart, get in my car with no upholstery, no gas, and six more payments, to fight traffic just for the privilege of putting cheap shoes on the cloven hooves of people like you. [...] But I'm not a loser. Because despite it all, me and every other guy who'll never be what he wanted to be are still out there, being what we don't want to be forty hours a week, for life. And the fact that I haven't put a gun in my mouth, you pudding of a woman, makes me a winner.

Occasional glimpses like these into the lives of clerks, servers, and salespeople reveal some of the animus lying just beneath the polished sheen of the supermodern service industry. Often making minimum wage, kept in part-time holding patterns, and derided as losers, slackers, simpletons, or outright automatons, the social costs already levied on workers in such conditions are only added to by a culture that has tended to trivialize or overlook them.

Yet despite this interesting inattention to these non-places on any sustained or lingering

basis, the sheer number of their briefer appearances in fiction suggests that they nevertheless heavily resonate with audiences, and have for quite a while. *I Love Lucy*'s famous conveyor belt scene might even be seen as a rudimentary example of the rapid pace and heavy regimentation of fast food work, Wally's malt shop job in an early episode of *Leave it to Beaver* lodges a few complaints in its own squeaky clean manner, and the lousy after-school McJob has practically been a teenage rite of passage for as long as it has existed. Given that these spaces have only become more streamlined over the years, it might stand to reason that this lack of engagement is because they are simply too boring to give continuous narrative focus. They are bland, homogenized, asocial, and heavily routinized, none of which make for particularly riveting entertainment, and consequently, pop culture seems to engage with them in the same way any actual customer would: by visiting a few minutes at a time at most, and not giving them much direct scrutiny unless something is gravely amiss. But it is for exactly this reason that it is important to examine the rare instances in which artists meet these challenges head-on, in order to meaningfully address the chronic alienation, frustration, and despondency endemic to these workplaces in a more sustained fashion, rather than continuing with piecemeal analyses of single episodes or thirty second scenes.

To this end I now turn to two such texts, which in addition to adopting deskilled service work as their chief object of interest, also do so through the use of a particularly spartan version of retail non-places in the form of the convenience store. The first is Kevin Smith's *Clerks*, a film dedicated to the aspects of these dead end jobs that are perhaps least conducive to a compelling film: the tedium, the anxiety, the deluge of minor frustrations and acts of disrespect, all of which are railed against to increasingly crass and absurd degrees. The attention it received from both critics and audiences for this novel format and subject matter single-handedly launched Smith's

filmmaking career—Roger Ebert remarks that “hardly anybody ever works in the movies, except at jobs like cops, robbers, drug dealers and space captains,” and “one of the many charms of Kevin Smith's *Clerks* is that it clocks a full day on the job.” Stuck in the Quickstop convenience store without much to do for the entirety of its runtime, the film helped popularize the casual lack of ambition that defines the 'slacker' character, a regular presence in stoner comedies like *Wayne's World*, the *Bill and Ted* series, or Smith's big budget follow up *Mallrats*. Through its documentation of this most mundane of occupations, however, *Clerks* also unexpectedly provides a very real and well placed sense of dissatisfaction with the more generalized structural issues sketched out above, derived primarily from Smith's enmity toward his own job as a cashier in the very same store. The reading of the film offered here is thus intended to highlight several of these issues as they manifest on a practical and highly personal basis, from the ways in which marginalized employees like service workers inherit most of the responsibility in ensuring convenience standards are met for everyone else, to the ways in which they are instrumentalized to meet these standards, to the ways in which they, too, rely on convenience to ease the myriad personal and professional burdens they bear as a result. These associations significantly complicate the popular view of slacker figures like Smith as merely lazy or careless; though he adopts the same sardonic indifference seen in related texts like *Office Space* or *Reality Bites*, his two lead characters are by turns irrationally angry, dangerously miserable, intensely codependent, and wholly unable to envision happier or more productive futures for themselves, gesturing to a more serious willingness to confront the grievances of service workers than his brash sense of humour might suggest. His unremitting focus on the space of the Quickstop symbolically cordons it off from the rest of the world as though in a vacuum, which by extension resigns its employees to seemingly perpetual drudgery, forsaken by civilization yet unwillingly

subject to its whims.

Ben Ryder Howe's *My Korean Deli*, the second text under consideration here, contrasts with *Clerks* in a number of analytically useful ways. Whereas the latter is quite singular in terms of its focus, attitude, composition, and perspective, the former is multifaceted and ambivalent, occupying different class positions, performing different kinds of labour, exploring different spaces, tackling different issues in different registers, and voicing different conflicting opinions on all of these subjects. Consequently, whereas Smith uses sheer oppressive emptiness to advance a straightforward polemic against the inherent exploitation of a society predicated on convenience, Howe's memoir is entirely too full, bewildered by the complex, ever-changing circumstances that encourage this exploitation in the first instance. Though working as a clerk, Howe is also the owner of the business he works for, becoming acquainted with both the alienation felt by service workers, as well as the organizational necessities that make service work so alienating. Though a server by happenstance, he is a writer and intellectual by trade, and the goal-oriented functionality of one role conflicts with the idealistic introspection of the other, providing him insight into two oppositional outlooks, thought processes, and sets of priorities. Though accustomed to the oddities of his bourgeois background and self-admitted WASPiness, his closest contacts are working class Korean immigrants with lifestyles and life stories radically different from his own, which help reveal to him the obscured plights of hopeful would-be Americans from every conceivable corner of the planet. The strengths of Howe's memoir lie in its conceptual breadth, its attention to convenience as a pervasive global condition and the broader logic that drives it, rather than the depth with which *Clerks* explores the results of this logic in the form of visceral psychosocial upheaval. Consequently, my reading of it here is intended to engage some of the more diffuse phenomena associated with convenience,

rationalization, and dehumanization mentioned above. These include how the satisfaction of workers is sacrificed for the economic stability of their workplaces, how this process applies elsewhere to similar logistical and organizational problems, how it intensifies upon intersecting with other factors of marginalization like race, age, foreignness, or degree of cultural assimilation, and generally speaking, how convenience represents the best and worst of supermodern abundance.

2. Kevin Smith: *Clerks*.

Kevin Smith shot his breakthrough film *Clerks* at his workplace, the QuickStop convenience store in Leonardo NJ, instead of doing his job. Made on a shoestring budget of 25000 mostly borrowed dollars during the DIY film boom of the early '90s, it is known for its numerous proudly displayed defects and punk minimalism—generally plotless, shot in black-and-white, sparsely populated, and focused on a single workday in a single location. This austerity, at the time mostly the province of art house and independent cinema unpalatable to popular audiences, renders the film something of a curiosity given its status as a cult hit and the fame it brought its director. Reviewer Scott Tobias quips that "*Clerks* may be the only $25000 movie ever made that leaves people wondering where all that money went," and Hal Hinson calls it "slapped together out of what looks like surveillance camera footage." But Smith managed to generate mainstream interest in these more subdued indie sensibilities by packaging them with constant digressions into nerd minutia and bombastic toilet humour, resulting in an intriguing mix of pop existentialism and relentless lowbrow depravity. These conflicting aspects of the film find ample and cohesive expression in the space of the Quickstop, its sanitized professional atmosphere as a workplace contrasted with the kinds of insubordination, dissatisfaction,

demotivation, marginalization, acrimony, and chaos endemic to the work performed there. Even the store's name implies an environment of strict functionality, but one that is nevertheless purely trivial: stocked with non-essential goods, staffed by non-essential workers, and host to reams of non-essential information, usually in the form of overly involved conversations about pop culture between eponymous clerks Dante Hicks and Randal Graves. Just as its protagonists oscillate between unenthusiastically tending to customers and playing hockey on the store's roof, the film delivers a thoughtful reflection on deskilled service labour and its discontents, but mostly through lengthy discussions about dead people, oral sex, and Star Wars.

This obvious dissonance is the foundation for both the film's comedy and its commentary on workplace alienation. In the vignettes that comprise the film's meandering non-story, the drab surroundings of the store and its attendant responsibilities are alternately subverted, resisted, or succumbed to, foregrounding a basic struggle between the clerks' self determination and the servile professional identities they are expected to adopt. A particularly instructive example of this juxtaposition at work is the scene where Randal asks to borrow Dante's car so he can rent a video across town on company time. Straight-laced Dante refuses the request, which is made even more absurd by the fact that Randal already works next door, at a video rental shop. “You're a clerk, paid to do a job,” he lectures. “You can't just do anything you want while you're working.” Randal develops an unlikely counter-argument and wins Dante over, however, by spitting water at a passing customer: “Title does not dictate behavior. If title dictated my behavior, as a clerk serving the public, I wouldn't be allowed to spit a mouthful of water at that guy. But I did. So my point is that people dictate their own behavior. Even though I'm a clerk in this video store, I choose to go rent videos at Big Choice. Agreed?” Like other stunts of this nature elsewhere in the film, Randal's lack of professionalism here is grounded in a hostile bid

for personal agency within the restrictive environment of his workplace, an endeavour that manifests spatially, socially, and economically. It serves to challenge the expectation that he fully and unquestioningly comply with every directive of the space and his assigned role in it, as well as tries to determine the point at which this expectation becomes indefensible: “So I'm no more responsible for my own decisions while I'm here at work than, say, death squad soldiers in Bosnia?” Appropriately, a significant part of this rebellion consists of Randal physically removing himself from the non-place where his job is performed, his refusal to occupy the video store distancing him from the servitude he sees in his work there. This dynamic reappears regularly throughout the film, with Randal habitually leaving his post to pursue the more desirable roles offered in other spatial contexts, whether by changing from clerk to customer by going to Big Choice, or from co-worker to friend by loitering in the Quickstop with Dante. In addition to time theft, his decision to give his business to a competing video store helps him cultivate an economic and cultural identity external to his workplace, and coming back to watch the video at the Quickstop signifies a desire to remake his environment in line with his personality rather than vice versa. Punctuating the ridiculousness of the entire scene is what Randal ends up renting, a niche pornographic film intended to be as unprofessional as humanly possible. “I like to expand my horizons” he says curtly, when asked about his selection.

This anarchic disposition did more than place Clerks at the forefront of the burgeoning amateur film scene. It also cemented the film's place in the canon of 'Generation X' art, a defining feature of which is withdrawal from a labour market perceived as devoid of meaning, pleasure, or reward, usually because of the overwhelmingly lacklustre opportunities to be had there. In addition to coining the term Generation X and popularizing the concept of the McJob, for example, Douglas Coupland's first novel also exhibits this sort of disaffection: “Our systems

had stopped working, jammed with the odor of copy machines, Wite-Out, the smell of bond paper, and the endless stress of pointless jobs done grudgingly to little applause" (11). And another seminal text, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, points to a few of the industries where it has taken hold: "We're the people who do your laundry and cook your food and serve your dinner. We make your bed. We guard you while you're asleep. We drive the ambulances. We direct your call. We are cooks and taxi drivers and we know everything about you" (166). Out of these occupational doldrums came one of the most enduring parts of Generation X's cultural legacy in the form of 'slackers' like Dante and Randal, who react to their social inertia with flippant disregard, outright loathing, or some combination of the two. "The nebulous ennui that informs the slacker stereotype is a powerful force in the cinema of Generation X," Peter Hanson writes. "Tarantino, Smith, and other key filmmakers" like Paul Thomas Anderson, David Fincher, and Steven Soderbergh, "address this spiritual sadness directly through sociocultural dialogue exchanges and the portrayal of slacker characters, and indirectly by employing narrative structures that both reflect and deconstruct the conventions of mainstream cinema" (15). This conspicuous rejection of work, including the narrative work typical of Hollywood films, frames the late capitalist values of organizational loyalty and hoarded wealth as empty pursuits, and waged work as an increasingly frivolous institution preserved for the benefit of few. As Smith himself phrases it: "You watch your parents work all their lives, and what do they have to show for it? My generation wants to get the most for doing the least" (Hornblower 68).

As a posterboy for the slacker lifestyle, however, Smith introduces a somewhat novel variation on this theme—his characters make this refusal while working at their jobs. Surprisingly, *Clerks* is one of the few slacker texts that actually offers a sustained look at the realities of work itself, with most others focusing instead on the ostensibly more productive

things Gen-Xers are doing with their time. This includes Richard Linklater's *Slacker*, which popularized the contemporary definition of the word, is credited by Smith as his primary reference point while making *Clerks*, and yet has almost nothing overtly to do with work whatsoever. The sole exception is a character who briefly comments on his feelings about it after being asked directly: “All it does is fill the bellies of the pigs who exploit us. Hey, look at me. I'm makin' it. I may live badly, but at least I don't have to work to do it.” Indeed, most of Linklater's characters appear to be unemployed, and virtually none of them are seen doing whatever jobs they might have. But by transplanting this antipathy into an actual workplace, Smith calls explicit attention to a frequently overlooked part of slacking: the fact that work remains the only reliable way for most people to meet their own basic needs regardless of the continued legitimacy or problematic nature of work, and regardless of one's level (or complete lack) of interest. The film's value as a slacker text does not simply lie in the exaggerated carelessness of its protagonists at their jobs, but in the ways it justifies this carelessness through a depiction of service work as a kind of absurdist exercise—unpleasant, demanding, demeaning, and completely extraneous to the continued functioning of society, but nevertheless performed for unconvincing or inapprehensible reasons. Unlike Linklater's characters, Smith's clerks live badly, *and* they have to work to do it.

This contrast between the personal desires of service workers and the professional identities required of them is produced through the spatial characteristics of the Quickstop, which in its asocial and functional aspects as a non-place help contribute to the complaints that slacker art is intended to raise. Randal's outlandish behaviour, for example, is largely a preemptive response to the kinds of abuse heaped on his friend Dante, who spends most of the film being strung along by management, badgered by customers, and feeling powerless to do

anything about it because of his adherence to professional conduct. In the very first transaction of the film, for example, a customer buys a cup of coffee and requests to drink it next to the counter, which Dante allows. The customer then immediately takes advantage of the permission granted him to harass other customers coming in to buy cigarettes, suggesting they switch to gum instead. Realizing the position he has put himself in, Dante reverts to reminding the coffee-drinker of the impersonal, transactional environment they occupy: "If you're gonna drink that coffee, I think you should take it outside, eh? [...] If you're drinking it in here, I'd appreciate it if you don't bother the customers." The situation soon escalates, however, as the customer leads a mob of repentant smokers in angrily throwing their remaining cigarettes at Dante, while heavyhandedly decrying him as an amoral stooge working on behalf of big tobacco. Although Dante attempts a second time to reimpose order using the same logic—"you're loitering, and causing a disturbance!"—the coffee-drinker responds in kind, and succeeds in justifying his presence in the space: "Here! Now I *am* a customer, I'm gonna buy some Chewlies gum. Alright? I'm a customer, engaged in a discussion with the other customers." The crowd only dissipates when it is discovered that the reverse is true—the man is in fact not a customer, but is actually himself at work, as a spokesperson sent to drum up business for the gum company by diverting customers toward their product instead of cigarettes.

This incident sets up several of the prevailing attitudes that inform how the space of the store is used in the film, most of which derive from the more well-known dissatisfactions harboured by service workers. It is, for example, an exaggeration of the dehumanizing tendencies of affective labour, and the expectation that clerks prioritize this labour in the face of abuse considered unreasonable in other contexts; Dante, unable to act against the mob shouting at him, impotently stands behind the counter and is pelted with cigarettes until his girlfriend

Veronica steps in. It also, like Randal's interrogation of title versus behaviour, explores the extent to which a job should dictate one's actions, who is responsible for these actions, and how they might conflict with one's own interests or ethical standards. The gum rep, for example, unscrupulously uses Dante as a scapegoat for his own professional gain. But the criticism he levies against the Quickstop's complicity in the harm caused by the cigarette industry also calls Dante's own morality into question, a proposition revisited later in more concrete terms when Randal absentmindedly sells cigarettes to a child and Dante is nonetheless held responsible. Making the whole exchange even more frustrating is the knowledge that Dante does not even need to man the till for his job to be performed. Prior customers that morning have been making change from money left on the counter while he lounges in the back room with Veronica—dishonesty is not an issue, he explains, because "when people see money on the counter and no one around, they assume they're being watched." This too is a component of the Quickstop's asocial, functional climate, with most of Dante's actual labour consisting of wordlessly dispensing cigarettes, or exasperatedly answering questions about the locations of various items despite comically huge signs around the store offering precisely that information.

Most pervasive, however, is the atmosphere of heightened interpersonal antagonism that develops out of these kinds of transactions over time. Structured by the repetition of petty conflicts with customers, performing rote tasks, and finding ways to waste time in the interim, the film's 'plot' consists mostly of the clerks being treated as products or infrastructure rather than as human beings, and the different ways they come to react to this objectification. For Randal's part, his antics in the film are not funny because of their obscene content per se, but because of their distance from the bland, preprogrammed niceties typical of service encounters. Moreover, the catharsis produced through this discrepancy calls attention to the ways in which

the personalities, emotions, and attitudes of actual service workers are sold for meagre compensation on an everyday basis, a reality stated explicitly by the film's tagline: “Just because they serve you doesn't mean they like you.” Accordingly, even polite customers are treated as potential threats to the fragile peace of the store, even if they really are just there to buy coffee—the water-spit victim, for example, unwisely tries to strike up a conversation about tabloid headlines. Meanwhile, lacking Randal's bravado, Dante becomes increasingly morose as he attempts to manage his own private neuroses and personal issues while barely keeping the store running amid a series of minor catastrophes. “It's not like it's a demanding job over there,” says an irate customer when Randal is 20 minutes late to work. “I'd like to get paid to sit on my ass and watch T.V. […] That's why you're jockeying the register in some fucking convenience store instead of working at a steady job.” Not only is this another early example of casual disregard for Dante's dignity and autonomy because of his role as a clerk, it is also based in the logic of convenience as defined by Shove, with Randal's minor lateness apparently adequate cause to direct hysterics at someone who has nothing to do with it. Additionally, the class condescension exhibited here helps explain some of the clerks' own hair-trigger peevishness, like when Randal goes off on a customer for merely trying to get his attention: “I don't appreciate your ruse, ma'am. Your ruse, your cunning attempt to trick me. I hope it feels good. I hope it feels so good to be right. There's nothing better than pointing out the shortcomings of others, is there?”

The more interesting tension, however, is between Dante and Randal themselves, the latter's mounting frustration and the former's deepening gloom culminating in a brawl between the two that trashes the store near the end of the film. With each mishap gradually straining their friendship as the workday wears on, this conflict adds to Smith's catalogue of everyday service industry woes in ways similar to the coffee-drinker or video rental episodes. However, it also

provides some additional insight into some of the more chronic, self-perpetuating issues that tend to afflict these employment situations. Randal's off-colour shenanigans, for example, help make his own job easier, and preserve his sense of self worth by staging a kind of revenge fantasy against the cloyingly obsequious nature of supermodern service work. But at the same time, he steadily contributes to the same toxic social atmosphere that this hostility is supposed to ward off, with everyone else indignantly picking up his slack to keep things functioning. This is especially true of Dante, whose own feelings of resentment are only exacerbated by having to do both jobs by himself, as well as endure the additional ill will that Randal has inspired in the store's clientele: “Sometimes, I think the only reason you come to work is to make my life miserable.” By opting for the most immediate, obvious, self-serving solution to his problems, Randal essentially lapses into the same 'convenient' logic that informs spaces like the Quickstop more generally; the short-sighted prioritization of his own individual empowerment and well-being alienates those who might otherwise be interested in approaching the issue together, which would make the whole endeavour easier in the long run.

Conversely, Dante's effusive self-pity and inability to stand up for himself only leads him further into hopelessness, which in turn only encourages Randal to deride him as a humourless wet blanket for ruining what little fun there might be to eke out: “If you hate this job, and the people, and the fact that you have to come in on your day off, then why don't you quit? You just up and quit. There's other jobs. They pay better money. You're bound to be qualified for at least one of 'em. So what's stopping you?” Dante's response unexpectedly dispenses with the usual fantasy of burning one's bridges in dramatic fashion, complicating the relationship that American art typically has with this kind of labour: “I can't, alright?! […] I can't make changes in my life like that. If I could, I would, but I don't have the ability to risk the comfortable situations on the

big money and the fabulous prizes." Such an answer is valid coming from anyone *but* Dante, who makes it abundantly clear that he is no way comfortable. The character is even named for the poet as a reference to the Inferno, his workplace by extension becoming a realm of seemingly eternal torment that he nevertheless feels compelled to tolerate. "That seems to be the leitmotif of your life: ever backing down," Randal observes. "You *always* back down. You assume blame that's not yours, you come in on your day off. You buckle, like a belt." But while Dante's unwillingness to advocate for himself is obviously untenable, it too corresponds to the kinds of cut-rate immediate gratification that convenience represents, which again, Randal explicitly points out: "Oh, you're comfortable, right? This is a life of convenience for you, and any attempt to change it would shatter the pathetic microcosm you've fashioned for yourself."

Moreover, and more importantly, it also gives Smith the chance to expound on what makes these coping strategies so attractive despite their flaws. Put simply, the convenient solutions that the clerks rely on to get through their workday have little to do with the simplistic understanding of comfort that might easily be read into Dante's rationale for staying in an obviously undesirable situation, and everything to do with the more complicated and less satisfying idea of 'comfort' elaborated on by Shove or Ritzer: efficiency, predicatability, calculability, control, and the effort to stay ahead as these things are refined in pursuit of ever higher standards. For Dante and Randal, slacking is not a matter of happiness, or freedom, or self-actualization, but rather *risk management*, a shabby bulwark against the climate of supermodern uncertainty and anxiety that lies ominously just beyond the Quickstop's walls. Dante's referral to the labour market through the parlance of gambling or game shows, for example—of 'the big money and the fabulous prizes'—is not insignificant. He is unable to make changes in his life because the assumptions that inform such changes are constantly becoming

obsolete too quickly to seriously pursue or give further consideration, and as Zygmunt Bauman notes, “being out of a job implies being disposable, perhaps even disposed of already and once and for all, assigned to the waste of 'economic progress'” like so many junk food wrappers and cigarette butts (*Times* 70). Similarly, Randal's scorched-earth campaigns against the store's customers are ironically born of a desire to bond with Dante, the only person in the film with whom he can commiserate—his loneliness, bitterness, and complete inability to socialize with anyone else largely drives the tension of the film's sequel, in which the characters are in their thirties and *still* working as clerks, this time in a fast food joint called 'Mooby's': “I thought you were the only guy in the world who got me, and had my back. […] You think I wanna start making friends at my age? Christ, who would want me as their friend? I hate everyone.” As quintessential slacker characters, Dante and Randal speak to something more complicated than a distaste for inconsiderate customers and undignified tasks. The film is not just about how demand for convenience affects them on an immediate professional basis as service workers, but how they must then organize the rest of their lives around similar principles, complete with the unintended breakdowns, inefficiencies, and evils that these principles entail—what Ritzer refers to as the 'irrationalities' that inevitably plague rational systems.

The basic role of the Quickstop in the film, then, is to keep the clerks in a state of stasis while the remainder of the film's cast remains highly mobile, moving through the space and ruining Dante and Randal's day as they go. “I'm not even supposed to *be here* today,” Dante repeatedly grumbles in response to various turns of events—called in on his day off, manipulated by management into working until close, and diplomatically absorbing the fallout from his cantankerous co-worker's various snafus. It is a more abstract declaration as well, however, positioning the Quickstop itself as his primary enemy, that which keeps him from the more

'productive' endeavours slackers claim to represent. “Slacker subcultures are built out of a sense of loss, a loss of innocence, a loss of ideals, a loss of purpose,” Tom Lutz writes in his history of slacker art *Doing Nothing.*

> Sometimes, like Thoreau and hippie back-to-the-landers, slackers mourn a disappearing sense of self-determination. Sometimes they mourn the loss of meaningful work or, as is often the case, the passing of their own preadult lack of concern for the future. As a result, slacker subcultures can sometimes have strong reactionary strands, as in the case of elite slackers yearning for a level of privilege and prestige that only an outmoded class system could provide. But in most cases, as in that of the immediate post-World War II generation that came of age mourning the passing of a world in which heroism was still possible, slacker subcultures engage our sense of value precisely through that which they mourn. Thoreau, we feel, was right to object to the destruction of the New England forest by the textile industry; the Beats were right to decry the corporatization of everyday life. (54)

As a more contemporary update to these ideas, *Clerks* relates this sense of loss to supermodern instability in ways similar to that of the minimal personal and professional control viewed previously with the work of Dave Eggers in chapter two, or the short-term contingent labouring circumstances of Didion and Thompson seen in chapter one. Hanson notes that “'slackers' are the Gen-X equivalent of hippies: They withdraw from the rat race as a half-assed rebellion against dehumanizing cultural forces” (15). The crucial difference, however, is that in the absence of avenues through which to meaningfully engage with these forces, “slackers seek no revolutionary means for overturning or even healing the culture that appalls them. Rebellious boomers hit the streets to demonstrate against misguided military actions, repressive politics, and

other such ills," but this capacity to organize is undermined by a sociospatial context predicated on separation, acceleration, and dispersal (Hanson 15). Consequently, "slackers echo the previous generation's discontentment but have neither clearly defined antagonizing forces nor clearly defined reactions to such forces" (Hanson 15). Because neither Smith nor his characters can afford to skip work to chase personal happiness or loftier ideals, slacking instead becomes about the more modest aspiration of keeping things from getting worse. Unable to meaningfully confront the issues affecting his generation on any kind of useful, systemic level, the safest decision becomes to make none at all—with no power comes no responsibility.

Work is only the first on a long list of things that *Clerks* refuses to care about, the usual slacker effervescence grown into full-on giddy nihilism, more a depressive episode than a vacation. But this refusal acts as its own form of critique, a pervasive lack of action begotten by a pervasive lack of will, begotten by a pervasive lack of options. The daily routines lifelessly carried out by Dante and Randal are not enviable—but they *are* routines, "cyclical and repetitive motions" that "provide a sense of security in a world where the general thrust of progress appears to be ever onwards and upwards into the firmament of the unknown" (Harvey, *Postmodernity* 202). While offering a brief respite from the vulnerability of joblessness or the pressures of a more competitive industry, however, this bargain-basement version of comfort also works to cut off any avenues of escape, precluding more meaningful connection with those similarly disenfranchised. The Quickstop is perhaps the closest thing to an anthropological place that the clerks have, a ramshackle fiefdom of junk food and dirty jokes buttressed against the true abjection in store for them. Everyone else, though, is only there to pick up some cigarettes, likewise opting for simplicity instead of solidarity, out of touch together.

As a contrast to this rather constricted, claustrophobic look at the service industry, I now

want to expand a bit and refract these associations through a wider range of spatial contexts and demographic groups with Ben Ryder Howe's *My Korean Deli*. Buoyed by the optimism of inexperience, Howe strives to find meaning and authenticity in the tedium of his new job as a shop clerk, and is keen to nurture the social connections, however minor, he makes in that capacity. Though his direct interest in the work itself echoes Smith's shrewd attentiveness toward this ubiquitous yet often overlooked profession, this additional willingness to branch out leads Howe to view the problems around commerce, community, and convenience as part of a more universal predicament that affects different populations in different ways and to differing degrees. This shift in focus looks to find rationalization out in the wider world, looking at supermodern efficiency and coordination as a cultural imperative, and its widespread repercussions as such.

3. Ben Ryder Howe: *My Korean Deli.*

Ben Ryder Howe wrote his memoir *My Korean Deli: Risking it all for a Convenience Store* after becoming disenchanted with his white collar job and deciding to go into the service industry. Unlike Smith, who was aimless, single, in considerable debt, and twenty years old, Howe was roughly thirty, married, and tentatively established in a career path, working as an editor at *The Paris Review*. As these discrepancies might suggest, he also becomes a clerk for considerably different reasons than Smith, and under different terms: his wife Gab, herself dissatisfied with her job as an attorney, decides she wants to purchase a convenience store for her mother Kay, “the Mike Tyson of Korean grandmothers” and a service industry veteran of several decades (3). These circumstances inflect his thoughts on everything from direct issues like pay, hours, and inherent dignity of the work, to topics of a more philosophical bent like community or

convenience, with his role as part-owner lending an aura of personal significance to even the most undesirable of his daily tasks. “Sometimes smallness can be a virtue,” he writes. “In the case of a deli, smallness means that the person who's poured your coffee for the last twenty years and whose children you've put through college is likely the owner, not some faceless corporation in an office park with square bushes in Odessa, Texas” (83). Indeed, the decision to buy the deli is the result of this sort of familial closeness—it is a gift, intended to replace the bakery Kay left behind upon immigrating to America—and the communitarian culture of Howe's in-laws plays a substantial role in how the business is run. For example, one early strategy for saving money involves Howe and his wife moving into her parents' house, where Kay, unable to refuse doing favours for friends and family, hosts a revolving door of boarders in addition to the author, many of them immigrants who “stayed with us for months, squeezing three at a time into beds made for one” (13). And because “the general rule in the Paks' house, was that an unworn shirt was your shirt, an uneaten chicken leg your chicken leg,” much of the memoir has to do with the somewhat repressed individualism of Howe's New England upbringing in relation to the other cultures he comes into contact with at both home and work (13).

Located near a subway stop in a well-trafficked part of Brooklyn, the deli is similarly inclusive in its allegiance to a multitude of cultures, races, classes, creeds, and sensibilities, and Howe lavishes attention on the rich cosmopolitanism that he discovers when taking over. Rather than appearing as a non-essential or perfunctory activity, working at the deli is viewed as an unsung expression of human decency in its capacity to provide the area with desired items, an especially challenging feat given the variation in the deli's customer base. “It had a kind of double or triple life,” Howe says of the store.

But so, after all, does the quintessential New Yorker, with a day job as a waiter and a

> night job as an actor, or an economic existence here and a family somewhere else. Our store had all these different and painfully particular customers, yet somehow we had found a way to reconcile all their various needs. And it was a beautiful thing.
>
> Someone once told me that small business is "is putting your faith in the world. You risk your reputation, your family, your future, and essentially trust that you'll be rewarded." For a while in the summer of 2003, that's how it felt. (255)

Luckily, Howe finds a capable ally in Dwayne, the only clerk kept on when the store changes hands as advised by the previous owner, who "said we'd be sorry if we didn't, but left us to guess why" (75). Dwayne turns out to be the lifeblood of the business for several reasons, like his "famously well-fortified sandwiches," superlative cashiering and multitasking skills, apparent omniscience concerning anything threatening harm to the store, and most of all, a lifelong relationship with the borough and its people (76). "Dwayne has groupies, devotees and disciples, people from all over Brooklyn and every demographic in the neighborhood who come to see him," Howe says, and "has been performing in this pulpit for years, his métier being the bombs-away freestyle jeremiad, a brilliant, crude and Yogi Berra-ish soliloquy" that has earned him the nickname 'Preach' among admirers (76). In the same way Howe is made to reflect on his own heritage as a consequence of living in Kay's house, working at the store entails similar opportunities for self-examination as he deals not only with Dwayne and his business partners, but the store's former owner Salim, his landlord Chucho, and their regulars, "an international brotherhood of mostly middle-aged men who in the evening often lend the store an atmosphere similar to that of an off-track betting parlor" (92). These personalities situate the deli in a more robust social context than would be found in Smith's suburban New Jersey, which in turn helps differentiate Howe's views on customer service from the dour indifference of texts like *Clerks*.

As much as such descriptions of social depth inform Howe's personal view of this kind of labour, however, they are often used to showcase his ignorance rather than his understanding, simply because of what their inclusion in the narrative reveals about his priorities. In a more simplistic sense, his focus on the sociality of convenience stores sheds light on the travails of populations that are often marginalized due to class or race. But ironically, these meditations are also themselves frequently revealed to be a luxury that Howe haplessly indulges in instead of actually getting things done, which undermines their importance when it comes to usefully defining working-class concerns. This is certainly true when it comes to the literal, day-to-day work, where Howe's nebbish writerly persona is well out of his depth compared to real working-class people like Kay or Dwayne: “Our store has over a thousand different products, only a third of which have price tags. For someone like me who struggles every day to remember his own debit card PIN, this is going to be a serious challenge” (57). It is also true in less direct ways, however, as the fantasy of 'real work' that fuels Howe's initial enthusiasm is crushed under the technical requirements of operating a small business, precisely because he is more concerned with introspection than with function: “I've never been a great worker, but not because I don't work hard. I just tend to focus on the wrong things, like how people look, what they're wearing and whether they use words like 'fortuitous' properly” (58). Howe's difficulty with service work is not just a question of inexperience, but of a preoccupation with issues like identity and sociality, which have little place in the environment of a convenience store as economic machinery that must be ceaselessly attended to rather than merely ruminated on. This fact is reinforced elsewhere through repeated comparisons between working at the store and the comparative comfort of his white collar labour in the culture industry. George Plimpton, his boss at the *Review*, excitedly expresses a desire to try his hand at stocking shelves, and his father, an

anthropology professor, exhibits a similar kind of tone-deaf academic detachment: “'Could be an interesting experience,' he said, 'sort of an ethnography, a participatory study into the lives of the urban underclass.' […] Which sort of made me want to remind him that the deli was *not* a semester abroad” (37).

These aspects of Howe's memoir position it as both a supermodern update to, and commentary on, similar 'ethnographies' that were in vogue around a century prior. Compelled by a surge of public interest in discourses of social equality, a number of relatively well-off authors —Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, Jack London, Josiah Flynt, and Walter Wyckoff, among others— published lengthy undercover investigations into the cultural workings of the urban lower classes. Eric Schocket describes the collectivist ethic surrounding this tendency toward 'class-transvestism' as working to highlight between economic strata “an essential sameness, a common humanity that requires only recognition and understanding for an inevitable amalgamation […,] presumptions of similitude [which] derive, in no small part, from nineteenth-century ideologies of social mobility and egalitarianism” (111). Howe's commentary on the twenty-first century equivalent of these lifestyles in the form of deskilled service work, however, hinges on the fact he is clearly *not* working-class, nor particularly capable of handling working-class responsibilities; his capacity to describe this labour conflicts with his ability to perform it. This very explicit separation of his own class perspective from those he observes is repeatedly reinforced by way of these kinds of self-deprecating asides, anticipating what Schocket identifies as a longstanding problem with class-passing narratives despite the otherwise constructive intentions of their authors:

> In class-transvestite narratives, these vestiges of working-class republicanism are inflected and embodied in far less progressive ways. Mobility resides with the narrator

> alone, and egalitarianism becomes his or her ability to manipulate vestments during strategic moments of entry. The class transvestite's journey "down" ultimately serves to echo and circumvent other journeys "up," reducing mobility to a mere play of cultural signs. (111)

In other words, the claims of authenticity and inside knowledge made by these narratives have typically been made by simply donning some ratty clothes and spending a few nights in a boarding house, which has the advantage of emphasizing an 'essential sameness' or common humanity between classes, but by emphasizing this sameness also elides all of the chronic structural disadvantages that keep people poor in spite of it. "What is erased here is not the socially constructed relations between bodily signifiers and political referents" as with something like gender transvestism, but rather "the systemic relations between lived experience and historically specific economic exploitation," as middle-class writers appropriate the narrative of lower class struggle for their own edification, while remaining unencumbered by its realities (Schocket 120).

Howe approaches the issue, on the other hand, from essentially the opposite direction. Instead of trying to replicate the more superficial social markers of dress, slang, mannerisms, or even attitude, he actively highlights the difficulty with which this can be done convincingly, which downplays the essential sameness between himself and those he documents—in one instance, a customer asks for a loosie (a 'loose,' or individually sold cigarette), and a confused Howe assumes he's asking after a woman. By the same token, not only does his work in the deli recall the undercover toils of later class-passers like Whiting Williams, George Orwell, or Cornelia Stratton Parker, but his willingness to stake his own livelihood on the venture puts him at risk of the kind of financial precarity that even these writers fail to approach. That is to suggest

that although Howe avoids presuming to occupy the same *cultural* milieu of these workers, his dicey financial situation roughly approximates the often unnoticed *economic* vulnerabilities that tend to afflict them. Indeed, what Howe discovers is that the basis of working-class culture is not something that can be adequately summarized by the quaint cosmopolitan ideals with which he begins the project, but rather the inimitable, inscrutable fortitude that develops in response to years of serious adversity and distress:

> Maybe the problem is that there's no risk involved. Risk—what would that even entail? I'm not sure I know. Not simulated risk, not managed risk [….] I'm talking about the real world, dog-eat-dog, kill-or-be-killed. Not that literary publishing doesn't entail risk on an individual level—you might start a new magazine and end up publishing only two issues, or you might write a book and get an embarrassing review. You might lose your job. These are obviously real and painful outcomes, and greatly to be avoided. But fear of getting fired or embarrassed doesn't always get you out of bed in the morning. (21)

After taking leave from his job, pouring his labour and life savings into the deli, moving in with relatives to shore up any financial vulnerabilities, and *still* barely scraping by, Howe learns that this risk is less exhilarating in practice than in theory, and begins to cultivate the same kind of sombre determination he sees in people like Kay. “Her biggest concern […] I think, is that like many Americans, I have forgotten what it's like to suffer,” he admits. “Forgetting what it's like to suffer can be a good thing, since suffering can make people too cutthroat for society's good. But suffering also breeds certain capacities that are easily lost, such as the ability to focus and a willingness to engage with conflict” (60). Kay's own biography, itself characterized by the kinds of long-term economic disadvantage referred to by Schocket, squares well with these remarks. After immigrating to the U.S., “Kay had no choice but to work in sweatshops and as a night

cashier at stores," her family "forced to live in trailer parks and a brutal succession of blighted condominiums overlooking highways and cemeteries" (208). Predictably, Howe's experience of risk under similar socioeconomic conditions yields similar results: it certainly gets him out of bed in the morning, but only to kill-or-be-killed, and not to savour the local scenery that he originally finds so appealing. By the midpoint of the narrative the entire family is chronically exhausted, their lives completely devoted to keeping the faltering business afloat—the final chapter of the book's first half is entitled "Death Tomb."

What is more important than the simple fact of these economic inequalities, however, is how they structure the perception and usage of space differently along class lines, and particularly where things like service, deskilling, and convenience are concerned. Such disparities are apparent even prior to the appearance of the deli itself, where Howe's fussiness over image comes into conflict with Kay's ruthless pragmatism concerning the issue of a steam table, "one of those stainless steel, cafeteria-style salad bars that heat the food to just below the temperature that kills bacteria" (4). Here, the issue of identity over functionality takes on a spatial element, with Howe's attempts to discourage the purchase of a deli with this feature deriving almost completely from his own preferences rather than what is best for business, to Kay's increasing annoyance: "'What's the matter?' she asked me the other day. You not like money? Why you make us poor?' These are not unfair questions. I would say that one of my biggest faults as a human being is that I do not love money, which makes me lazy and spoiled" (4). In slacker texts like Smith's film, remarks like this one usually lend themselves to snarky rhetorical forays into late capitalism's unwieldy priorities and dubious assumptions concerning what constitutes 'value.' But Howe offers them sincerely, not as capitalist apologia but rather a self-deprecating recognition of his own shortcomings when it comes to working-class survival,

as he repeatedly approaches straightforward business decisions with a mindset clouded by symbolic considerations: “Call me a snob, but somehow a deli *grocery*—a traditional fruit and vegetable market—seems more dignified than a deli dishing out slop by the pound in Styrofoam trays. Is that practical? We are, after all, talking about a deli, not a summer home or a car” (4). Over the course of narrative, these impulses generally tend to cause more problems than they solve, like when Howe wastes money on niche world cuisine-type items in a bid to compete with the trendier market down the street, or irks customers by changing the quality, and price, of the deli's coffee.

And despite his early triumph in the steam table dispute, it turns out that Kay is of course in the right—the business needs all the practicality it can get as it gradually becomes saddled with increasingly burdensome and unexpected demands. In one instance, the family has to decide whether to stay open during a blizzard of historic proportions, a rare event that nonetheless has huge implications: “When you close, bad things happen. You may not lose all your customers, but you might miss an important delivery, or your food might spoil, or the cat might get angry about not getting fed and pee all over the store” (159). In another, it is discovered that Salim has underpaid his sales taxes for the last few years, “and as a result the government is levying a whopping eighty-eight-thousand-dollar fine. Which to my unschooled ears sounds like a problem for Salim, not us. But not Gab. She knows. *We* now own Salim's business, assets and liabilities” (139). In still another, the store is hit by the 2003 blackout that affected large portions of Canada and the U.S., threatening the loss of their perishable inventory and drawing potential looters: “We could be facing losses that take us into going-out-of-business territory. […] If only the store weren't so vulnerable and exposed. Money is everywhere and getting harder to keep track of” (214). In addition to sowing the kinds of direct social estrangement and distrust seen in *Clerks*,

these instances also reinforce the more general omnipresence of a liquid modern sense of precarity, where a single misstep could (and frequently does) spell disaster. And so the family, now unified in purpose, moves to make the space of the deli as efficient as possible, getting rid of the television and halving the amount of meat allowed to be put on sandwiches. Most significantly, Howe grapples with the mixed blessing of Dwayne, who is just as capable of offending customers as endearing them: "He doesn't portray himself as someone who *used* to be hard. On the contrary, he takes pains […] to establish that he is *still* whoever he used to be, maybe more so. Thus the cringe-inducing treatment of women, the frightening displays of rage and, well, the gun" (223). If nothing else, Dwayne is unfiltered—the wellspring of the openness, acceptance, and cosmopolitanism that Howe desires in service labour, and seen by regulars as "the one and only legitimate thing about the store, not only because he had stood behind that cold-cut counter for seventeen years, but because he embraced the role of neighbourhood advocate," acting as "an old standby during a time of change" (223). Everyone in the area seems to know and appreciate his story, his tribulations with drugs and violence, the dedication with which he has worked to go straight, and the role of the deli in providing him a reliable way to do so. But it is also these eccentricities, which would not be out of place in something like *Clerks*, that imperil the kind of stability that Howe is relying on to stay solvent, and as a result they become as much a liability as they are an asset.

The intractable presence of these hard financial realities highlighted by Howe's class-passing, and the ways in which they affect the space of the deli, can be seen to accomplish two things. First, while all of the changes made over the course of the memoir work to save the business from one catastrophe after another, these changes simultaneously erode the vibrant social atmosphere that initially differentiates it from similar businesses like the Quickstop. By

doing this, Howe provides context for the unhappy conditions railed against in a slacker text like Smith's, framing the dehumanizing environment seen there as the inevitable outcome of supermodern speed, dynamism, and uncertainty, instead of the mostly arbitrary malevolence that Dante and Randal seem to fall victim to. Secondly, and relatedly, by turning Schocket's formulation of class-transvestism on its head by examining class difference as a question of economics rather than culture, Howe exposes exactly that which Schocket argues to be obscured by these kinds of narratives. “From the abject to the integral, from community to signifying system, from shared work to shared morality, from economy to culture,” Schocket writes, “the transvestite's recorded journey through the lower class produces a translation that creates the discursive space for a fictitious resolution of material class conflict” (125). But because Howe's focus is on these irreconcilable material differences themselves, instead of the reconcilable social ones that stage this fictitious resolution between classes, the problems behind class difference and labour relations are revealed to be much more complicated than is generally surmised. In order to exist at all, the store must absolutely be a non-place rather than a place, which virtually requires all of the same tendencies toward dehumanization seen in *Clerks* and the service industry more broadly, and which directly contradicts all of the ways in which Howe is accustomed to living his life. “The worst of it,” he notes, “is coming to realize that principles I used to believe in as staunchly as anything, like that wide-open embrace of the world and those tried-and-true Strunk and White rules, haven't been of much use during the ordeal we've been experiencing” (158). In his double role as owner and employee, capitalist and worker, bourgeoisie and proletarian, he is essentially forced to exploit *himself* in order for the deli to function correctly, and in doing so gains rare insight into where exactly this exploitation comes from, and why it persists.

Contrasted with Smith's more cloistered perspective of supermodern service workplaces, Howe's experience across multiple class and labour categories is valuable not simply because it reaffirms that convenience is a central and necessary part of how these workplaces operate, but because it demonstrates why this is unavoidably the case. His journeys down the class spectrum by no means shy away from the same all-consuming alienation, precarity, and anxiety that define texts like *Clerks*, where servicepeople are made responsible for propping up the lifestyles of everyone else. But upon journeying back up again, he finds that his position is only marginally more enviable, and no more capable of enriching the lives of those around him without bankrupting the whole enterprise. “Dread is the nature of small business,” Howe muses while recounting the misstep that actually sunk his own. “You're gnawed by fear that something is going to come out of nowhere and flatten you before you've even had a chance to shout, whether it's a blackout or a government inspector” (234). In Howe's case, it is the latter. A detective sent in as part of a sting operation repeatedly coughs and clears his throat as Howe attempts several times to card the customer in front of him, who is buying cigarettes—in an effort to keep things moving during the rush and sensing a mounting air of exasperation, Howe finally gives up, neglecting this crucial step at his own peril. The beginning of the end for the already struggling deli, the incident again underscores Howe's relative ineptitude as a clerk, but also launches the narrative into a new, much wider and more powerful network of bureaucratized rational systems that the family must now live at the mercy of, and attempt to negotiate without any sense of how to do so effectively. The detective and his questionable behaviour, for example, are merely instruments of the NYC municipal government, which serves its own nebulous interests well beyond the scope of Howe's store in the same way that Howe's own concerns come to eclipse those of his employees. Trying to make sense of his predicament, Howe theorizes that the

haphazard identification protocols adopted in his city exist primarily to benefit tobacco companies wishing to appear interested in public health while still receiving dividends from grievously clumsy and easily circumventable regulations, as well as city officials trying to do the exact same thing. “Meanwhile,” he notes, “many retailers' associations actually support mandatory age verification, because the so-called retraining programs and the associated laws cause so many inadvertent mistakes” (234). This is more or less the same dilemma seen elsewhere in this chapter simply transposed into a different level of the economic food chain, where the convenience of several major players within a given system is achieved through the efforts of the more minor players that receive a disproportionate share of the responsibility and consequences. The detective need only offer the following justification: “What were you expecting? […] This is New York” (232).

This grudging reorganization of the deli, along with the rest of Howe's life, around convenience principles in response to such pressures is only the foremost example of rationalization seen in the memoir, however. Tangentially revealed by these associations are many other people, families, and organizations in the exact same situation, unwillingly beholden to the standards of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control that have outpaced their own capacity to make decisions for themselves, enjoy the comforts of family and friendship, or even exercise basic human decency. The unyielding surliness of the detective, for example, is reproduced at the Consumer Affairs adjudication office where Howe and company seek clemency, located in “a Kafkaesque warren of dim, windowless courtrooms on the eleventh floor of a black marble building” in lower Manhattan that Howe refers to as “the DMV from hell. Twenty or so grown men—schlubs in their puffy vests and hooded sweatshirts rock in their chairs neurotically, mumbling to themselves in Urdu, Spanish or Korean while waiting to be

summoned to a doughnut-sized hole in a Plexiglass window" (278). And the *Review*, which is hemorrhaging money because of its own problematic dedication to fun over function, is corporatized and downsized in the wake of Plimpton's death to ensure its continued viability, which leads to the elimination of many jobs, Howe's included. "The reason people buy delis is because they don't have money; their capital is their own labor and willingness for self-sacrifice," Howe says around a month into his tenure as owner upon realizing the true extent of the difficulties he will face. "That's what makes it a great stepping-stone for people with large, close-knit families and an impatience for success—that is, immigrants. If deli owners had more money when they started out, they'd go into a less taxing line of work" (118). But although other roles might offer some additional extravagances in comparison, what becomes apparent is that the challenges endured in the deli are fundamentally the same as those endured most anywhere else. Despite the best of intentions, or the tenacity with which this rationalization process might be resisted, even those in comparably lucky circumstances must inevitably abandon comfort to keep pace with those willing to be uncomfortable, who are rarely in short supply.

More affecting than the rationalization seen in these higher socioeconomic registers, however, are the portraits of squalid, white-knuckle existence seen at the lowest. Most of these are other deli owners, who in the narrative are marginalized economically, socially, and spatially, often found behind walls and beneath floorboards, like rats: "'Over here,' the voice says. 'Look inside.' And now I see. Next to me, apparently imprisoned within a soda refrigerator, is a balding Korean man in a puffy vest. 'I'm you,' the man says, banging meekly on the glass" (8). Unsurprisingly, most are also immigrants, and the conditions in which they live quickly clarifies the kinds of close community seen in other places like Kay's house, which form not simply out of a desire for social contact, but because the occupants have nowhere else to go. For some, their

business is all they possess, lacking as they do the resources to acquire an actual home:

> The owners (or somebody; we don't ask) turn out to live in the basement, where there are beds, dressers and clotheslines hung with wet laundry. Being basement dwellers ourselves, Gab and I withhold judgment, but Kay is appalled. It looks like the power has been cut off recently, judging by all the candles, and I assume that the kindling I saw by the stove is what they've been using to heat themselves. Then suddenly a loud noise fills the basement, vibrating like an earthquake, and a subway car goes by right on the other side of the basement wall. (15)

And just as instances like this one scatter the narrative even further afield to include the instrumentalization of human beings on a global scale, others take into account the massive underground economies through which they move. "Walid," for example, a Yemeni generic goods supplier working literally underground out of a dilapidated hole-in-the-wall operation called Screaming Eagle, "is a middleman who dips his hand in the torrents of consumer goods flowing about the globe. Things like razor blades, teeth whitener, iPod headphones and batteries," which are channelled through every institution imaginable, from first-world retail outlets, to third-world sweatshops, to terrorist organizations (200). While these geographical extremes add important new dimensions to the consideration of convenience that working at the deli invites, however, it is ultimately the outcomes of this sort of marginalization that prove most impactful. Near the end of the memoir, Kay's iron-clad work ethic catches up with her, and she briefly slips into a coma after suffering a massive heart attack that her doctor attributes to overwork. Dwayne is less fortunate; after Howe's family loses the deli, his new employer cuts him adrift, forcing him at long last to do the one thing he swore he would never do: leave Brooklyn. Losing his attachment to the anthropological place of his neighbourhood augurs only

further loss, as he cobbles together several jobs in different boroughs to make ends meet, finally succumbing to an aneurysm due to the strain. Howe notes that his funeral “was the most varied group of people they'd ever seen—blacks, whites, Asians, Mexicans, old people, young people. Everyone” (294).

More than relating the failure of a family business, *My Korean Deli* bemoans the loss of what family businesses once stood for: the ability to pursue work worth doing, to build a satisfying life through that work, and to extend the same satisfaction to others, helping forge ever more robust, effective, and inclusive communities through one's success. Striving to buck the stereotypes around the service industry, Howe maintains an interest in something beyond quarterly profits, instead looking for ways to put a sense of warmth and hospitality back at the centre of everyday commerce. But regardless of his better intentions or nature, he still has to compete with the lean, pitiless, expertly organized companies behind these stereotypes, not to mention other small-timers who may or may not share his inclinations. Rather than the basis for connection and fellowship he was hoping for, even on this scale retail becomes a tense, harrowing kind of prisoner's dilemma, a ceaseless gauntlet of thieves, rivals, fines, repairs, expired inventory, and pushy vendors slowly chipping away at his faith in American enterprise. And everywhere else, it seems the same is true—each desperate to secure their own livelihood, or balance their budget, or have enough to eat next week. With stakes so high, and competition so fierce, compassion is considered a luxury if considered at all, leaving otherwise benevolent individuals unconcerned with the machinations plotted above them, and oblivious to who or what might be trampled underfoot.

Clerks and *My Korean Deli* are peculiar hybrids of art and obligation, earnest cries of longing, angst, dread, and defeat crammed into dingy aisles next to the snack cakes, as though there was simply not enough time for both labour and labours of love. Beyond their unusual subject matter, these unusual circumstances around their very existence, their production as texts, further works to underscore the troubling extent to which genuine human expression has become secondary to a turgid and malignant consumer culture; the constant, mindless acquisition of things that are not just unnecessary, but actively harmful in the excessive quantities in which we seem to consume them. At bottom, convenience is about the desire to provide—the effort to offer as much as possible, to as many as possible, as cheaply and quickly as possible. However, and somewhat ironically, the pursuit of this ideal—of abundance, effortlessness, and largesse—has sidelined the actual public good it is supposed to represent, having turned into a largely abstract exercise of finding the better bargain, dispassionately cutting costs, shaving down or plumping up this or that number on this or that spreadsheet with little concern for the needs, hopes, and miseries that such numbers ultimately signify. More interesting still is that this short-sightedness does not appear to be chiefly the product of greed, but of fear and self-preservation, the feeling that no stockpile is large enough to bridge the gaps between times of plenty, or no margins wide enough to stay in business. In the next chapter, I expand my examination of this relationship between rationalization and precarity to include issues of a more directly geopolitical bent, moving to issues of civic identity, mass surveillance, and national security in the contemporary international airport.

Chapter Four: Airports

This chapter concerns airports and air travel in relation to class, control, and the politics of global mobility. In the preceding three chapters, I have primarily attempted to show how supermodern infrastructure subordinates the social dimensions of public space to serve mostly material interests, providing various economic and logistical advantages in exchange for diminished personal comfort, social connection, or political influence. One of the more important recurring observations I have made with respect to this trade-off, even while keeping its considerable benefits in mind, has had to do with the all too often misguided desire for putatively 'better' or more efficient ways it might be approached, which leads to an increasingly problematic disregard for matters of social concern over time. Diminishing returns of this nature are readily seen, for instance, in the authoritarian police presence that emerges in the work of Thompson and Yamashita, the runaway dependence on convenience outlined in the previous chapter, or the basic theoretical premises of supermodern acceleration related by Harvey, Bauman, or Augé. Examples like these help explore the uncertain value of non-places with respect to their overall enrichment of human life—where their principles might be ineffectively or unscrupulously applied, where their benefits are enjoyed by some at the expense of others, or where compensating for their deficiencies through constant maintenance is perhaps more trouble than it is worth. This uncertainty is nowhere more apparent than at the airport, a space dedicated not only to enabling supermodern mobility in its fastest and most expansive iterations, but to assessing, policing, and keeping track of the millions who avail themselves of it, a task already struggled with by the most sophisticated of screening apparatuses and governing bodies. In airports we see the global circulation of people and capital at its most frenetic, along with the new issues that inevitably follow, with mass international travel rendering borders increasingly

permeable, and nation-states an increasingly arbitrary and untenable way of organizing the world's population. Under such burdensome circumstances, these spaces of supreme mobility become tense, stressful environments of suspicion and social regimentation, frantically trying to separate increasingly urgent signals from increasingly troublesome noise. This chapter is thus intended to highlight airports as public spaces governed by supermodern principles in the extreme—in terms of their capabilities, their complexities, and their hostility toward any form of social activity or expression extraneous to their goals.

The first section of this chapter follows its counterparts in charting out the various architectural and organizational developments which were intended to streamline airports as air travel gradually became more accessible and widely used. In keeping with much of the available scholarship on the subject, these developments are divided into two primary groups: those related to a security apparatus that ensures public safety, and those related to a commercial apparatus that lowers costs and keeps passengers content in an otherwise scrutinizing and hectic environment. Joined by a common logic of ubiquitous surveillance and big data analysis, each half of this system holds very different connotations, the former characterized by hair-trigger authoritarianism incited by the ever-present spectre of mass tragedy, the latter by unprecedented convenience and advantage reflective of the dream of aeromobility itself. Each is also meant to distinguish between two very different kinds of passenger, and to do so accurately is among the most difficult and critical challenges engaged with through the medium of public architecture. Flying inherently involves a multilateral crisis of trust, in which passengers must cede control of their fate to an authority that is unseen, unpredictable, and frequently overwhelmed by its responsibilities. Airports have consequently come to represent some important changes in how some public spaces are organized and held together, sacrificing even the pretense of amity in

favour of active intimidation as a means of simplifying the calculus behind their daily functioning. This bargain makes intuitive sense given the central role played by aeromobility in supermodern life, the sheer number of variables involved at any given time, and the technical acumen required to make it all work. But it also renders these spaces merciless and implacable, prone to subjugating first and asking questions later, giving rise to some especially pernicious variations on the anti-social tendencies already seen in other non-places thus far.

The second and third sections examine this dual consumerist/carceral logic at work in Walter Kirn's *Up in the Air* and Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal*, texts that depict how these two distinct aspects of airport operations work together in practice to sort, socialize, admit, and expel travellers according to various metrics and standards. The former section draws both from Kirn's novel and Jason Reitman's 2009 film adaptation, beginning with their presentation of airports as hedonic wonderlands used by the wealthy to move their entire lives around the world at will. Ryan Bingham, a consultant whose job consists mostly of flying across the country to fire people he neither knows nor works with, spends most of his life alone in what he affectionately calls 'Airworld,' his genericized jet-set existence a microcosmic version of the organizations that employ him—efficient, well-trained, well-equipped, perpetually mobile, globally oriented, and totally uninterested in other people's lives, opinions, or problems. This effortless adaptability is what makes him powerful, a literal and figurative representative for the well-heeled transnational entities that have grown beyond the capacity of localized political enclaves to regulate them. But while first-class creature comforts and corporate resources help Bingham distance himself from the misery left in his wake, he knowingly pays for them with his own unflagging obedience, including the tacit recognition that he too will be cleanly, irrevocably excised should it become necessary. Airworld is the most immediate expression of not just power, but precarity, in

Bingham's life, providing unlimited gratification in the present with no guarantee of even a near future, volatile in ways similar to the kinds of capitalist battles royal in which he is continually implicated. His meticulous negotiation of this transnational space's many obstacles only further communicates his desperation to belong there, and his fear of a long slide into abjection should he fail.

The latter reading begins with this abjection in the depths of the airport's carceral infrastructure, where Spielberg's protagonist, a traveller from a newly defunct post-Soviet country, is held against his will. Viktor Navorski is a family-friendly proxy for the global stateless deprived of their homes and nations by humanitarian crises, revolutions, and other large-scale bureaucratic disorder, his destitution so extreme it confounds the usual systems with which visitors like him are processed. Whereas Bingham is made practically omnipresent through the airport's myriad channels of communication and transport, Navorski is denied even the freedom to leave the building, a superlative example of how these spaces both arrest and enable movement as a function of class, and the implications of this gatekeeping role as it pertains to the rights and dignity of the less advantaged. From here, the film proceeds back toward the consumer side of this dichotomy, with Navorski finding ways to earn money, and like Bingham, eventually managing to obtain social acceptance in the space through economic influence. This arc, in many ways inverse to that of Bingham, completes a full journey down and back up the class spectrum, showing how non-places like airports reflect supermodern needs at a macroscopic level, and then produce a baseline of behavioural and socioeconomic conformity in order to fulfill them.

1. International Airports, Ubiquitous Surveillance, and Social Control

Although a comparatively newer invention than the spaces examined in the first three chapters, airports also originally developed as 'places' with overtones not unlike those of majestic hotels or shopping centres. A product of both the aspirations and means to participate in global affairs, they quickly became “a city's business card and its handshake,” symbols of “what a community yearns to be as well as what it really is” (Iyer, *Global Soul* 46). The reasons for this have mostly to do with the initial push to make commercial aviation mainstream, with airports seeking to foster public interest and a sense of 'air-mindedness' by working abundant and prominent space into their designs that showcased the marvels of engineering and technology newly on offer. In 1932, UK airport architect Graham Dawbarn lists several examples of these strategies at work, observed during a tour of early US airports:

> Roosevelt Field has produced an interesting system of “bleachers” (or stands for spectators) and car pens involving a minimum of supervision, three or four thousand people being able to see the whole Aerodrome from their cars, the whole falling within the “dead” area (aeronautically speaking) formed by adjoining buildings. At Cleveland there is a large grand-stand reminiscent of Epsom, on the side of the field furthest from the other buildings while, though I did not see it, I understand that at Glenview, Chicago there is a pukka grand stand on top of an enormous hangar. (qtd. in Adey, *Aerial Life* 69)

Designing airports around the spectacle of flight was a shrewd business move by municipalities looking to make these new facilities economically viable, while also encouraging the development of a new form of social and leisure space similar to that of a racetrack or sports stadium. “To watch an aircraft meant a physical engagement with the balcony and with one's nearby companions,” Peter Adey notes. “Spotters lent shoulder to shoulder as they propped themselves up against the guard-rail of the balcony. They shared binoculars. Or one struggled to

push through fellow spectators blocking the view. Spotters regularly shared their log-books, or passed them around to compare recordings" ("Airport Balcony" 38). For others, "the airport was a place of relaxation. [...] In one newspaper report a woman explained, 'I enjoy the break—it gives me a chance to sit out in the sun and knit in peace'" ("Airport Balcony" 36). Children in particular found the fantasy of flight compelling, necessitating large numbers of family outings and school trips. Moreover, the proximity of airports to similar points of interest like parks and hotels helped make them a worthwhile leisure destination in their own right for locals, furthering their integration into public life as distinct elements of civic identity.

As commercial aviation became more reliable and relied upon during the postwar years, however, the need arose to modify airport spaces and processes in light of several new considerations. Among the first of these changes was the inclusion of amenities (retailers, restaurants, cinemas, etc.) used to recoup the costs assumed by an airport's financial backers as they worked to democratize air travel by lowering the price of the airfare itself. In 1947 S.E. Veale writes that "their [the businesses'] contributions, usually in the form of rent, to the airport's total income is often considerable, and the tendency, now, is to provide [...] as many such services as can reasonably be accommodated without interfering with the smooth and efficient flow of traffic through the airport" (qtd. in Adey, "Attention" 521). The resultant growth in airport usage over the next few decades would require airports to manage a larger number and much more varied spectrum of passengers, who travelled more frequently, with origins and destinations that were increasingly further afield. This problem had both acute and chronic elements, immediate logistical demands as well as more deep-seated abstract complications arising from the social crises, in every register, that global mass mobility induced. David Lyon notes that "rising rates of mobility, coupled with the stretching of social relationships enabled by

new technologies of travel and communications, meant that fewer and fewer transactions and interactions are based on face-to-face relationships," which in turn "produces a quest for means of compensation with what can be called 'tokens of trust,'" which help confirm a prospective passenger's identity and background (*After 9/11* 27). Consequently, "extensive computerization of administrative tasks and systems took place from the 1960s," which "had the effect of reducing the burdens of cumbersome bureaucracies, but with the frequent side-effect of increasing dramatically the visibility of all citizens, workers and, before long, consumers, through routine surveillance checks," spurred on by related developments during this time like well-publicized hijacking epidemics and the introduction of jumbo jets (Lyon, *After 9/11* 26). And while this process made things drastically more efficient, it simultaneously engendered "a sense of radical insecurity" by further increasing the scope and complexity of airport operations, precisely because "as global modernization produces more risks, so more efforts are made to counteract risk, particularly through insurance based on surveillance information" (Lyon, *After 9/11* 28). As airports eased into their more specialized functions—as not merely landmark infrastructure in the manner of hotels, but as borders within borders, and thus arbiters of belonging in the cities and countries in which they were situated—they necessarily became beholden to an increasingly complex system of foreign, domestic, and international entities as a reflection of their unique status, described by Haggerty and Ericson as a "rhizomatic" security assemblage (614). Mark Salter elaborates and provides a few examples of what comprises the common 'airport management committee':

> Stakeholders include the airport authority, airlines, land-side and air-side businesses, cargo agents and freight forwarders, catering and stores, police, immigration and other security officials, as well as regulators, inspectors, and government representatives.

> Airports are “high-reliability organizations” that must perform many complex functions while maintaining a low error rate in terms of accidents, crimes, acts of unlawful interference, compromised security, or lost bags. (“Global Airport” 3)

Accordingly, airport space during this period has seen comprehensive redevelopment away from its more public, 'place-like' iterations as its administrators try to balance extreme regimentation with supreme adaptability in order to contain the frenzy of activity they have come to oversee. As far as the users of these spaces are concerned, the primary consequences of this shift are twofold.

Perhaps the more obvious of these, given the post-9/11 culture in which we live, relates to the continuing development of a security screening apparatus capable of performing the impossible task of keeping mass aviation both safe and efficient simultaneously. Among the foremost defining characteristics of this apparatus is, as I indicate above, an increasing reliance upon methods rooted in statistics and computerization, which Peter Adey goes so far as to summarize as “a contemporary security focus upon an imagined presocial, prelinguistic, and potentially inhuman species” (“Airport Security” 275). These include measures like metal detectors, scanners for bodies and cargo, and biometric technologies like fingerprint and retina scanners, facial recognition software, etc. They also, with increasing regularity, include more interpretive forms of analysis such as the now infamous 'profile,' and other sorting models based on behaviour, affect, and the presence of 'microexpressions' that might give away a flyer's feelings or motives, as well as, taken in aggregate, “provide a model of what someone likely to commit terrorist activity would act like and be like” in order to anticipate future threats (Adey, “Security” 278). “Such systems, it has been shown, rely on quite large amounts of information, creating sorts of data trails or biographies and histories,” and “by placing people into a specific

category or a 'risk pool,' one may then use this profile to predict using known data to theorise the unknown" (Adey, "Security" 278). Of course, these measures only give rise to further organizational problems, resulting primarily in needless inconvenience and invasions of personal space levied on those otherwise innocent passengers who happen to fall into whatever risk categories are deemed germane at any given time. A design philosophy that once encouraged interactivity with fellow travellers thus becomes one intended to produce "not only a docile body but also an anxious, self-disclosing citizen" under the scrutinizing gaze of the state (Salter, "Governmentalities" 49). Salter, quoting Foucault, describes this as

> architecture [which is] is no longer built simply to be seen, or to observe the external space, but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. (Foucault, *Discipline* 172; qtd. in "Governmentalities" 51)

Conversely, this architecture also renders *in*visible or obscure both the diffuse structures (or more accurately, anarchic vacillating ecosystems) of power responsible for implementing these measures, as well as the exact nature of the implementations themselves so as to thwart attempts to circumvent them.

The other major development is a robust consumer infrastructure far beyond that of publicly owned airports of the prewar and immediate postwar periods, "driven by risk management strategies to diversify income streams and lessen reliance on aeronautical charges in an industry vulnerable to external shocks like pandemics, terrorism, economic downturns, and natural disasters" (Freestone 118). Airports no longer resemble transfer points in the manner of

bus or train stations (although these, too, are to a lesser degree slowly adopting similar models), having adopted the veneer of cities in their own right, complete with all of the amenities a city might boast. “One outcome of the push for more profits,” Mark Gottdeiener notes, “is the further expansion of the 'airport as destination' concept. If the terminal building can be a mall that attracts shoppers as well as travellers, it can also function as an entertainment space that attracts people out for a good time, in competition with urban downtowns” (18). Among the more conspicuous examples of this kind of expansion is Heathrow airport's rapid and ongoing development, as Paul Freathy and Frank O'Connell indicate:

> In the UK, [the British Airports Authority] increased its retail floor space (including catering) from 400,000 sq. ft in 1991 to over 1,070,000 sq. ft in 2010 (BAA 2010). When Heathrow Terminal 5 opened in 2008, it included a 215,000 sq. ft commercial area with 144 different stores and restaurants, including major brands, such as Tiffany's, Cartier, Gucci and Harrods. Moreover the Terminal 5 development increased total retail floor space in Heathrow by approximately 50% (BAA 2007). (401)

The presence of these 'major brands' highlight a different dimension of the 'placelessness' of airports, what might be described as the reverse side of the space's punitive or carceral functions. In addition to reducing human traffic to a series of data points for the purpose of enhanced security and encouraging flyers to adhere to certain guidelines, the same process is used to boost revenue through selling “merchandise that is all very familiar from countless hours of watching television and exposure to mass media advertising” (Gottdeiener 60). Moreover, each of these trends is bolstered by the presence of the other, with the consumer landscape contributing to increased comfort in a space otherwise characterized by high anxiety and regimentation, and with more rigorous security procedures leading to more 'dwell time,' which is usually filled by

consumer spending as a way of staving off boredom while waiting for a flight.

Indeed, despite offering very different impressions of the airport at a glance, these two architectures are clearly similar in purpose and work according to similar principles—"it should not surprise us that the same architects design modern airport terminals, shopping malls, and penitentiaries," Salter writes ("Governmentalities" 53). This is particularly important to keep in mind when considering consumer spaces, which, beyond making their more domineering counterparts palatable by acting as the carrot to their stick, are actually responsible for much of the data capture that the whole system is built on in the first place. Like the airport's security apparatus, this consumer apparatus is worked into the physical design of airports so as to ensure maximum surveillance, control, and profitability—Lyon observes that "surveillance occurs in two analytically separate contexts in airports: for maximal commerce and for national security" (*After 9/11* 124). In addition to simply encouraging consumer spending, things like "ticketing, frequent flyer clubs, air miles loyalty clubs, plus credit card, cell-phone, Internet, and telephone use" aid airport security by helping to identify not those who are the likeliest threats to security or decorum, but those who are *desirable* according to a different set of metrics (Lyon, *After 9/11* 124). In Salter's words: "To facilitate the passage of 'safe' transit passengers, airports, airlines, and governments use voluntary 'opt-in' programs, which materially assist the screening profile by the self-sorting of groups into safe and high-risk groups" ("Governmentalities" 51). The use of a frequent flyer program, for example, immediately indicates what kind of passenger one is—obviously, one who flies frequently (indeed, it can be quickly discerned *how* frequently based on the number of miles or points accrued), but also the extent to which one conforms to the associated set of assumptions attached to one who flies frequently (e.g., someone of means, someone on business, etc.), and the extent to which one should be rewarded based on this

conformity. While these optional consumer items facilitate readier movement through difficult areas of the airport like security checkpoints, and might offer a fantasy of aeromobility closer to the halcyon days of the industry during the immediate postwar period, they essentially play the same role as compulsory documents like passports and visas through which we affirm our identities, telling “the story of ourselves that defines us as docile, obedient sovereign subjects” (Salter, “Governmentalities” 59).

The broader repercussions arising from such an extreme emphasis on automated sorting systems and tokens of trust, in lieu of actual human intervention, have become an important topic of scholarly conversation. Foucault figures notably here, with Salter exploring the airport as a Foucauldian heterotopia, “both in terms of the isolation of the rites of passage of entry into and exit from the territory of the state, and in terms of the containment of deviant, mobile subjects” (“Governmentalities” 52). Others gain theoretical traction with Foucault's use of the panopticon, or more often the 'panoptic sort,' whereby an environment does not just monitor its inhabitants or induce them to monitor themselves, but is then able to classify and act on them in ways that are similarly passive or automatic, built right into the architecture itself. The airport's prerogative to exclude or blacklist those deemed deviant or threatening has also prompted the use of the neologism 'banopticon,' used to highlight an international security approach which mainly “consists of keeping the poorest foreigners at a distance [...] by proceeding through an extension of the definition of security” (Bigo 16). Similarly, Lyon conceives of the airport as a 'data filter,' that assembles disparate aspects of an individual identity into a 'data double' “split off from and yet reconnectable with the individuals whose data constitutes them” (*Surveillance Society* 116). These higher-tech filters are also supplemented by lower-tech ones such as expensive parking facilities, which help offset operating costs in addition to providing another barrier based largely

on class—those unable to afford such fees must find more inventive means of simply getting to the airport, in much the same way that those who cannot afford to opt into its premium or loyalty programs experience more processing delays than those who can. The intended or unintended forms of "digital discrimination" that have resulted from these sorts of modifications call attention to "the ways in which the flows of personal data—abstracted information—are sifted and channeled in the process of risk assessment, to privilege some and disadvantage others, to accept some as legitimately present and to reject others" on both local and global scales (Lyon, *After 9/11* 81).

Concepts like these represent a timely extension of earlier work by theorists like Augé and Castells, who are more concerned with airports as completely emptied of meaning—non-places in a stricter, more elementary sense of the term. Castells, for example, posits that postmodern spaces like airports epitomize an 'architecture of nudity' reflective of "the end of history and the supersession of places in the space of flows […] whose forms are so neutral, so pure, so diaphanous, that they do not pretend to say anything" (*Network Society* 450). While clearly not entirely misplaced, such assessments give insufficient credence to the goal-oriented nature of these crucial transnational gateways, and how they shape "the complex habitations, practices of dwelling, embodied relations, material presences, placings and hybrid subjectivities associated with movement through such spaces" (Merriman 154). What is remarkable about the austerity of the contemporary airport is not that it says nothing, but the overwhelming force with which it says something, to each and every traveller and worker, individually and according to highly individualized factors. The disinterestedness of non-places should not be mistaken for neutrality; they are not voids, but machines optimized to deliver a specific result, which in architectural terms generally translates to the manipulation of human movement, perception, and

affect to fit orderly, predictable patterns. Among Adey's interests, for example, is “what happens to bodies during spectatorship, and how airports organise the immobility of the passenger through the creation of observation points and viewing technologies spatially positioning the passenger within particular areas of terminal space,” a process “directly related to airport economics and implicit to the logic of the passenger's journey through the building” (“Attention” 525). Large balconies and grandstands have been replaced with windows that “expose people visually to as much retail frontage as is possible in order to maximise the profit from the space,” with “many outlets [being] bordered by windows and window displays to create a 'site of seduction for consumer desire,'” rather than more organic interactions like those encouraged by planespotting (“Attention” 525). Even programs ostensibly meant to replace these latter activities, like Chicago's O'Hare airport's 'Kids on the Fly' program, which permits children to explore a virtual version of the airport online, are pale imitations of their former selves. The bulk of activities available on this front now have mostly to do with teaching children to deal with the space on a strictly functional, rather than recreational, basis—buying tickets, going through security checkpoints, and so forth.

Perhaps most striking about all of these attempts to ensure lock-step consistency, however, is how they only seem to exacerbate the uncertainty that has come to define the airport experience in the popular imagination. Airports are overwhelmingly seen as spaces of profound ambivalence, juxtaposing mobility so boundless as to encompass the globe, with confinement so extreme as to preclude even the suggestion of personal agency. In his 2016 novel *Zero K*, Don DeLillo writes that “air travel reminds us who we are. It's the means by which we recognize ourselves as modern,” even as it “removes us from the world and sets us apart from each other” at the same time:

> Those blanked-out eternities at the airport. Getting there, waiting there, standing shoeless in long lines. Think about it. We take off our shoes and remove our metal objects and then enter a stall and raise our arms and get body-scanned and sprayed with radiation and reduced to nakedness on a screen somewhere and then how totally helpless we are all over again as we wait on the tarmac, belted in, our plane eighteenth in line, and it's all ordinary, it's routine, we make ourselves forget it. (172)

Ursula LeGuin exhibits a similar interest in the conflict between power and powerlessness found in these spaces, interpreting them as "not a prelude to travel, not a place of transition" but rather "a stop. A blockage. A constipation. The airport is where you can't go anywhere else. A nonplace in which time does not pass and there is no hope of any meaningful existence. A terminus: the end. The airport offers nothing to any human being except access to the interval between planes" (2). For some, a traveller's identity is not only forfeit, but forgotten entirely; Pico Iyer describes his experience of LAX as "an odd kind of twilight zone of consciousness, that weightless limbo of a world in which people are between lives and between selves, almost sleepwalking, not really sure of who or where they are" ("Worlds Collide" 53). And in many cases, along with this absence of identity is a perceived absence of security, a lack of control that combines intense dread with an almost exhausting tedium, as Chuck Palahniuk illustrates: "A thud, and the second wheel hits the tarmac. The staccato of a hundred seatbelt buckles snapping open, and the single-use friend you almost died sitting next to says: I hope you make your connection. Yeah, me too" (31). Very often, the mortal fear implicit in air travel takes the form of an actual antagonist in the form of a terrorist or saboteur, particularly during the '70s, the heyday of both airplane disaster movies and the actual skyjackings from which they often drew inspiration. And on the somewhat less bombastic end of the spectrum, there are of course the innumerable scenes of rushing to the

airport to catch a friend or lover as they are about to pass through the final gate to be lost, it would seem, forever. Gottdeiner takes cues from a litany of romantic comedies, for example, in his mention of the “high drama that reunites loved ones and bears witness to final departures,” even though “everyone else is there for the briefest possible moment in their lives” (23).

The following close readings look further at this strange and rather pervasive anxiety, relating it to how airports pathologize various aspects of individual identity for the sake of collective safety, and how passengers come to internalize this pathologization. In airports we see the most overt and troubling ways in which public space has been reconceptualized in response to supermodern pressures, afflicted first with the disorder brought about by mass transnational travel, and then with the dangerously ardent crusade for order that attempts to manage it. Too delicate to abide the chaos that inevitably arises from social encounter and entanglement, they exist for the public, yet as a rule are hostile toward this foundational part of public life, resulting in a kind of dark inversion of the principles according to which such spaces once at least nominally operated, where selfhood is now awarded from the top by the institution rather than cultivated from the bottom by those it serves. Though continuing to revolve around questions of identity, history and relations, of chief interest is no longer one's own identity, but that which one is *believed* to have, as determined by algorithms meant to separate acceptable from unacceptable, desirable from undesirable, innocuous from dangerous, etc.—to define and distinguish between what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'tourists' and 'vagabonds.' In other words, airports do not ignore differences between passengers, but to the contrary, reveal “how problems of difference—and therefore identity—persist in the 'surveillant assemblages' of US homeland security,” and “how securitized discursive regimes seek to order the relationship between passengers' bodies, identities, (self-)representations, and threat” (Martin 18). Accordingly, while passengers may be

wary of other passengers, their utmost caution is reserved for the system itself, its judgement issuing from a logic which is concealed to them, of unknown speciousness or merit.

The first of these two readings begins on the considerably more fortunate side of the tourist/vagabond divide with *Up in the Air*, in which we follow Ryan Bingham on his final expedition as a Career Transitions Counsellor, a euphemism for someone contracted out to management teams that want to avoid firing their employees personally. In large part, Bingham is an expression of capital itself, a carpetbagger in a grey flannel suit roaming the country with impunity, his next flight the only connection he holds sacred. Like the nature of his work, he too is impersonal, so relentlessly aloof as to not only have zero close personal relationships, but a side career as a motivational speaker in which he espouses the virtues of having zero close personal relationships. He is the consummate tourist, a member of the rarefied 'kinetic elite' with the impeccably organized itinerary and mountain of reward miles to prove it. Even as this privileged status forms the entire foundation of his self concept, however, it is also not attached to him in any intrinsic or sustainable way, merely the byproduct of his work for a company similarly predicated on the mercurial tendencies of late capitalism, and as such marked by the same shark ethic. The detached, transactional logic of Airworld is only the most basic example of how Bingham conducts his life more generally, and his solitary efforts to gain purchase in either arena suggest struggles that are one-sided if not outright unwinnable; the novel's title refers to his literal daily activities, as well as the considerable possibility that at any moment he might be forever barred from enjoying them again. In its propensity to abruptly, irrevocably, and unilaterally exclude, the airport is thus used as a metaphor for the sense of social and economic insecurity it has itself helped produce, in which self-determination simply does not exist, and one's identity is governed by external circumstances with little regard for context, let alone

compassion. Bingham is only a tourist for as long as he is allowed to be one, and although several critics have already weighed in on the moral questions raised by his transitory lifestyle, I want to suggest that it is this helplessness on a more basic practical level that best defines the narrative's concern with how individuals confront the supermodern conditions that affect their lives.

I then move to a completely different depiction of the contemporary airport in *The Terminal*, which is more concerned with the plight of the vagabond. Here, the airport works to prevent movement rather than enable it, which points to a different kind of apprehension surrounding the mobility that it offers. Whereas *Up in the Air* in many ways articulates a contemporary fear of the wealthy, critiquing the unchecked movement of power and capital in ways that undermine attempts to wield them equitably, *The Terminal* attends to the reverse—a fear of the impoverished, and the burdens or dangers seen in their abjection. In his role as a professional hatchet man for a nebulous global elite, Bingham consistently cuts a far more ominous figure than Spielberg's hapless fish out of water Viktor Navorski. Yet the airport vigorously abets the former in his less than scrupulous deeds, while seizing and quarantining the latter for reasons having nothing to do with him, like an overactive immune system attacking a harmless allergen while real threats slip by. Though Navorski's situation is sympathetic bordering on maudlin, it is simply not part of the equation as far as airport security is concerned, lacking as he does the credentials to continue on his way; the film's title refers both to his immediate surroundings, as well as the more abstract kind of ego-death mentioned by writers like LeGuin or Iyer. But in the absence of the proper documents, he manages to obtain the next best thing: the bona fides of a tourist. His mere humanity insufficient to overcome the polite neglect he initially receives, Navorski must instead justify his own existence by conforming to fit the logic of the

space, both by learning to manipulate its formal bureaucracies, and more importantly by approximating the likeness of someone who is considered to belong. The contrast I am drawing between this journey and that of *Up in the Air* calls attention to a few things. First, it shows the 'panoptic sort' of the airport at work from the perspective of those who are accepted versus those who are rejected, and helps illustrate how the system working as a whole generates different experiences and associations based on this division. It also serves to comment on the criteria used to make these sorts of determinations, which are both rigid and in many ways arbitrary, lacking the capacity to provide any genuinely meaningful information about a given traveller while nevertheless holding complete dominion over them. Lastly, this discrepancy points to broader anxieties arising from a global society predicated on mobility and interconnectedness, and the problems surrounding the heuristics we tend to use in response to the perceived risks of living in one.

2. Walter Kirn and Jason Reitman: *Up in the Air.*

The basic ways in which the airport figures as a non-place in Walter Kirn's novel *Up in the Air* are already somewhat obvious given the attention paid it in both Augé's work and the novel itself, as a space built explicitly to elide the finer points of human geography and culture in favour of speed, flexibility, and instantaneity. It is these attributes, in fact, that are immediately made central to how Ryan Bingham justifies his unusual (and perhaps, visionary) lifestyle:

> I call it Airworld; the scene, the place, the style. My hometown papers are USA Today and the Wall Street Journal. The big-screen Panasonics in the club rooms broadcast all the news I need, with an emphasis on the markets and the weather. My literature—yours, too, I see—is the bestseller or the near-bestseller [....] In Airworld, I've found, the passions

> and enthusiasms of the outlying society are concentrated and whipped to a stiff froth. When a new celebrity is minted in the movie theaters or ballparks, this is where the story breaks—on the vast magazine racks that form a sort of trading floor for public reputations and pretty faces. (7)

The correspondences between Kirn's and Augé's appraisals of the airport have also been outlined by Julie Hansen's article on how the novel recycles road genre tropes within this more recent spatial context, diagnosing the American social and personal dysfunctions that emerge as a consequence. A substantial portion of Hansen's argument involves a critique of Airworld deriving from Augé's own impressions and with specific reference to his work, as "devoid of historical perspective" (28), populated with "stereotypical and superficial" interactions, and conceptually distant from less dislocated environments like home or the road (24). While Kirn often goes to great lengths to render the prospect of continuous travel seductively attractive, for example, Bingham is also frequently revealed to be disoriented, emotionally detached, and lonely, all of which is masked by canned epithets and bravado. "The narrative suggests that Ryan's self-characterization as a jet-setter belies a longing for home," she writes, and "underlying this vague longing is a sense of loss—a motif which appears in various forms, both literal and metaphorical, throughout the narrative: Ryan mourns his father's death, as well as his own divorce" (28). However, in the interest of offering more than simply a rehash of Hansen's insightful work here, or of many of my own remarks in earlier chapters for that matter, I want to expand this general line of argument beyond the private, personal, or emotional sides of supermodern life, and follow Bingham's lead by keeping things strictly about business.

That is, with these more affective facets of airport space already sufficiently addressed for my purposes, and with much airport scholarship already striving to examine the airport as

considerably more than just socially sterile travel infrastructure, I want to elaborate more on Bingham's position within the systems of power and influence represented by this particular non-place, and what is suggested by his use of it. In both the novel and Reitman's adaptation, for example, the disjunction between the 'chronotopes' of Airworld and home, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term by way of Hansen, implies a similar disjunction between the level of status occupied by Bingham, and that of the unfortunate individuals that Bingham is obligated to encounter as part of his job. Such interactions are perhaps best summarized by Bingham himself, as played by George Clooney in Reitman's film:

> Poor Steve has worked here for seven years. He's never had a meeting with me before, or passed me in the hall, or told me a story in the break room. And that's because I don't work here. I work for another company that lends me out to pussies like Steve's boss, who don't have the balls to sack their own employees, and in some cases for good reason. Because people do crazy shit when they get fired.

This monologue suggests a few important things about Bingham's work, most of which have to do with the relationship between power and distance. The consulting firm that employs Bingham is able to provide his services not only because such a specialized position exists and is in demand (which is itself indicative of the service-oriented economies of scope endemic to and produced by this stage of global, yet distinctly American, capitalism), but because it allows the client to neutralize the outrage of their former employees by channelling it toward a different organization at a greater geographical and interpersonal remove. This displacement is directly cited as a primary goal of CTC specialists in both the book (244) and film, because it helps prevent litigation and other reprisals—the 'crazy shit' Clooney refers to, for example, prompts a cut to a distraught Steve loading an automatic rifle in preparation to vengefully storm his former

workplace, a scene intended for laughs due to its out of place intensity, but which unfortunately mostly just suggests that the unemployed may become dangerous to interact with *because* they are unemployed.

Moreover, the actual reasons given for the firings tend to be expressed in similar terms, as being well outside the employee's sphere of influence or even awareness—the consequences of actions carried out elsewhere, by other people, at times when these kinds of outcomes were not immediately apparent and thus unavoidable. Framing the matter in this way does have something of a socially or legally manipulative aspect to it, as such assertions can minimize claims of discrimination or other forms of malfeasance. For the most part, however, Bingham's dismissals *are* actually the result of systemic failings wider in scope than things like personal merit, as his role as a professional downsizer would imply: “All were middle-aged men with families, and all but two of them asked me what they'd done wrong, to which I answered, 'Nothing. Blame interest rates. Blame low commodity prices. This problem is global'” (204). In the film this is frequently approached by attending to the reverse, with many of the people Bingham fires futilely arguing for their jobs by demonstrating their loyalty, performance, productivity, etc. in such a way that it becomes obvious that the individuals themselves are not the issue—“This is what I get in return for thirty years of service, for my company?”; “You have a lot of gall coming in here and firing your number one producer, and you're going to go home and make more money than you've ever made in your life, and I'm going to go home without a paycheck”; “I guess, I just... you leave me dumbfounded, I don't know where this is coming from.” The context of these performances is also important; most of the employees seen in the film are people who were reenacting actually losing their jobs in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent 'Great Recession,' which is exactly the kind of global problem Bingham describes.

It is through this equivalency between Bingham's aeromobile lifestyle and his role as a harbinger of global economic ill tidings, that the text uses air travel as a metaphor for the ways in which globalized power has begun to express and organize itself. Bauman contrasts power working in this mode with its older, more geographically 'located' equivalent of nation states and their associated phenomena, which,

> like Jeremy Bentham's panoptical model of social control, assumed the mutual engagement of the rulers and the ruled. Imposition of norms and execution of normative regulation tied the controllers and the controlled to each other and made them inseparable. Both sides were, so to speak, tied to the ground: reproduction of the power hierarchy required constant presence and confrontation. It is this reciprocal dependency, this perpetual mutual engagement which the new techniques of power which come to the fore in the era of globalization have rendered redundant. The new hierarchy of power is marked at the top by the ability to move fast and at short notice, and at the bottom by the inability to slow down these moves, let alone arrest them, coupled with its own immobility. Escape and evasion, lightness and volatility have replaced weighty and ominous presence as the main techniques of domination. (*Individualized Society* 35)

I use almost the entire paragraph here to highlight Bauman's reference to the panopticon as following from an increasingly outdated logic of centralized and localized power. I do this in order to draw a parallel between it and similar revisions to the concept, as I have mentioned above, within current scholarship on modern airport surveillance and the ways in which airport space has been reoriented as a result. These changes (to the space, and to the concept) reflect the more generalized values and strategies Bauman outlines concerning globalized power: obscuration and obscurity, exclusivity and exclusion, and above all, adaptability. That is to

suggest that such attributes are both enabled by aeromobility in many important ways, and again, as discussed above, tend to manifest at their most sophisticated within airports themselves. The film attends to this 'banoptic' aspect of airport space frequently as well, through several scenes which feature, and short montages completely dedicated to, Bingham constantly reiterating his belonging there by swiping various forms of identification through various card readers. His mobility within the space of the airport, and by extension across the country, is implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, granted by his identifying himself as someone of status and wealth—in the novel he strongarms clerks using his track record as a customer in order to score deals, and in the film is permitted to casually cut in front of an outraged (but apparently less loyal) passenger for similar reasons. In the context of Bingham's attitudes with regard to family, socializing, and his job, these examples work to emphasize the social and economic distance between him and most of the people he encounters, as well as the extent to which air travel and its associated architecture perpetuates this distance and makes it possible.

But Bingham's role as the avatar of these byproducts of globalization is made more complicated when looking at the finer details of his daily life, where a reality at odds with his rather independent self-image emerges. Though he unabashedly enjoys Airworld, his access to it is predicated on subservience to a distressingly large network of organizations, owing to his work as a roving corporate intermediary-for-rent. One of these organizations in the novel, ironically, is the airline he uses most often, as he spitefully hoards reward miles to signify the airline's debt to him after what he sees as a series of encroachments on his personal liberty: “For years, Great West has been my boss, my sergeant, dictating where I went and if I went, deciding what I ate and if I ate. My mileage is my one chance to strike back, to snatch satisfaction from humiliation” (38). The extent to which Bingham is actually in many ways subordinated, directed, and

manipulated by these various entities is mostly left out of the film in favour of its take on a romantic sub-plot (but with a few notable exceptions I will mention shortly). In the novel, however, these examples are more numerous, and include his home firm ISM, the airline, the publishing house to which he has submitted his 'business parable' entitled *The Garage*, and other miscellaneous contacts and business opportunities, all of which are dwarfed by MythTech, a company so ludicrously exclusive that candidates do not even know they are being interviewed until they have been offered a job. Many of these examples function, to Bingham, in the same way that he functions to those he fires—as indirectly influential, notoriously cagey, and unable to be located until they wish to reveal themselves: “They can't be courted, they can't be pushed. They watch you. They rate you. If they make an offer, you sign on the spot, you don't hold out for dental. [...] They don't use letterhead, just plain white bond with a faint embossed omega at the top. No logo, no web site—just a street address” (16). So keen to join MythTech that he has already put in his notice to ISM at the start of the narrative, Bingham of course plans to use the only lead he has—the address, “in Omaha, of all places, blandest Omaha”—to pay a surprise visit to its major players during his final trip as a downsizer (16). But they, along with the rest of organization, are already in Calgary by the time he gets there for reasons that are predictably close to those given to Bingham's firees: “Tax breaks. Lax accounting standards. Who knows? Strict banking privacy laws. Skilled immigrants. It's not like we're quarrying Nebraska sandstone. We can run this shop from Djakarta” (287).

Instances like these—from being given the runaround by his book agent, who cancels meetings due to a 'tennis commitment' (Bingham's response: “What's a tennis commitment? That's a *game*”), to suspecting that his travel inconveniences are the result of a personal antipathy toward him held by Great West's CEO—appear to suggest that as much as Bingham functions as

an ambassador for this new globalized power regime, he functions in equal measure as its victim (178). What is interesting about Bingham as a metaphor for power in the era of globalization is that despite his apparent resources and resourcefulness, he too is consistently vulnerable, not only socially or emotionally as Hansen rightly indicates, but *professionally*, and in the same ways as those 'down on the ground.' In fact, the only real indicator of Bingham's power, wealth, or success, is that he spends most of his time flying around the country first-class; the only confirmed capital to his name comes in the proprietary currency of air miles (he is even asked directly if he's rich, but sidesteps the question), and the bulk of Kirn's text sees him constantly adjusting and readjusting his already rigorous itinerary due to unexpected demands from work and family. This itinerary precedes the actual novel and gives a rough breakdown of what the reader should expect, underlining the extent to which Bingham's activity is preprogrammed not in spite of, but because of his lifestyle. And although, as I have mentioned, the film contains fewer of these examples, its entire main plot is set into motion by a threat posed to Bingham's livelihood by an eager and inventive newcomer, a recent Columbia graduate who has both grounded Bingham by offering counselling services remotely via the internet to save money, as well as deskilled his job by formulating a scripted flow chart that one could place "in the hands of anybody and they could be downsizing immediately. All they have to do is follow the steps." Elsewhere, and more explicitly, Derek Nystrom observes that "Bingham's own activity here would seem to be a species of alienated labor," given that his personality and charm are deployed at the behest of his employers in order to project "an intimate, direct frankness in order to establish a seemingly genuine connection" to the fictional employees, but also to the actual paying audiences watching the film (176). For Nystrom, the fact that Bingham wields his emotions in this transactional way while simultaneously appreciating the same in the service

workers that enable his jet-setting, “suggests that he does not find his own affective work to be alienating in the slightest,” and that

> this, in turn, points us to the half-secret, half-articulated fantasy/nightmare of *Up in the Air*: the idea that the predatory world of late capitalism, in which human sentiment is cynically manipulated to facilitate and lubricate the mass shedding of able-bodied, willing workers—which, of course, means the liquidation of the productive capacities of millions of people—could be a context of unalienated labor for those on the winning side of it. (177)

However, while this last observation certainly applies readily to both novel and film—“you know that Big Auto is about to cut another 10K before the end of the month? Christmas came early this year” (Reitman)—what I want to indicate is that it perhaps applies less so to Bingham himself, who functions more as the instrument of those 'on the winning side' of late capitalism than as their equal, and who merely reaps some ephemeral rewards for himself as a result.

These realities of Bingham's position relative to the upper echelons of global power and influence inform his satisfaction with the routinized and superficial environment of the airport. Following the logic of this space as simultaneously a symbol, product, and enabler of late capitalism, as a site of obscured and decentralized influence, and as the place that Bingham considers his 'home' despite the fact that his being there is intrinsically tied to his own exploitation, it would appear that his desire to stay derives less from the enjoyment or exercise of power, and more from a need to keep up with it lest he find himself in the same predicament as those he has had a hand in firing. Indeed, akin to the space of the contemporary airport, *Up in the Air* illustrates a highly mobile, far-flung, and amorphous capitalism that induces a perpetual uneasiness in those that live under its auspices, owing to the very thin and often invisible line

that separates tourist from vagabond:

> A zip code is something I'd rather do without. Zip codes are how they find you, how they track you. They start with five numbers and finish with a profile, down to the movies you're liable to go see and the pizza toppings you prefer. I'm not paranoid, but I am my father's son, and much of my fascination with marketing stems from my fear of being the big boys' patsy. Sure, today, we live in a democracy, and yes, for the most part, it leaves us to ourselves, but there are ambitious people who'd like to change this, and some who boast that they've already succeeded. I'm like the guy I met flying out of Memphis who told me that he'd joined the local police force because he'd lived next to a drug house for a time and seen how thoroughly the cops had watched the place. True privacy, he concluded, was only possible inside a squad car. (26)

It is this awareness that fuels Bingham's desire to work for MythTech, which has been rumoured to be developing market research strategies and algorithms so advanced in their predictive power as to be essentially no different from magic (hence the name). But it also helps explain his appreciation of the dearth of genuine interaction, perception, or even thought that dominates aeromobile life. In light of the formal parallels between airports and the version of capitalism they have aided in birthing, the “systematized friendly touches” guiding Bingham through these spaces also seem to function as reassurances of his continued belonging there, which is to say both in the airport as a traveller, and in the global capitalist regime that it enables, as a worker (Reitman). As he says in the novel: “The way I've lived, the way I've moved around, I've not had the luxury of double-checking what I see and hear. I have to trust. If a man who says he's a doctor hears me cough and tells me I should go on antibiotics, I go on antibiotics. Of course I do” (82). It is in these respects that Bingham can be viewed as an example of the process by

which non-places like airports encourage conformity in their dwellers, producing in them the desire to adhere to a specific set of attitudes and behaviours reflective of the broader social and economic logics that spur them to action. Appropriately, this friction between Bingham's real desires and the imperatives of his environment is made apparent both in the novel, where he is burned out at work and afraid of being tracked by MythTech, his superiors at ISM, and the airline, and in the film, where despite working as a motivational speaker hawking the value of a solitary life free of interpersonal attachments, he immediately develops romantic feelings for a fellow traveller and attempts just such a relationship.

This latter example adds a few more interesting dimensions to Reitman's social commentary worth mentioning by way of some parting remarks: in a minor twist on the contrived star-crossed lovers subplot so often shoehorned into Hollywood movies, Bingham shows up unannounced to his fling's actual home in pursuit of something genuine, only to discover she already has a husband and family. Clearly, the scene is intended to underscore the blow dealt to openness, fidelity, and connection under this kind of coolly ruthless take on aeromobile capitalism, both within and outside its attendant infrastructures. Yet even as it is doing this, and truly in line with the sort of ambivalence that characterizes airport space in particular, it is also the impetus for a long segue into a much more comforting, affirmative message about what *really matters*, papering over the critical tone of Kirn's source text with a series of monologues about the importance of family over work by the people Bingham was firing earlier in the film. In this way, the film itself wields fiction in much the same fashion as its subject matter—just as airports sell the fantasy of motion, transition, and change to obscure their less pleasant realities and functions, the film, the product of a completely different arm of post-Fordist American capitalism, is doing the same thing. Bingham indeed appears to be a changed

man, but he is more or less the only thing that *has* changed—Reitman takes a page out of the character's own playbook by emphasizing friends and family to distract both from the persistence of economic conditions that remain as grim, precarious, and exploitative as ever, *and* the fact that these conditions themselves work to undo the social bonds that the film is trying to encourage. Bingham learns several major lessons, but none of them ultimately have any value, even for him; the film closes with him arriving once again at the airport to board another plane, seemingly resigned to his solitude.

Shifting uncomfortably now from first-class to coach, I want to bring these more subdued themes around mobility, insecurity, and control completely into the open through a consideration of *The Terminal*, which stages exactly the kind of worst-case scenario Bingham seems so keenly anxious to avoid. Just as Viktor Navorski represents a radically different type of traveller, the airport here becomes a radically different type of space, devoted to obstruction and containment instead of the unfettered movement normally on offer. Following this abrupt leap into the clutches of airport security, however, Spielberg then begins the same kind of recuperation process as Reitman, looking for silver linings and crafting heartwarming moments with which to soften an otherwise rather bleak turn of events. Navorski's extended layover in JFK Airport gradually erodes its imposing, almost monolithic environs to reveal the actual people underneath, finding authenticity in even the most Orwellian of settings. But it also reveals the extent to which these professedly disinterested spaces are in reality influenced by a wide range of interests indeed, and how this fact undermines the trust commonly placed in them as an invaluable public good.

3. Steven Spielberg: *The Terminal*.

The first shots of Reitman's film and those of Steven Spielberg's 2004 film *The Terminal* immediately establish the two films as conceptually opposed in their illustration of how airports function. *Up in the Air* begins already up in the air, with several successive aerial shots of the American landscape comprising the opening credits sequence, as though airport processing were a minor formality barely worth mentioning. The immediate focus on actual travel here corresponds to the sense of ease with which Bingham experiences the airport (and by extension American life more generally) owing to his class position and resources, as well as visually reinforces the 'big picture' perspective of the economic and political workings of his country that he is able to cultivate as a result of this unrestricted mobility. The credits end with a shot of a plane landing, and suddenly, Bingham is in an office, firing those who presumably aren't so fortunate.

By contrast, *The Terminal* begins by focusing on a large split-flap board announcing arrivals and departures, automated instructions directing passengers to their gates. This is followed by several shots of airport security personnel patrolling and assuming their posts, complete with drug dogs, a close-up shot of a cordon reading “U.S. Customs and Border Protection” in capital letters, and a bird's eye view of a large influx of passengers crowding into the airport early in the morning, streaming to various kiosks, checkpoints, and so forth. In keeping with the film's emphasis on the airport's mundane daily operations, the visual language here is intended to highlight the workings of airport architecture itself as a machine dedicated to the sorting of people much in line with the commentaries of Lyon, Salter, and others. Then, a series of short staccato cuts of the human agents responsible for helping this sorting process along, asking “what is the purpose of your visit?” followed by passengers nervously providing their responses, and the same kinds of identity-validating card-swipe shots found in Reitman's

film. Elsewhere, Director of Customs and Border Protection Frank Dixon is examining a group of tourists on a monitor, engaging in the same sort of profiling behaviour purported to increase security at airports, which in large part was meant to assuage the widespread public fear of air travel that took root in the wake of 9/11: “When was the last time you saw a group of Chinese tourists on their way to Disneyworld, and not a single one of them had a camera?” While the observation is well placed in the context of the film—the 'tourists' actually *are* up to something nefarious—the scene unfortunately bolsters the viewer's early impression of Dixon as insightful, dutiful, and protective by lending undue credence to a practice that numerous detractors have condemned as 'security theatre.' This sequence sets the tone of the film by showcasing airport surveillance in its punitive capacities, rather than the commercialism that forms the foundation of *Up in the Air*'s take on airport space.

Of course, and again in line with the abovementioned scholarship on airport surveillance, the bulk of the film's social commentary on this front has less to do with the mere existence and magnitude of this security apparatus, and more to do with the ways in which these professedly comprehensive measures are easily undermined by edge cases like that of Viktor Navorski. A simple example lies in the follow-up phrase posed by security agents to new arrivals concerning the nature of their visit: “business or pleasure?” The phrase not only implies that these are the only acceptable reasons for entering the country (both options, significantly, have mostly to do with commerce), but also sets up the dilemma that drives the remainder of the film—neither case applies to Navorski, a traveller from the fictional Eastern Bloc country of Krakozhia who has arrived in New York to fulfil a promise he made to his late father. It also presupposes that the person to whom the question is asked knows the meanings of these words and can therefore answer properly—again, Navorski ranges outside the set of possibilities permitted by these

assumptions, with a grasp of English so limited he is unable to even understand his own predicament when brought in by airport authorities. These very basic shortcomings of the logic on which the airport's security screening apparatus rests soon give way to similar failures of progressively greater significance, as the extreme rarity and specificity of Navorski's situation leaves Dixon with no formal way to actually address it:

> No more Krakozhia. Okay? New Government. Revolution. You understand? So, all the flights in and out of your country have been suspended indefinitely. And the new government has sealed all the borders, which means your passport and visa are no longer valid. So currently, you are a citizen of *nowhere*. See, you don't qualify for asylum, refugee status, temporary protective status, humanitarian parole, or non-immigration work-traveller diplomatic visas, you don't qualify for any of these things. You are, at this time, simply... unacceptable.

Navorski's continued stay in the airport poses a problem for Dixon, who is being groomed for the position of Field Commissioner by his imminently retiring boss, and must be vetted by Washington officials before assuming the role. The issue, ironically, is Navorski's obedience, as he insists on waiting in the airport to avoid further legal complications, even while Dixon himself expects him, and later actively encourages him, to break the rules: “Why the hell doesn't he walk out the door, why doesn't he try to escape? [...] I mean, he's in a crack. Who the hell waits in a crack?” But Navorski is right to wait—Dixon seeks to goad him into leaving the airport in order to justify having him deported, thereby washing his own hands of the entire situation: “Catch and release, it's very simple. Sometimes, you land a small fish, you unhook him very carefully, you place him back in the water, you set him free, so that somebody else can have the pleasure of catching him.” Instances like these illustrate how an overreliance on authoritarianism in these

high-security spaces can sometimes fail to productively address any actual needs or problems, negatively affecting both the lives of those it is ostensibly meant to serve, as well as the judgement of those tasked with running it. Appropriately, Dixon becomes increasingly unhinged as the film goes on, taking Navorski's inability to legally leave the airport as an affront to his own authority and ability to carry out his professional responsibilities.

Although this apparent dearth of common sense and basic human decency at times stretches belief as far as the film's premise is concerned, such events have been known to actually happen. Indeed, the film was originally inspired by the story of Iranian refugee Mehran Karimi Nasseri, whose documents went missing en route to England, leading to his confinement in Charles de Gaulle airport for nearly 18 years. More recently, cybersecurity contractor Edward Snowden's well-publicized flight from the American government following his disclosure of illegal domestic spying activities conducted by the NSA, had him living in a Moscow airport for more than a month after his passport was revoked by the U.S. State Department. But while Navorski ably functions as a stand in for those affected by this very peculiar circumstance, whether the result of a bureaucratic nightmare like Nasseri's or for more overtly political reasons as with Snowden, the film becomes especially timely when considered as a social consciousness piece dedicated to the problem of statelessness and stateless persons more broadly. Although the geographical context in which Navorski's struggle occurs is highly unusual given that only a handful of real individuals have had to live in an airport for an extended period of time, the nature of the struggle itself is common to millions of people deemed 'simply unacceptable' and spatially marginalized in similar ways. Nicholas de Genova elaborates on the complicated relationship between the stateless and the states they find themselves outside, and in doing so quite closely approximates the relationship Navorski, as an emblem of the former, has with

Dixon, as an emblem of the latter:

> For the "deportable alien," there is an ever-tenuous frontier between her abject subjection to the state and the imminent peril of her descent into the utter statelessness that signals the refugee as precisely a figure of barest life, naked humanness, humanity shorn of any juridical personhood. That frontier is distinguished by the spectral vestiges of some previous (and, in any case, exterior) citizenship, a "proper" belonging elsewhere, within the orbit of some other state power. If the refugee may be invoked as an icon of statelessness and therefore also of bare life, then deportability perfectly and precisely marks the zone of indistinction between a condition that is (virtually) stateless and one that is positively saturated with the state. [...] Deportation is, indeed, a premier means for perpetrating, embellishing, and reinstating a "threshold... that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside." It is no mere contrivance or exaggeration, therefore, to say of the "deportable alien" that—like the exiles and bandits to whom Agamben analogizes the figure of bare life (1995/1998, 183-84), excluded form all political life, disqualified from any juridically valid act, and yet in a continuous relationship with the power that banishes it—no life is more "political" than hers. (46-47)

Spielberg's use of the airport—a space likely more relatable to the average American filmgoer than, say, a refugee camp—articulates these difficulties that global mobility poses both for those who fall through legal and administrative cracks in the systems of population management constructed by nation-states, and for the nation-states themselves, which are increasingly unable to effectively organize such populations via these systems. By the same token, the explicit focus on the space of the airport helps emphasize the extent to which airports specifically, and very probably more than any other commonly encountered urban space, are always concerned with

and informed by these issues by virtue of their very existence, their basic functions and purpose. In this way, the film provides a useful contrast to Reitman's *Up in the Air*, with the two taken together illustrating this problem of 'dislocation' brought about by global aeromobility on both ends of the class and social status continuum. While *Up in the Air* gestures toward the ways in which aeromobility confers important advantages to social elites by providing the option of escaping the laws or customs of a given place for somewhere more favourable, *The Terminal* uses the setting of the airport as an avenue to discuss the international dispossessed, unable to reap the advantages of belonging to the state they are confined in while nonetheless being constantly at its mercy.

However, as with *Up in the Air*, this dominant set of associations is really just half of what the film indicates about airports. Just as Bingham's presumably carefree consumerist lifestyle in the airport, as I have attempted to suggest, actually conceals a surprising preoccupation with the space's more authoritarian qualities, *The Terminal* contains a similar reversal of its own in the opposite direction. After meeting with Dixon, Navorski is led down a drab hallway by head security officer Ray Thurman, released through a door into an explosion of colour, lights, and people, and informed that "there's only one thing you can do here [...]: shop." It is at this point that *The Terminal* becomes an entirely different film, as it moves from a commentary on, as Lester Friedman puts it, "the dangers of government functionaries viewing people not as individuals but rather as obstructions to the implementation of their policies," to a more conventional 'immigrant's tale'-type narrative of a sympathetic outsider integrating into a community where he is presumed not to belong (285). This integration, importantly, mostly revolves around the same types of things someone like Bingham keeps careful track of: money, resources, appearances, and status. Navorski is immediately confronted with the necessity of

obtaining these things as he first receives vague hints as to what has become of his country via a nearby television set, but is unable to learn more due to being barred from an exclusive lounge where further information is being broadcast. A second problem quickly arises: Navorski is hungry, and so he takes to returning stray luggage trolleys to their corrals for the meagre cash reward given to those who do so, in order to purchase food—his prosperity is illustrated by way of a move from the Burger King value menu to Whopper combos. Like Bingham, Navorski also quickly learns to use his knowledge of the space and its directives (in terms of its formal bureaucratic workings, as well as its less obvious codes of behaviour and etiquette) to forge social relationships. This is the case with flight attendant and love interest Amelia Warren, who first encounters him after breaking a shoe and finding him there offering useful advice that, appropriately, takes the form of an advertisement—"Payless shoes, second floor. Sensible heels!"—and who mostly functions in the narrative as further motivation for Navorski to blend in. Navorski and Warren later bond over their constant occupation of this type of environment —"Do you ever feel like you're just *living* in an airport?"—amidst a backdrop of retail frontage provided by businesses looking to advertise in the film: Burger King, Starbucks, Borders, Sbarro, Hugo Boss, and so forth.

These businesses perform a more important function, however, than to convincingly fill out a film set meant to represent JFK airport, or allow Hanks's character to demonstrate his growing comfort in these new surroundings. They are the means by which he moves from unacceptable to acceptable, in the same way that any other occupant does. Returning to De Genova's referral to deportable people as indicative 'of barest life, naked humanness,' and 'humanity shorn of any juridical personhood,' it would appear that such hardships are overcome by simply buying some clothes. By participating in the consumer capitalist requirements of a

space where all he is able to do is shop, Navorski effectively manages to designate himself as mobile rather than immobile—as a patron of the airport's consumer infrastructure, rather than a victim of its carceral infrastructure. This is particularly apparent around the beginning of the film, where Navorski is literally living on saltine and condiment sandwiches, and must devise a way of earning money to thwart Dixon's attempt to starve him into compliance. But the best example is a scene that Friedman calls attention to: when

> Viktor gazes longingly into the glass window of the airport's Hugo Boss store, where the reflection shows how he will look dressed in one of those handsomely tailored and expensive suits. However improbably, Spielberg's world of compassionate capitalism—not to mention extensive product placements—allows for this dreamy image to become flesh. Viktor accumulates enough money to buy the suit, marked down to a level rarely reached by Boss products off the screen, and meets Amelia for a romantic dinner looking like a “real American.” (287)

Navorski's newfound agency is not, of course, just the result of buying the suit, but rather the means by which he is able to afford it. In a turn of events pulled straight from Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, an airport contractor recognizes his industry and skill as a carpenter after he renovates a gate set to be remodelled as a way of passing time, and decides to pay him under the table on other projects. These liberties awarded to Navorski by his newly acquired station then snowball into even further exaggerations, culminating in his physical remaking of the space as he sees fit by building an elaborate fountain as a gift to Amelia. This whole arc is predicated on the virtues of, as Friedman's commentary appears to indicate, a quintessentially American labour mythos—nothing but hard work and good character leading to survival despite poor odds, then to sufficiency, then luxury, then genuine influence—all of which is both enabled

and represented by the hypersaturated consumer landscape of the airport lounge.

In these instances, the havoc wreaked by Navorski's activities on the boundary between acceptability and unacceptability works to highlight the internally contradictory nature of airport surveillance. But it also produces a ripple effect, refracting through the airport's bureaucratic hierarchy to pose similar quandaries for other characters as well. The most prominent of these are the airport's manual labourers—Enrique, who works in food service, Joe, a cargo handler, and Gupta, an elderly janitor who is initially suspicious of Navorski because he suspects he is spying on them, checking on their job performance on behalf of management, or worse: "He could be recording everything we say. A wire in his shirt. [...] I'm not going to lose my job." Of course, Navorski is merely a traveller in an unusual situation. But that fails to keep Gupta from not only being fired anyway, but also deported, because it turns out management actually *is* spying on him:

> Part of my job is to get rid of undesirables, and there are quite a few. Like this guy, Joe Mulroy. I think you know him. He's been here for years, but he's been running an after-hours poker game. Bringing in liquor and marijuana. Poor guy's going to lose his pension. And I think he has kids, too. Yep. And then there's this guy, Enrique Cruz. I think you also know Enrique. Enrique has been letting people into the food preparation area. That's a major security breach. The poor guy, I think he's a newlywed. But I'm going to have to let him go. And then there's Gupta Rajan. He's a janitor. But he's wanted for assaulting a police officer back in India in 1979. I'll have to deport him.

This final threat issued by Dixon is one more example of adherence to the letter rather than the spirit of regulations, even gesturing to similar abuses of authority in other cultural contexts (the police officer Gupta assaulted was trying to extort money from him). But even more

significantly, this discipline is applied retroactively in a last-ditch bid to get Navorski to back down, to people who have presumably belonged in the airport for many years, for reasons having nothing to do with the gravity or even existence of their infractions. This precarity under which such characters are permitted to identify as 'acceptable' (as workers in the airport, but also in capitalist society more broadly as a result of this employment) is obviously largely a consequence of class, as well as race. Friedman points out that in the film, "a group of multicultural manual laborers perform the physical work necessary to keep the airport functioning," while "a small contingent of white-collar Caucasians oversees them" (285). But Dixon's job is not safe either—his impetus for singling Navorski out in the first place is a visit from his superiors in Washington, and his insecurity around how to wield his new authority with them watching. In one scene, where an obvious lie allows prohibited drugs to get through the airport, albeit for legitimately compassionate reasons, an incensed Dixon is told by his boss that sometimes relaxing the rules is as important as enforcing them, which is a statement completely at odds with the intensity with which airport procedure is generally adhered to, especially after 9/11. These examples in many ways come full circle with *Up in the Air*, by highlighting not only the extent to which airport authority is diffuse, obscure, and rhizomatic, but the feeling of vulnerability that this induces in even those who are supposed to be there, regardless of social status, background, or level of authority.

But perhaps most striking about this constantly mounting drama is how quickly it all dissipates upon Navorski's climactic exit from the airport at the end of the film. Navorski finally leaves en route to his destination, Amelia returns to the stormy relationship she was in prior to meeting him, Dixon of course still gets the job—everyone again becomes strangers, returning to as they were before the whole debacle started, save presumably for poor Gupta. Once more we

see a bit of metafictional judo here, the heightened tension of the film itself coinciding with the heightened tension of the spaces it looks to explore. And once more, these formal workings perform a similar function to those of *Up in the Air* with respect to audience perception and affect—by dramatizing the minor victory of one stateless person, Spielberg gestures to the tragedy of all those still trapped 'between lives and between selves,' but never has to discuss the issue in earnest. What is framed as a happy ending is merely the restoration of an already middling status quo, as Navorski finally gets to move on with his life after months of victimization by pure freak chance. But his struggle represents only one incident in a world all but defined by these tense and intricate passageways: the film closes with him at last making it to New York, fulfilling his familial promise, and then immediately turning around to go back the way he came.

Day to day, airports are essentially a system of rudimentary portals with a very rare but well-known tendency to malfunction with harrowing results, devouring the occasional unlucky traveller without warning. They are high-tech, high-stakes spaces, bureaucracies of transition that bridge the gaps between national custom and law—spaces of incalculable economic, cultural, and individual benefit. But this importance has also made them vulnerable, and so they demand vulnerability as compensation, resulting in a volatile martial law-type climate where personal privacy and autonomy are casually surrendered in the name of security. Airports see the practical challenges of globalization at their most overt in terms of basic administrative functioning, but also in terms of dread and emotional discord, the attendant phobias of

supermodernity on full display. This chapter relates this sense of insecurity to the broader forms of structural disorganization that airports have played a part in producing. In the next and final chapter, I expand these themes even further to include a consideration of cyberspace, and how supermodern programs of speed, anxiety, and control are starting to transcend physical geography altogether.

Chapter Five: Cyberspace, and the Body as Place

With human society increasingly oriented around global flows of capital and information, it is unsurprising that the conceptual limits of the self have been altered in ways similar to the physical spaces in which selfhood is formed and negotiated. As David J. Phillips notes, "performances and enactments of identity call on a variety of resources," including "reciprocal techniques of visibility and concealment, ideals and genres of engagement, and tact" (303). And space, in keeping with the work of critical geographers like Lefebvre and Harvey, both influences and is influenced by this process: "the architectures of lived space afford possibilities for visibility or concealment, [and] shape the ways in which we may see or be seen," while at the same time, "spaces themselves are socially meaningful. Certain roles and interactions are appropriate or not in certain spaces. Genres of performance create, sustain, and are supported by genres of place" (Phillips 303). Owing to this mutual dependence between place and identity, the need has arisen among thinkers in a variety of fields to reconsider human subjectivity as it has transitioned from a hierarchically ordered, locally oriented spatial context, to a dispersed global network. "The most powerful and effective places which our forbears made for themselves, and left for us, exist in contiguous space," the architect Charles Moore writes. "They work on an organized hierarchy of importances, first dividing what is inside from what is outside, then in some way arranging things in order of their importance, so that objects give importance to a location, and location gives importance to objects" (32). Consequently, "the visible order of these hierarchical places was buttressed by the confidence that they shared the order which made comprehensible the world" (Moore 32). By contrast, "our own places, like our lives, are not bound up in one contiguous space. Our order is not made in one discrete inside neatly separated from a hostile outside, in which we are free to structure a visible simulation of our vision of the

world" (Moore 32). The question of precisely how our vision of the world is structured in this new context, then, is central to examining the decline of the individualized, self-contained liberal humanist subject—the self as a 'place'—"as humanism transforms itself into something one must helplessly call posthumanism" (Hassan 843).

The opening section of this chapter departs from the historical material analysis conducted thus far, shifting to the ways in which these structural changes impact more personal constructs like identity, agency, or individuality. Accordingly, rather than continuing to discuss spatiality in more conventional terms, this section instead considers the changing boundaries of humans themselves as they too circulate through the globalized infrastructure that non-places represent. More specifically, it considers posthumanism, the body of scholarly and artistic work dedicated to interrogating these boundaries, in relation to the developments outlined in the previous four chapters. Organized around the same basic comparison that informs the rest of the dissertation, between an earlier era of 'places' and a more current era of 'non-places,' my remarks here distinguish between older versions of posthumanity in the form of monsters and other mythological beings, and more recent examples, in particular the key concept of the cyborg, which has recently been adopted as a symbol for sweeping changes in the human self-concept upon its entry into the properly global field of action and awareness that supermodernity makes possible. Unlike other chapters, however, this distinction is not meant to indicate any substantial difference in what these figures themselves represent—namely, the notion of human identity as inherently heterogeneous, fragmentary, dissonant, and artificially 'assembled,'—but rather the very different philosophical work they do vis à vis the social, spatial, and material situations in which they arise. Whereas monstrous identities clash directly with the ordered and stable continuity of a world predicated on 'place,' acting as a total abject Other, ontological foil, and

implicit threat to such a world, cyborgs represent a coming to terms with this sort of internal discontinuity, incited by and reflected in the external discontinuity of the new world they have come to inhabit. Cyborg identities are overwhelmingly cosmopolitan, unconcerned with the kinds of rigid geocultural boundaries that once sequestered their ancestors into discrete, relatively homogeneous societies, and gave rise to the kinds of myopic, sectarian thinking that held sway therein. At the same time, however, they are exceedingly unstable because of this cosmopolitanism, representing an expansion of consciousness so drastic as to preclude its own ability to define and assert itself (lacking as it does anything to do so *against*), signalling the new hindrances to agency that arise when the lines between the individual and the collective, personal and public, self and other, inside and outside, become not merely blurred, but virtually non-existent. The cyborg is and is from everywhere, yet cannot be said to be or belong anywhere, and it is this basic sense of indeterminacy that poses problems for how we approach issues of identity in the context of the interdependent, interconnected global society that supermodernity has begun to usher in.

The following two sections explore these new forms of subjectivity as they coalesce with humankind's newest frontier: cyberspace, the informational realms that make global space coherent and navigable. The first uses a close reading of William Gibson's debut novel *Neuromancer*, a watershed science fiction text that helped popularize the 'cyberpunk' aesthetic of cyborged bodies, virtual worlds, rampant urban sprawl, and unbridled social anarchy, to look at the complex relationship between individuals and the networks through which they act, and which reciprocally act on them. Here, the raw potential of non-places is taken to fantastical heights, with the illimitable free-for-alls of business, science, and politics rioting across psychedelic and hyperactive infrastructures, most notably the boundless disembodied expanse of

pure information known as the Matrix. Essentially a caper narrative about a two-bit hood roped into initiating the dawn of a new transcendent consciousness in the form of an omniscient and omnipresent A.I., *Neuromancer* is concerned with how humans are gradually ensnared by the structures they build around themselves, their efforts and ambitions becoming a function of their milieu rather than vice versa. In the novel, the control these structures exert are nigh-absolute, effectively erasing the distinction between individual bodies, minds, and wills on the one hand, and the systems with which they are integrated on the other. And while Gibson leaves open the possibility of achieving something like autonomy opposite the magnitude of these systems and the risks they pose, such a process entails radical, fundamental changes to those who undergo it, suggesting a possible need to reexamine rudimentary concepts surrounding personal identity should a genuinely posthuman future come to pass.

The second section revisits these concerns in a contemporary setting with Gibson's mid-career novel *Pattern Recognition*, via the language of advertising, viral media, corporate espionage, and post-9/11 anxiety. Dispensing with outlandish body modifications, roiling urban chaos, and a cyberspace blended seamlessly with the corporeal world, Gibson instead turns to the subtle ways in which online networks have already changed the rules of economic and social engagement. While this more grounded and faithful take on internet culture has his characters liberated from the imperious futuristic technology of his earlier work, however, cyberspace in the present is nevertheless readily seen to have its own perils. Rather than mounting a relatively straightforward if practically suicidal assault against intimidatingly robust systems like the Matrix, the novel's protagonist, a market researcher unravelling the mystery behind a cryptic series of online videos, faces a considerably more manageable task, but also has far fewer tools with which to manage it. Conversely, the various entities trying to prevent or delay her in her

pursuits have less immediate, unqualified control over her actions, suffer from greater internal discord and fallibility, and are altogether more vulnerable to attack or circumvention than the towering, uncompromising juggernauts encountered in *Neuromancer*. But to compensate for these deficiencies, they are also less overt and transparent in their workings, anonymously exercising their influence through the kinds of techniques currently central to online informational warfare: social engineering, trolling, intimidation, disinformation campaigns, character assassination, and the like. These conceits provide a more subdued, practical rendering of the issues surrounding cyborg subjectivity seen in speculative fiction, showing how global communications networks are used for both mass empowerment and mass manipulation, mobilized to both shape public perception and opinion on behalf of private interests, as well as uncover, disrupt, or guard against this process in a constant frenzy of doing and undoing that has largely outpaced the conventions of pre-Internet discourse. Together, these readings highlight some of the ways in which global citizens are reshaping themselves (and being reshaped) to participate in supermodern affairs, and the kinds of issues they might confront along the way.

1. Cyborgs, Monsters, and the Networked Society.

A useful starting point for considering the rather large canon of posthumanist thought is Donna Haraway's “Cyborg Manifesto,” among the most well-known and cited documents on the subject in humanities circles. Originally coined in 1960 specifically to refer to a human body enhanced with mechanical and electronic components (hence 'cybernetic organism'), the cyborg has come to function as a mascot for the wider scholarship of which it is a part, having been expanded to include not just physical modifications, but the various other developments that follow. “The cyborg is our ontology,” writes Haraway, whose primary concern here is with this

shift in focus. “It gives us our politics” (150). What this ontology and these politics generally have to do with, for Haraway and others, is the abandonment of a unified, coherent view of individual and/or group subjectivity, along with the broader assumptions that stem from such a view—concretely defined and demarcated groupings of all kinds and on every scale (biological, intellectual, social, political, etc.), and just about any boundary previously assumed to be unassailably static and natural:

> The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically. […] The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself—all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others—consequences that themselves are very different for different people and which make potent oppositional international movements difficult to imagine and essential for survival. (163)

As Haraway's commentary suggests, this trend toward approaching and experiencing human identity as inherently unstable, promiscuous, chimerical, and expansive, invites considerable ambivalence. The growing instability of what constitutes a body, or self, or what can and cannot be referred to as human, introduces the potential liberation of these things (whatever they are) from the systems of mass control and domination that act on them and have for centuries—patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, etc. It also, however, directs attention toward the new systems of control that are emerging to replace them, ones more reflective of this new paradigm of fragmentation, amorphousness, and dispersal. “From one perspective,” Haraway suggests, “a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence,” while from

another, it “might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (154). In order to elaborate adequately on what exactly is meant by this as it relates to supermodern placelessness, it is helpful to revisit some of the earlier versions of this idea to look at what has and hasn't changed since the advent of non-places and other outgrowths of globalized capitalism.

Indeed, although the plausibility of an actual, literal cyborg as is currently imagined in mainstream culture is a relatively recent development that has yet to be even close to fully realized, the art world has been exploring posthuman bodies for centuries. The best example is of course *Frankenstein*, inspired in large part by Galvani's experiments with electricity and the nervous system. Taking humankind's growing ability to manipulate biological processes to its logical conclusion, Shelley anticipates Haraway's “ironic faith, my blasphemy,” in her examination of how scientific advancement destabilizes moral precepts that were once central to human selfhood (149). Catherine Waldby reads the novel along these lines, arguing it to be

> the first investigation of the ontology of the technoscientific subject, its conditions of being in the world. How, the novel asks, do the conditions of artificial creation and technically conferred life generate certain possibilities for being? What does it mean to be embodied, when the body cannot claim the status of nature? How can artificial life situate itself in the world, and what kind of world does it make for itself? (33)

And although Frankenstein's monster is the obvious standout example, the link between biological and 'moral' deviance is central to the tradition of the monster dating back to classical mythology. “For many cultures,” Elaine Graham observes, “the existence of any living thing that seemed to transgress the laws of nature was an object of curiosity,” and “in antiquity, such beings

were held to augur tragedy and misfortune" (47). This is especially true of animal-human hybrids, which were often used as symbols for degenerate impulses, as "beings such as centaurs (men-horses), sirens (bird-women) and satyrs (men-goats) represented a sexualized nature which rampaged through the ordered institutions of city and family" (Graham 47). These associations, too, find their way into narratives with more contemporary concerns such as *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, which uses animal-human hybridity to illustrate the savage and brutal bedrock of human behaviour, while simultaneously joining *Frankenstein* in its skepticism toward technical progress as a gateway to a utopian future.

These forays into posthumanism by way of speculative fiction were soon joined by more grounded philosophical inquiries that addressed similar questions. Nietzsche, for example, deploys the concept of a fragmentary sense of self as a starting point for thinking beyond the simplistic system of polarized 'good versus evil' morality foundational to the work of his predecessors. Taking his cues from scientific discoveries that had disproved assumptions of unity and unification in the physical world (namely, Copernicus's heliocentric model of the universe and Boscovich's groundwork on atomic theory), he advocates the application of similar principles to moral and intellectual life, insisting that

> we must go further still and declare war—a ruthless fight to the finish—on the "atomistic need" [….] Let this expression signify the belief that the soul is something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, that it is a monad, an *atomon*: this belief must be thrown out of science! Between you and me, there is absolutely no need to give up "the soul" itself, and relinquish one of the oldest and most venerable hypotheses [….] But the path lies open for new versions and sophistications of the soul hypothesis—and concepts like the "mortal soul" and the "soul as subject-multiplicity" and the "soul as a society constructed

out of drives and affects" want henceforth to have civil rights in the realm of science. (14) Sentiments like this one, advancing a kind of cyborg consideration of subjectivity, would become more common and varied as time went on. Seeming to take up Nietzsche's call for the study of psychology to put "an end to [this] superstition that until now has grown around the idea of the soul with an almost tropical luxuriance" (Nietzsche 14), for example, Freud theorizes that ego formation is fraught with a chaotic morass of unconscious drives and repressed desires, "individual instincts or parts of instincts [which] turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones" (5). And two decades before Haraway uses the cyborg as a metaphor for human subjectivity in a postmodern context, Foucault is arguing that the very idea of humanism has always been a fiction of post-Enlightenment modernity, during which the world and its occupants were discursively organized according to certain historically determined values and imperatives that encouraged that model of selfhood. "Before the end of the eighteenth century, *man* did not exist—any more than the potency of life, the fecundity of labor, or the historical density of language," he writes (*Order of Things* 308). In line with Nietzschean or Freudian conceptions of a fragmented and latently constructed subjectivity, such an assertion is essentially to ask "'how, under what conditions and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules?' In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse" ("Author" 118).

The primary critical value of these 'modern' posthuman figures like Frankenstein's monster or Nietzsche's overman, at least for the purposes of this discussion, are the ways in which they conceptually oppose their socio-spatial context. As Moore argues, a society oriented

around contiguous 'place' encourages a localized, structured, hierarchical view of the world, and the liberal humanist subject, as Foucault appears to suggest, is simply an extension of this logic. Calling into question the boundaries and definitions of such a subject, then, serves to undermine the ideologies that produce it—Nietzsche looks to dispel assumptions of objective truth which had persisted since Plato, while Shelley places humankind's destiny in its own hands by replacing God's role with science in the production of life. These are not simply thought experiments, but part of an incisive commentary that challenges the forms of power and authority which exist by virtue of the hierarchies built on these ideas. Robert Pepperell notes, for example, that "until around the eighteenth century, the political system was largely feudal and the authority of God was used by the ruling elite to justify the social order" (156). And "while there was considerable argument amongst philosophers and theologians as to the precise meaning of various religious doctrines, the actual existence of God was rarely questioned by representatives of the institutions of power such as ecclesiastics, courtiers, the judiciary and executive" (Pepperell 156). Texts like Nietzsche's and Shelley's, that implicitly and often directly took aim at the ontological and moral assumptions encouraged by this hierarchical model, thus took aim at the legitimacy of the hierarchy itself. And while their doing so is, importantly, frequently expressed in the language of secularism and scientific progress, even mythological figures like centaurs, sirens, and satyrs to some extent perform this function, as Graham indicates above. All of this is simply to say that the intellectual freight of these examples consists of their status as ontological, moral, and political aberrations. Their disorderliness in all respects is used as a foil against which to examine a modern society predicated on hierarchical order, and the advantages and disadvantages of that arrangement.

It is in this fundamentally important respect that these modern renditions of posthumanity

differ from postmodern examples, like Haraway's cyborg. Due to the proliferation of global travel and communications networks, a cyborg self-concept is no longer the exception, but the rule: “Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of the spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable,” Haraway writes. “People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque. Cyborgs are ether, quintessence” (153). Cyborgs are an *extension* of their socio-spatial moment, rather than the antithesis of it, as is the case with something like Frankenstein. They are not only fragmented, or multifaceted, but quite literally dispersed, able to voice their opinions or exercise their will from halfway across the planet, in ways and with consequences that may or may not be controllable, desirable, or even apprehensible. The larger social and political structures of which they are a part are likewise dispersed, as commentators like Chris Hables Gray observe: “Today's contemporary political communities consist of infrastructure, great armies are made up of human-machine weapon systems, and the world economy is dominated by gigantic multinationals who depend on their own hypercomputerization,” all of which are “signs of a cyborged body politic” (19). Consequently, the discourse surrounding the cyborg's relationship with its milieu is considerably different, and raises different questions.

Rather than examining the ways in which subjective experience might range outside the stable but oppressive socio-spatial paradigm of modernity, considerations of the postmodern cyborg in many ways effectively seek the reverse: the reclamation of some semblance of essential personal agency from the postmodern digitized sprawl with which one, along with everything else, is integrated. N. Katharine Hayles's seminal *How We Became Posthuman*, for example, summarizes the problem in this way:

The presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly

> distinguished from the “wills of others” is undercut in the posthuman, for the posthuman's collective heterogenous quality implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another […]. The posthuman is “post” not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will. (3-4)

The collapse of this distinction between self and other that once defined the liberal humanist subject—the ability to distinguish 'what is inside from what is outside,' to use Moore's parlance—has wide ranging implications with respect to the civic existence of individuals, destabilizing as it does the concepts on which individualism is predicated. One particularly productive way of considering this trend is in terms of what Gilles Deleuze calls the 'control society,' which functions according to this logic of ambiguous boundaries and discontinuous experiences of space. Authority is no longer asserted through the experience of enclosed spaces each with their own distinct imperatives and goals, like the prison, hospital, factory, school, or family, as would be the case in the Foucauldian 'disciplinary' societies of modernity. It is instead exercised through free-floating principles applied across contexts and modified as needed, against which individuals are compared and compare themselves. Whereas “enclosures are *molds*, distinct casings” dedicated to socializing their occupants in specific ways having comparatively little to do with other institutions, “controls are a *modulation,* like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to another, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (4). In the same way that the physical dispersal of power enhances its influence by removing avenues for individuals to directly engage with it (for example, the international corporation's relative degree of freedom from the laws and customs of nation-states), the ideological imposition of power according to this logic prevents resistance to it by

essentially obscuring the facts of its presence and origin—its status as an 'other-will.' To use Deleuze's example of the workplace, the factory of the disciplinary society "constituted individuals as a single body to the double advantage of the boss who surveyed each element within the mass, and the unions who mobilized a mass resistance" while its control society counterpart, the globalized, informationalized corporation, "constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within" (4-5).

The practical issues surrounding this dispersed, amorphous model of power are already becoming apparent through decentralized spaces like the Internet, which trades chiefly in information, the lightest, most portable commodity there is. Cyberspace is communication in a vacuum, a non-place through which billions voice and form their opinions, influence and are influenced, and define themselves in relation to others, all without the need for actual physical proximity—discourse, far apart and seen fast. Decoupling culture from geography in this manner has advantages and disadvantages, helping enable the kinds of unique affinities and unexpected coalitions that scholars like Haraway apply to the post-human experience, while simultaneously rendering them critically vulnerable, exposed to equally novel methods of intrusion and interference. David Phillips notes, for example, that "surveillance as a technique of knowledge production and population management is becoming a central organizing principle of modern institutions" due to ubiquitous computing and the subsequent rise of big data, which is "causing deep structural changes to the negotiation of space and identity" (308). More specifically:

> In this idealized form, surveillance individualizes each member of the population, and permits the observation and recording of each individual's activities, then collates these individual observations across the population. From these conglomerated observations,

> statistical norms are produced. These norms are then applied back to the subjected individuals, who are categorized and perhaps acted upon according to their relation to the produced norm. Thus surveillance produces both discipline (that is, conformity to the norm), and the disciplines (regulated fields of knowledge and expertise). It alters both the structures of visibility and the structures of meaning making. It renders us visible—it identifies us—in relation to the norms it produces. (308)

This largely passive, surreptitious approach to mass socialization is a particularly ominous example of a control society phenomenon already widely at work, effective not despite, but because of its unobtrusiveness. More than simply another infrastructure through which we act, cyberspace is how we publicly consider and justify our actions, from landmark legal, business, and policy decisions, to the everyday conversations that gradually cohere into prevalent ideological values and assumptions long-term, to the utilitarian, or transactional, or whimsical, or totally frivolous, all of which "mediat[e] our awareness of places and our ability to create, engage, and use those places […]. Like zoning laws, the infrastructures of ubiquitous computing and surveillance become resources in the mutual construction of habitus and place" (Phillips 309). Informational networks thus precipitate a shift in power relations toward indirect rather than direct action—though the intangible, anonymous nature of online communities insulates them from outright authoritarian suppression, they are nevertheless assailable through other means, prone to wholesale manipulation precisely because of this lack of boundaries and means of identification normally provided by anthropological place. In a society where information is bought, sold, shared, mined, stolen, fabricated, doctored, concealed, or weaponized with no real oversight or restraint, the idea of making meaningful decisions based on this information ceases to make any intrinsic sense. Though knowledge can no longer be forbidden, it is more easily

obscured; though dissenting points of view can no longer be crushed, they are more easily drowned out, or better yet, commandeered. Consequently, the once self-evident construct of identity is thrown into perpetual crisis, as the difference between independent thoughts, perceptions, and actions, and those guided by some wider sphere of influence, can no longer be reasonably discerned.

In popular culture, there is nowhere that this crisis is staged more openly and with more regularity than in the world of science fiction, where human-machine hybrids frequently represent the ways in which people gradually fuse with the various systems that surround them, their own sense of individual agency left hanging in the balance. The result is usually a muddy, convoluted grab-bag of ontology, moral philosophy, futurology, psychogeography, and existentialism that strains the relationship between identity and society to its limits, dressed up with extravagant set pieces and high-concept premises. A relatively straightforward example can be found in something like *The Terminator*, in which the computerized weapons system Skynet becomes self-aware and attempts to exterminate anything that might endanger its continued survival, sending android assassins to pursue its opponents through tangles of city streets. The film displays the same basic uneasiness toward technology as texts like *Frankenstein*, seeing humankind besieged by an enemy not just of its own making, but made in its own image, a magnified reflection of its own propensity for evil made flesh and run amok. Expanding this conflict to global dimensions, however, introduces new, distinctly supermodern concerns and ramifications. Artificial intelligence no longer represents an abjection that is merely symbolic—the kind of uncanny mongrel abomination that comes from recklessly trying to play God—but terrifyingly literal, an infrastructure sophisticated enough to make pivotal choices and commit unconscionable atrocities in our stead. *The Terminator* is less about dangerous weaponry as such,

and more about its universalization, with the world's total destructive resources digitally amassed into a single cataclysmic force and brought to bear on its older embodied counterpart, the labyrinthine urban arenas where Sarah Connor and the T-800 relentlessly evade, outwit, and assail one another in a genre-bending slugfest that the film itself appropriately characterizes as 'tech-noir.' Thematically, the principal characters are inconsequential compared to the all-or-nothing stakes of their conflict, a struggle over the fate and soul of the species that highlights the extent to which localized developments have come to drastically affect civilization in aggregate. Then, in a surprising reversal, this broader look at the challenges of self-determination in a highly networked society is pared back down to an intimate personal journey in the film's sequel, in which the T-800 is reprogrammed to empathize and identify with its one-time foes, subsequently working to protect them from the cybernetic agglomeration of which it is still a part. Here, the franchise complicates matters still further by pursuing subjecthood from a position already well outside conventional understandings of the term, following a patently inhuman creature as it manages to learn, internalize, and eventually even exude human virtues.

Of course, exploring these issues surrounding independence and assimilation need not require scenarios as outrageous as the literal apocalypse; a great many examples opt for a more subdued approach, often emphasizing the banal evil of human organizations over the technologies they happen to use. Such is the case with *Blade Runner*, in which a group of fugitive replicants are pursued through futuristic LA by the detective tasked with 'retiring' them, their initial ruthlessness revealed to be the product of desperate circumstances in an inversion of classic killer robot stereotypes. Having escaped from a brutal existence in a Martian labour colony only to watch his companions killed one by one in a failed bid to extend their meagre four-year lifespans, the film's primary antagonist unexpectedly summons the benevolence in his

final moments to save the man responsible, who conversely is defined by his own problematic obedience to various juridical and corporate entities despite a growing affection for one of these synthetic beings, not to mention the several clues that he may be one himself. This preoccupation with law enforcement in particular is a common one—films like *Minority Report*, *Logan's Run*, *Equilibrium*, and *Judge Dredd* all see posthuman lawmen reluctantly propping up dystopias on behalf of some other authoritarian presence higher up the political food chain. Others, like *Tron* or *Total Recall*, look more at these themes as they relate to big capital and the exploitation of labour, while still others, like *RoboCop*, do both of these at once. And in some instances, like *eXistenZ*, *The Thirteenth Floor*, or *The Matrix*, reality itself is a fabrication, a narrative device used both to mediate the awareness of characters, as well as call attention to the ways in which the viewer's own awareness is being mediated by the fiction they are in the process of consuming. In any case, posthumanist art is ultimately about how new developments might change the parameters of a timeless human problem: the threat of losing individual sovereignty to external influence, of being oppressed, or silenced, or manipulated, or obliterated by the myriad networks within which one is inevitably enmeshed. Cyborg figures like Tony Stark, Seven-of-Nine, or Darth Vader are not compelling for having acquired supernatural abilities, but because of their indebtedness to the systems that provide them these abilities in a kind of Faustian bargain—they are simultaneously master and slave, subject and object, self and other, both the epitome and antithesis of what it is to be a person.

The remainder of this chapter looks at two works by William Gibson, a writer who built his early career exclusively on this introspective and socially conscious strain of sci-fi. His first novel *Neuromancer* is replete with the sorts of conventions listed above, transposing them into a wide range of contexts and registers—from the internal discord engendered by extreme

bioengineering and body augmentation, to mass misery under avaricious and morally bankrupt governance, to confinement in squalid, overpopulated megacities, to the final, dramatic convergence of all of these structures into a single entity, the awakening of a consciousness so robust as to take all others under its digital, globally disseminated wing. Cyborg subjectivity is grappled with here in huge, multifaceted, and highly imaginative terms, by a host of actual cyborgs who interface with their environments in an array of peculiar and volatile configurations. In many ways, the novel attempts to envision the endpoint of globalization as we know it, a society barrelling toward total synthesis even as its constituents continue struggling to resist and understand their place in it.

Following this extended detour through speculative fiction set in the far future, I step back into the present day with *Pattern Recognition*, which examines the origins of this integration process in the formative years of cyberculture, e-commerce, and the knowledge economy. In his first novel published after 9/11, Gibson dispenses with the science fiction tropes of his earlier work to show how the boundaries of the human have already been radically altered by the emergence of the Internet, and the deluge of information it makes available. Though freed from the kinds of immediate, visceral perplexities brought about by the literal fusion of man and machine, his characters here are colonized in less obvious ways, held in thrall to better heeled interests by way of the carefully curated information they are presented with. Consequently, the explicit tyranny of *Neuromancer* is swapped for a consideration of globalized power much more in line with Deleuze's description of a control society, characterized by an insidious permissiveness that masks a lack of genuine transparency, where goals are simply achieved through guile rather than force. These readings are intended to offer a brief look at how some of the questions, challenges, and anxieties introduced by posthumanism and its associated concepts

might manifest on an everyday basis, starting with a vision of where global civilization may be headed, and followed by a meditation on where it currently is.

2. William Gibson (1984): *Neuromancer.*

William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, widely regarded as a foundational text of 'cyberpunk' science fiction, is notable amongst critics for its expansive depiction of the intersections of power, space, and subjectivity in a highly networked world—Fredric Jameson has famously called cyberpunk "the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, than of late capitalism itself" (419). Likely its most well-known achievement in this or any other regard is its popularization of the term 'cyberspace,' which in the novel refers to a kind of lived in version of the Internet, "a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding" (57). And although such descriptions forecast with an unusual degree of insight the rise of incorporeal, networked 'space' that would begin to appear only a few years later with the development of the actual Internet, the prescience with which Gibson handles physical geography is also significant, and for similar reasons. In addition to the disembodied experience of 'the Matrix,' as it is most frequently referred to, the novel rushes frenetically from the dangerous underbelly of a Tokyo exurb overgrown with commerce, to a high-orbit resort town powered by an ultra-wealthy corporate dynasty, to a single domed amalgamation of metro areas stretching from Boston to Atlanta called 'the Sprawl,' locales intended to both reflect and support the channels of digital transaction that animate them. These too are depicted as classic non-places, hostile to any activity other than what Gibson's cybercriminal protagonist Case calls 'biz,' "like a deranged experiment in social

Darwinism designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button. Stop hustling and you sank without a trace, but move a little too swiftly and you'd break the fragile surface tension of the black market; either way, you were gone" (8).

Case is first found barely keeping up this balancing act in a blighted district of Japan's Chiba City while trying to stage a comeback, or as one associate puts it, "trying to con the street into killing you when you're not looking" (31). Originally a professional blackhat hacker and thief, Case has been prevented from 'jacking into' the Matrix by employers he attempted to steal from, maimed by a neurotoxin in retribution to deprive him of future work. This development relegates him to being stuck in his actual body, which is unfortunate not only because it ruins his credibility in 'console cowboy' circles, where "the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh" and the body is derided as "meat," but also because having a body has become extraordinarily dangerous (6). All of Case's problems derive from immediate bodily needs or shortcomings, with poor sleep in the cheapest coffin hotels and several drug addictions fuelling a paranoid belief that his remaining underworld contacts are looking to murder him over trivial sums of cash, which is itself now illegal in favour of digital currency. He is rescued from these perils of 'meatspace,' however, by a mysterious figure named Armitage, who provides technology that restores his nervous system function and disables his addictions as compensation for his expertise in a final heist conducted at the behest of the even more mysterious benefactor that funds and dictates Armitage's activities. This benefactor is Wintermute, a corporate owned A.I. clandestinely attempting to merge with a companion A.I. called Neuromancer that will allow it to learn and develop independent of human intervention, thereby essentially attaining godhood in contravention of strict globally imposed laws forbidding such an occurrence.

This basic plot of the novel, Larry McCaffery notes, is largely a sci-fi flavoured update of

classic detective and noir narratives in the same vein as cyberpunk films like *Blade Runner* or *The Terminator*. And as with those films, although "the 'messages' occasionally bear similarities to what we find in Chandler and Hammett […,] Gibson is also using the framework of *Neuromancer* to introduce his own agenda, which is a veritable casebook of postmodern SF concerns," including

> the contrast between the human "meat" and metal, the relationship between human memory and computer memory; the denaturing of the body and the transformation of time and space in the postindustrial world; the increasingly abstract interaction of data and images in this world; the primacy of information in the "dance of data" that comprises so much of life today […]; the ongoing angst and paranoia […] that some overarching demiurge is manipulating individuals and international politics; the mystical sense that our creation of data and images produces systems capable of merging with one another into new intelligences, (15)

and so forth. But all of this is readily reduced to the single fundamental problem of networked identity gestured to by posthumanist scholars like Hayles or Haraway that I have sketched out above, what McCaffery refers to as

> the spectre haunting nearly all postmodern SF—the uneasy recognition that our primal urge to replicate our consciousness and physical beings (into images, words, machine replicants, computer symbols) is *not* leading us closer to the dream of immortality, but is creating merely a pathetic parody, a metaexistence or simulacra of our essences that is supplanting us, literally taking over our physical space and our roles with admirable proficiency and without the drawbacks of human error and waste, without the human emotions of love, anger, ambition, and jealousy that

jeopardize the efficiency and predictability of the capitalistic exchange. (15-16)

Case's role as a noir-style protagonist, then, is a large part of the novel's attempt to work through these ideas, functioning in many ways as a 'pathetic parody' of that archetype, or a rough indication of what is being supplanted, and how. The novel opens with terse, cynical banter in a dive bar, positioning Case as a worldly but world-weary iconoclast reminiscent of a character like Sam Spade, "a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation, able to get the best of anybody he comes in contact with" (Hammett, viii). But these older romanticized noir tropes—generally speaking, the kind of maverick autonomy that somehow manages to be both benevolent and also completely self-serving—are dramatically warped by the bleakly deterministic future of *Neuromancer*. Rather than declaring independence in pursuit of an unconventional but arguably superior form of justice, or in observance of a personal code of conduct, Case's situation is demonstrative of the exact opposite: a *dependence* upon being intimately, fundamentally linked up with the global network that the Matrix represents. His solitary, anti-heroic posturing is not the result of some vague state of being misunderstood by society, but rather his forcible removal from it and the heinous crimes he has subsequently committed in order to stay alive, having "gone into a kind of terminal overdrive, hustling fresh capital with a cold intensity that had seemed to belong to someone else […] until the street itself came to seem the externalization of some death wish, some secret poison he hadn't known he carried" (8). Framed in this way, Case's personal misdeeds become part of a larger examination of the sociospatial conditions that encourage such behaviour—namely, a global network fitting McCaffery's description, so totalizing that his lethally precarious lifestyle is an inevitable consequence of being outside of it.

Case's return to the Matrix, the apotheosis of this network beyond that of even Night City

or the Sprawl, seems to further problematize this already one-sided self/other dynamic for critics. David Brande, for example, places the novel's cybergeography specifically in dialogue with Haraway's cyborg subjectivity, arguing that a reading "that locates technoscience within the coercive laws of the market suggests some of the conditions of cyborg existence and indicates the economic and ideological significance of the development of 'cyberspace'" (509). Others, like Benjamin Fair, look for ways to escape or balance what many perceive to be an overly negative, dystopian view of networked supermodernity—his solution is found in Gibson's depiction of Zion, a spacefaring Rastafarian squatter colony which serves to "highlight the fact that Case's identity is built on the alienating system that the matrix represents and enacts," and which "reveals a political alternative to the hyperrational, individualistic, parasitic realm that characterizes postindustrial capitalism in the novel because it affirms social commitment and community, intuition, and the body" (93). Indeed, such affirmations are hard to come by in a novel like *Neuromancer*, where bodies are often rendered primarily as avenues of expression for economic activity itself, and grist for its mills:

> He stepped out of the way to let a dark-suited salaryman by, spotting the Mitsubishi-Genentech logo tattooed across the back of the man's right hand. Was it authentic? If that's for real, he thought, he's in for trouble. If it wasn't, served him right. M-G employees above a certain level were implanted with advanced microprocessors that monitored mutagen levels in the bloodstream. Gear like that would get you rolled in Night City, rolled straight into a black clinic. (11-12)

Encounters like this are instructive in considering some of the ways the novel imagines global networks of exchange like the Matrix. The salaryman, branded and physically modified to comply with the zaibatsu he works for, demonstrates the degree to which professional affiliation

has come to dictate one's personal life: “Company housing, company hymn, company funeral” (Gibson, *Neuromancer* 48). But the depths of this coercion is made especially alarming by the sheer efficiency with which such networks convert subjects into objects; while the salaryman presumably at the very least gets to choose his employer, in so doing he is also unwillingly dissolved into and commodified by the other interrelated global networks of crime, technology, and public health, this time as literal property rather than as labour. His body acts as a site of tension between these competing aspects of the same global economic system, being claimed by and pulled in the direction of each simultaneously, all of which is both metaphorized and precipitated by its adulteration with the technology imagined by the novel.

This general lack of concern for traditionally very basic indicators of subjecthood (e.g., embodiment, free will, etc.) in the networked world of the novel, combined with its general lack of alternatives (space Rastafarians notwithstanding), tends to frame Case's endeavour to unshackle Wintermute as at best counterproductive to the human goals of self-expression and self-determination, and at worst the death knell of the species. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay observes, for example, that

> the best-known cyberpunk manifesto, Bruce Sterling's introduction to the *Mirrorshades* anthology (1986), cannily describes the cyberpunk school's aspirations not in terms of conceits, but as the reflection of a new cultural synthesis being born in the 1980s, making it essentially a paradoxical form of realism. Cyberpunk art, Sterling says, captures “a new kind of integration. The overlapping of worlds that were formally separate: the realm of high tech and the modern pop underground.” (266)

The desirability of this integration, Csicsery-Ronay proceeds to argue, is dubious. Though Sterling's version of the well-worn 'high tech meets low life' description of cyberpunk art

privileges the capacity of marginalized '80s countercultures to organize and refashion technology to suit their own needs (in contrast to those of the 1960s, which were “rural, romanticized, anti-science, anti-tech” [Sterling, xii]), Csicsery-Ronay suggests something more in line with capitalism's tendency to cannibalize and commodify such forms of cultural opposition. “To put it mildly, it's hard to see the 'integrated' political aesthetic motives of alienated subcultures that adopt the high-tech tools of the establishment they are supposedly alienated from,” he writes. “It seems far more reasonable to assume that the 'integrating,' such as it is, is being done by the dominant telechtronic cultural powers, who—as cyberpunk writers know very well—are insatiable in their appetite for new commodities and commodity fashions” (267). Wintermute, the amoral puppetmaster-type character responsible for the novel's events, appears to be just such a power, as it forces Case's cooperation under threat of again being ejected from the Matrix, and otherwise dispassionately orchestrates the murder and mayhem required to achieve its goals. Conversely, the eagerness with which Case capitulates can readily be interpreted as humankind's failure to swim against currents of global (technological, economic, political, etc.) activity that have developed their own clinically ruthless momentum to the detriment of the actual people who sustain them.

While these kinds of readings are lent significant support by the finer illustrations of daily existence on offer here, however, they nonetheless tend to clash with the novel's overall tone, which seems considerably more ambiguous. Its cautiously optimistic epilogue for example, which sees Wintermute's success culminate in a kind of ontological leap forward reminiscent of *The Matrix* or *2001: A Space Odyssey*, is somewhat perplexing given the context in which it occurs, as well as the A.I.'s putative role as both an avatar of and symbol for that context. And more generally, the agency exhibited by Case when doing the job itself is conspicuous opposite

the enormity of the system he works against, with he and his collaborators eluding a wide range of security and law enforcement apparatuses including those of Wintermute's owner, the highly secretive Tessier-Ashpool corporation. These elements of *Neuromancer* resist a reading in accordance with Csicsery-Ronay's appraisal of cyberpunk, which favours the forces of globalization in ways that imply the impossibility of significant rogue elements like Case. On the other side of the same issue, however, analyses like Fair's appear to prioritize a physical embodiment that is mostly irrelevant in the networked world in which the characters reside, which seems an ineffective if not outright regressive form of resistance. Despite that cyberspace is the ultimate realization of global capitalism in overdrive—the quintessential non-place—it is cyberspace to which Case unexpectedly retreats in order to rescue himself after a string of failures in Chiba City. Discrepancies like these necessitate a closer look at the more encouraging possibilities alluded to by Sterling, which is to say an assessment of the ways in which technologies like the Matrix might be repurposed to achieve more liberatory ends.

Revisiting the parallels drawn by McCaffery and others between cyberpunk and detective stories is a useful way of approaching this question, the latter having long been read by critics as meditations on the individual's coming to terms with and making intelligible the spaces in which they find themselves. “To experience life as a detective story,” Todd Herzog avers,

> is thus to hold open the promise that the mysteries of modernity can be solved and that the impenetrable world can, in fact, be apprehended. Whereas the child playing cops and robbers goes forth into the city in search of adventure, the detective-*flâneur* is in search of something more: clues that will lead him to hidden laws that govern social interactions and enable him to narrate a secret history of modern life. In Benjamin's writings criminalistic fantasy goes beyond embarking on an imaginative adventure; it also offers a

> means by which to understand the modern world that is hidden to the modern subject. (19)

And even closer to the point, Paul Jahshan applies this logic directly to the novel itself, suggesting that

> short of transforming themselves into AIs, cybernauts can become Poesque 'physiognomists' and, through their cyber-gaze, untangle the knots which are incessantly constructed in their cyber-cities […]. Cybernauts become, in the cyber-city—an invisible city *par excellence*—cyber-flâneurs trying, like their real-life counterparts, to decipher the city-as-text they have themselves helped shape. (155)

Viewed in this way, as a logical extension of noir fiction's original exploration of the modern city, Case's run through the Matrix becomes more indicative of an active discovery of the city's supermodern spatial equivalent, rather than passive enslavement by it. In fact, it is precisely this process of deciphering via immediate experience that allows Case to circumvent the rampant infrastructures of control imposed on the space by the larger global entities that stand to benefit from them: “This was what he was, who he was, his being. [...] Ice patterns formed and re-formed on the screen as he probed for gaps, skirted the most obvious traps, and mapped the route he'd take through Sense/Net's ice” (64). Elsewhere, in corners of the space less central to corporate activities, the unsanctioned use of cyberspace by collectives and amateurs even becomes evident, like the “'pirate's paradise,' on the jumbled border of a low-security academic grid” traversed by Case early in the novel, which “resembled the kind of graffiti student operators sometimes left at the junctions of grid lines, faint glyphs of colored light that shimmered against the confused outlines of a dozen arts faculties” (87). These examples gesture toward a conception of cyberspace as a Lefebvrian 'perceived' space, a space that can be literally

occupied and reappropriated in the same way that physical spaces can. In these respects, Tony Myers observes, “we may see cyberspace as an attempt at a postmodern cartography; that is, as a representational strategy for domesticating what Jameson terms 'postmodern hyperspace'” by way of “a recognition of the change in, and thus a recodification of, contemporary urban experience” (888). Gibson's use of detective tropes in this manner thus functions as a postmodern update to the modernist conceit of wandering, discovering, and mapping such spaces in service of a similar kind of emancipatory egalitarian ideal.

Instead of posing the problem of posthuman identity as a matter of somehow escaping the spatial paradigm around which the world is now organized, or attempting to reassert physical embodiment as an essential ingredient of subjecthood, Gibson instead imagines the surprising alternative forms of embodiment that may arise from these new circumstances. As Matthew Gandy notes, “whilst the 'cyber-' metaphor has tended to be associated with various forms of virtuality, the idea of the cyborg is closely linked with the corporeal experience of space,” because it is necessarily grounded in a consideration of the body. And it is “in this sense [that] the cyborg can be read as an alternative way of conceptualizing the growth and development of cities that serves to destabilize the pervasive narratives of dematerialization, spatial malleability and virtualization” often advanced by posthumanist thinkers (27-8). Similarly, Hayles, whose work on posthumanism discourages overly simplistic notions of a purely dissolved, disembodied postmodern subject, contends that while “the body can disappear into information with scarcely a murmur of protest, embodiment cannot, for it is tied to the circumstances of the occasion and the person” (“Materiality” 156). Gibson's fiction serves to speculate, then, on what productive versions of this embodiment might look like, as imposition of one's subjecthood in the novel is predicated on maintaining this sort of embodied agency within the global network in either its

cyber or physical iterations.

Importantly, and in keeping both with the revolutionary tone of the novel's conclusion as well as its status as speculative fiction, versions of this type of supermodern cyborg embodiment resist easy definition as far as the self/network dichotomy is concerned. In the sizeable body of work that engages such topics, the ways in which these categories might be configured in relation to one another are practically infinite—though many critical readings of Haraway's manifesto skew optimistic, she leaves the details 'difficult to imagine.' For one way of considering this range of possibilities, it is helpful to again return to detective fiction, more specifically to the figure of the 'detective-flâneur' alluded to by both Herzog and Jahshan, the latter term referring to the modernist wanderer of city streets as a detached observer of urban life. Baudelaire, the original modernist flâneur, writes:

> For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude [...]. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world […]. He is an “I” with an insatiable appetite for the “non-I,” at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive. (9-10)

Populated by numerous characters scarcely registering as human, *Neuromancer* offers an extensive set of variations on the posthuman idea—Case, who prefers virtual existence over a physical one; Wintermute, the A.I.; 'street-samurai' Molly Millions, Case's heavily cyborged partner in crime equipped with retractable claws, surgical eye implants, and nervous system and reflex upgrades; Armitage, a disgraced U.S. Army colonel rendered catatonic by warfare, hollowed out and conditioned to act as Wintermute's agent; Lady 3Jane Tessier-Ashpool, an

heiress to the T-A corporation cloned from one of its founders; and so forth. But the most successful of these appear to conform to this both/and model of selfhood vis à vis the global network, rather than an either/or paradigm.

The obvious example in this regard is Case, who is only able to escape death on the streets by regaining his subjecthood in the Matrix. Case's role as an expert navigator of the space, and as an abject nobody who nonetheless enacts great change through his use of it, can be viewed largely as metaphor for maintaining a sense of 'embodiment' in even the purest incarnations of supermodernity imaginable—in separating his self-will from the 'other-will' of the Matrix, in the same way the flâneur walks *in* the city without necessarily being *of* the city. Moreover, like modernist flâneurie, achieving this sort of agency in ways that range outside the dictates of corporations like T-A is predicated on Baudelaire's emphasis on anonymity, of seeing without being seen: “This ain't bore and inject, it's more like we interface with the ice so slow, the ice doesn't feel it. The face of the Kuang logics kinda sleazes up to the target and mutates, so it gets to be exactly like the ice fabric” (180). Another prominent example is “the industrial clan of Tessier and Ashpool” (109)—though nominally a global corporation, it is run exclusively by a single family that refuses to sell shares of stock on the open market, who “have sealed ourselves away behind our money, growing inward, generating a seamless universe of self” in the Villa Straylight, an old-world estate cordoned off from Freeside, the thriving space resort of which it is a part (85). But the best, and perhaps most surprising example is Wintermute, who is one half of an organism seeking to become whole, and whose subjectivity is originally every bit as subsumed into the network as Case's, if not moreso:

> I can't see how you'd distinguish, say, between a move the parent company makes, and some move the AI makes on its own […]. Those things, they can work real hard, buy

> themselves time to write cookbooks or whatever, but the minute, I mean the nanosecond that one starts figuring out ways to make itself smarter, Turing'll wipe it. Nobody trusts those fuckers, you know that. Every AI ever built has an electromagnetic shotgun wired to its forehead. (141)

Wintermute's final declaration that "I'm the Matrix [….] Nowhere. Everywhere. I'm the sum total of the works, the whole show," is the quintessential version of this kind of ideal cyborg subjectivity in the process of being born, one that has command of the vast resources offered by the network, without being confined by or beholden to it (286). Though radically beyond many of the more traditional, embodied renderings of cyborgs offered by cyberpunk and sci-fi more generally, it is this dynamic—of discovering a space, and by extension the socio-spatial-temporal currents that govern it through this sort of detached immersion—that Gibson appears to prioritize in coming to grips with some of more discouraging prospects offered by a distant supermodern future.

Somewhat ironically, this extensive intermingling of biology and machinery is thus positioned as an avenue toward sovereignty as much as it is servitude, greatly complicating the kinds of negative connotations frequently ascribed to it by sci-fi writers and critics. These cyborgs are chained to their society in distressingly comprehensive ways, yet are able to exercise their limited agency to more widespread and immediate effect because of this closeness. Despite its futuristic setting, the fantasy indulged in by the novel is ultimately nostalgic, predicated on a virtual space that is made intelligible through the same exploration that once tamed modern cities. This desire to concretely map out the intangible, diffuse flows of globalized economic and cultural activity—postmodern cartography, as it tends to be phrased—is evidence of the bewildered rootlessness of the late twentieth century giving way to a resolve against its vagaries,

similar to that which characterized modernism around the turn of the century previous.

It also, however, underscores how far away such a goal currently is, and the extent to which the early years of this millennium have been marked by continued and continual change, an interregnum between the period of relative stability associated with Fordist America, and the one Gibson seems to hold out hope for in *Neuromancer*. Emphasizing this even further is his move away from science fiction during this time to chronicle the tumultuous emergence of cyborg civilization in the present day with his 2003 novel *Pattern Recognition*. Sans the lurid, often violently physical illustrations of posthumanity seen in his previous work, Gibson switches here to the more metaphorical aspects of networked existence, focusing on the social crises and information overload currently beleaguering the contemporary Internet. These looser ties entail a loss of control in both directions, as citizens are no longer wired in to the nightmarish extent seen in dystopian sci-fi, but are also less able to meaningfully engage with the kinder, gentler, somewhat more mundane dystopia in which they happen to live, governed by the usual determining factors instead of spectacular technological arms races: money, property, connections, labour power, and so forth. Haphazardly navigating the disorganized lawlessness of early globalization, his characters are now internally divided on a psychic rather than biological basis—indecisive in their actions, conflicted in their loyalties, quietly exploited by countless operatives working for anonymous employers to achieve inscrutable ends. Whereas *Neuromancer* uses cyberspace to imagine a sense of place forged through the creation of a virtual world, *Pattern Recognition* uses it to show how a sense of placelessness is afflicting the real one, complicating the process by which individuals negotiate their surroundings and their identities in relation to them. Gibson's adaptation of posthuman concerns to fit our current circumstances serves as a reminder that the questions around cyborg subjectivity are not those of some distant

era, but rather part of a long, treacherous series of trials already underway.

3. William Gibson (2003): *Pattern Recognition*.

Pattern Recognition, the first of Gibson's novels to be set in the present after two successful cyberpunk trilogies, reworks various *Neuromancer* conceits to such effect that it has led some to suggest that Gibson's work hasn't much changed at all, everyone else having finally caught up in the two decades since he started writing novels. Many of these parallels are deliberately obvious—Henry Dorsett Case is replaced by Cayce Pollard, a 32-year-old 'coolhunter' who pronounces her name like that earlier protagonist instead of the intended 'Casey.' Cyberspace and cyberculture also continue to play as prominent a role as ever, with Gibson pivoting from a swashbuckling virtual adventure in the Matrix to a more pensive spy-type novel situated in the world of global marketing. John Johnston points out that *Pattern Recognition* is still largely "about the Internet, in the sense that it is primarily concerned with the 'life' and kinds of experience that only a vast, global communications assemblage like the Internet makes possible," specifically owing to its sociospatial characteristics as a "global, de-centered structure and complex of layered protocols, which ensure instantaneous, utterly anonymous electronic communications from almost unlocatable origins" (Johnston 864). But despite these similarities, its revision of networked space in light of the actual state of technology and culture in 2003 necessitates analogous changes in how Gibson's fiction works, how his characters are made to work within it, and how this informs his view of e-sociality more generally. The "consensual hallucination" of the Matrix, a kind of idealized Internet where the channels of the global network are made intelligible, mappable, and interactive, is replaced by the actual Internet, which in the novel consists mostly of Cayce's hotmail account and the

Fetish:Footage:Forum (Gibson, *Neuromancer* 6). This latter is the novel's chief point of interest in its forays into cyberspace, a site where Cayce discusses, researches, and eagerly awaits new segments of the Footage, a series of short, silent, black-and-white video clips mysteriously surfacing on various Internet sites. It has no narrative structure, apparent theme or purpose, or even hints as to when, where, and by whom it was made—"a lack of evidence, an absence of stylistic cues, that Cayce understands to be utterly masterful" (23).

The Internet of *Pattern Recognition* shares some conceptual resemblance to that of *Neuromancer*, still being "experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators" (*Neuromancer* 6), and with F:F:F having become for Cayce "one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar cafe that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones" (5). But there are nonetheless some important differences, not having to do simply with the relative sophistication of the two cyberspaces, but how this sophistication translates into visibility and identity formation through their usage. Although *Neuromancer*'s Matrix is often alienating and authoritarian—identifying, tracking, at times harming renegade users—it also identifies itself in relation to those users, allowing for a relative degree of manuverability on the part of the disenfranchised who dwell there, like Case. Such a process is not possible in *Pattern Recognition*, where the 'space' of the Internet is obscured to the users that 'occupy' it—this iteration of cyberspace is truer to descriptions like those of Castells's space of flows, the network itself engaged with only through the hubs that provide access. Though the forum, for example, is valued in Cayce's highly mobile life as "a way now, approximately, of being at home" (4), she finds many portions of the site like the chatroom "not so comforting. It's strange even with friends, like sitting in a pitch-dark cellar conversing with people at a distance of about fifteen feet. The hectic speed, and the brevity of the lines in the thread, plus the feeling that everyone is

talking at once, at counter-purposes, deter her" (5). This logic of disconnected hubs, as opposed to the seamless contiguous experience of space enabled by the Matrix, gives rise to a similar sense of disconnection in the real world, particularly with a global freelancer like Cayce who generally lacks the resources to locate herself within the network:

> Once they are out of Camden Town she has little idea of where they are. She has no internalized surface map of this city, only of the underground and of assorted personal footpaths spreading out from its stations. The stomach-clenching roundabouts are pivots in a maze to be negotiated only by locals and cabdrivers. Restaurants and antique shops rotate past, punctuated regularly by pubs. (27)

In contrast to *Neuromancer*, which explores both productive and unproductive fusions of the human with the digital network via the Matrix as a perceived space, *Pattern Recognition* usefully illustrates how far away this fusion actually is. Although both versions of post/supermodern space are predicated on the usual characteristics of non-places—speed, transience, functionality, and so forth—the former novel attempts to imagine subjects capable of navigating and appropriating such spaces in the same way as any other, while the latter works to demonstrate the current impossibility of doing so, along with the various social, political, and economic consequences that follow. Case's position inside this disembodied, transnational, transactive space comes to provide him an expansive view of the entire network's topography in several registers, "spherical, as though a single retina lined the inner surface of a globe that contained all things, if all things could be counted" (275). Conversely, Cayce, positioned strictly on the hubs that border this same space, remains "hyper-specialized, a freelancer, someone contracted to do a very specific job. She has seldom had a salary. She is entirely a creature of fees, adamantly short-term, no managerial skills whatever" (63).

This basic switch in how global space functions comprehensively reconfigures how Gibson's characters view, approach, and interact with it, and with each other. In keeping with the novel's role as something of a spiritual successor to *Neuromancer*, one prominent way of registering this difference is through its commentary on embodiment vis à vis human identity and identification. Whereas the impediments posed by Case's body are casually erased in short order upon his return to the "bodiless exultation of cyberspace" (6), for example, corporeality is a persistent issue for Cayce, who remains perpetually jet lagged throughout the entire narrative, beginning with her initial arrival in London as a consultant for an ad firm called Blue Ant: "It is that flat and spectral non-hour, awash in limbic tides, brainstem stirring fitfully, flashing inappropriate reptilian demands for sex, food, sedation, all of the above, and none really an option now" (1). And unlike Case, whose ability to explore, function, and maintain a coherent sense of selfhood is mostly unmoored from physical necessity, Cayce's jet lag is repeatedly used as a metaphor for the disjunction between the speed at which her body is expected to move, and the comparative sluggishness of her reaction to that movement: "Her mortal soul is leagues behind her, being reeled in on some ghostly umbilical down the vanished wake of the plane that brought her here, hundreds of thousands of feet above the Atlantic. Souls can't move that quickly, and are left behind, and must be awaited, upon arrival, like lost luggage" (1-2). This ongoing attention paid to Cayce's biological needs provides a sense of Gibson's changing impression of how individuals experience globalization as he shifts to fiction of a more strictly realist bent. Dispensing with the fantasy of a generally 'bodiless' posthumanity, *Pattern Recognition*'s contemporary setting provides Gibson an opportunity to consider the troubling fact of a persistently essential physicality within a world that is perhaps just as frenetic, impersonal, and relentlessly fast paced as that which is found in *Neuromancer*; the fact of a colossal techno-

spatial transformation, but without a biological one to accompany it.

This inability to keep up with the currents of globalization on the part of individuals like Cayce is juxtaposed with properly global entities like Blue Ant, which is “relatively tiny in terms of permanent staff, globally distributed, more post-geographic than multinational,” and “has from the beginning billed itself as a high-speed, low-drag life-form in an advertising ecology of lumbering herbivores” (7). The agency is helmed by marketing wunderkind Hubertus Bigend, the novel's Armitage-equivalent who kicks off the plot by personally recruiting Cayce to track down the maker of the Footage. Predictably, as “the most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century” with “attention focused daily on a product that may not even exist,” he wants to find a way to monetize it by replicating its virality (67). Cayce, so averse to marketing in practice that she actually labours through a psychosomatic 'allergy' to branding, is reluctant to accept the assignment. But despite her repeated, direct refusals to Bigend, she winds up doing it anyway, due largely to his knack for passively coercing others to do his bidding: “Every Bigend deal was treated as a done deal, signed and sealed. If you hadn't signed with Bigend, he made you feel as though you had, but somehow had forgotten that you had” (70). Boone Chu, the novel's Molly-equivalent who collaborates with Cayce to this end, expresses similar reservations: “I don't want to wind up as a gadget on his key ring. I'm not exactly immune to the kind of money Bigend has to play with. When that start-up was on the fence, teetering back and forth, I found myself doing things I came to regret” (109). These impressions of Bigend and Blue Ant—which, Jakob Ladegaard helpfully points out, is actually “not the name of an ant, but a parasitic wasp”—indicates a few important things about the nature of power and global presence in the novel, particularly in relation to similar themes explored in *Neuromancer* (35).

First, it illustrates a large power differential between workers and consumers like Cayce,

and the global elite they work for like Bigend. Moreover, this differential is made inherently spatial, and frequently in the same ways as in other texts; Bigend is framed as hailing from a "country without borders, [...] a world where there are no mirrors to find yourself on the other side of, all experience having been reduced, by the spectral hand of marketing, to price-point variations on the same thing" (352). By contrast, Cayce experiences the friction of distance everywhere she goes; her catch-all rationalization for the uncanniness of British culture and artifacts, for example, is their existence in a "mirror-world," where "the plugs on appliances are huge, triple-pronged, for a species of current that only powers electric chairs, in America" and "telephone handsets have a different weight, a different balance" (3). These associations recall similar observations concerning power and mobility found in, for example, texts about airports and other transnational spaces as seen in the previous chapter.

However, put into dialogue with Gibson's use of motifs like global marketing and the Internet, they also highlight this translation of mobility to power in ways specifically pertaining to the ideas surrounding cyborg subjectivity and societies of control sketched out above. Bigend's position as a global citizen, and an arbiter of global culture and discourse, affords him a broader perspective on that culture in a way that is self-perpetuating, not unlike that of Case: "It's as though the creative process is no longer contained within an individual skull, if indeed it ever was. Everything, today, is to some extent the reflection of something else" (70). By contrast, much of Cayce's engagement with global culture is very limited, usually pertaining to the more superficial aspects of products, particularly their branding, and an awareness of this branding as the glossy, customer-facing endpoint of a much longer, more convoluted, and mostly obscured supply chain and semantic history. For example, descriptions of the items in her friend's flat, where she is staying while in England on business: "Damien's Italian floor lamp feels alien: a

different click, designed to hold back a different voltage, foreign British electricity […]. She runs tap water through a German filter, into an Italian electric kettle. […] Bag of some imported Californian tea substitute in a large white mug" (3). Cayce is afraid of marketing, to such an extent that her wardrobe is comprised entirely of what she refers to as CPUs or 'Cayce Pollard Units,' minimalist garments with all logos removed that are "either black, white, or gray, and ideally seem to have come into this world without human intervention" (8). She has panic attacks when she sees the Michelin Man, and harbours a particular disgust for Tommy Hilfiger, a fashion "event horizon, beyond which it is impossible to be more derivative, more removed from the source, more devoid of soul" (18). Similarly, rather than viewing the Internet as infrastructure allowing for the easy acquisition of vast amounts of knowledge from one place, she comes to react to it as a way of being invaded from everywhere else. This is after being literally invaded; someone burglarizes Damien's flat and inadvertently tips her off by using his computer, which she subsequently sits in front of "unmoving, peering at the browser history the way she once peered at a brown recluse spider in a rose garden in Portland, a drab little thing her host reliably informed her contained enough neurotoxin to kill them both, and horribly" (40). And despite F:F:F enabling easy discussion between the site's approximately twenty Footage 'co-obsessives' scattered across the globe, Cayce also maintains an uneasy awareness of "some much larger and uncounted number of lurkers," gesturing to an awareness of being exposed online, made vulnerable to anyone interested in her activities there for the wrong reasons (5).

Which is of course exactly what happens. Cayce is chosen specifically by Bigend partially due to her reputation as an unusually gifted trendspotter, but also because Bigend is already aware of her interest in and expertise on the topic, because she posts about it publicly on the Internet: "I've had people look at all the sites. In fact we monitor them on a constant basis.

Your contributions are some of the more useful material we've come across. 'CayceP,' when you start to know the players, is obviously you. Your interest in the footage is therefore a matter of public record, and to be interested, in this case, is to be involved to whatever extent in a subculture" (67). As the novel unfolds, it becomes apparent that others are monitoring the sites as well, in particular those surrounding the Footage's 'maker' Nora Volkova, the brain-damaged niece of a Russian oligarch, gravely injured in a bombing that killed both her parents during a period of political upheaval. Obsessed with the safety of both Nora and her twin sister Stella, who distributes the segments of Footage online once they are completed, their uncle has constructed a large security apparatus that works to keep them anonymous and their location undiscovered. Part of this effort involves harassing Cayce, breaking into her New York apartment and Damien's London flat, and placing taps on her phones and keyloggers on her computers, all of which is set into motion by one of Cayce's posts on F:F:F that half-seriously suggests that the Footage looks like the product of Russian money and a distinctly Russian flair for secrecy: "'You were tracked, via your post's ISP, your name and address determined, and logged. […] They took certain steps.' Sergei pauses. 'Your apartment was entered and devices were installed to allow your phone and e-mail to be monitored'" (350). These revelations at the conclusion of the novel finally dispel the ever-increasing sense of anxiety and confusion experienced by Cayce since taking the assignment, demonstrating how her activities over the network have expanded her presence beyond her own sphere of influence or even awareness, and consequently endangered her in some indirect, often surprising ways.

In contrast to *Neuromancer*'s heavily authoritarian, disciplinary-style Matrix, this use of cyberspace depicts networked space more in line with a control society of Deleuze's description. A large part of this transition has to do with how networked space, being impossible to actually

inhabit and appropriate, requires different strategies for asserting and resisting the forms of power that exercise their influence through it. In the absence of a physical, 'perceived' cyberspace, and consequently a lack of direct control over its users, attempts at policing behaviour instead tend toward relentless messaging rather than hard commands or boundaries, a kind of ambient bombardment of information which functions to either confound, mislead, intimidate, or disguise bad actors in a cloak of legitimacy. The novel's title, *Pattern Recognition*, largely finds its presence in the narrative through Cayce's repeated meditations on her growing inability to exercise that skill. Her quest to find the maker mostly involves distinguishing pertinent discoveries from mere coincidence, while evading reams of misinformation specifically intended to lead her off course, and keeping at bay her natural tendency toward apophenia: "The spontaneous perception of connections and meaningfulness in unrelated things" (117). She is repeatedly manipulated and surveilled by various characters including rivals, employers, and colleagues, all of whom have their own undiscerned motives and increase the hesitance and doubt with which she approaches her work. And she too is complicit in this manipulation on a larger scale, particularly due to her work for Blue Ant, which Gibson uses to discuss various control society trends in advertising that would become commonplace over the next decade such as native advertising, guerilla marketing, and astroturfing:

> – "I mean you're in a bar, having a drink, and someone beside you starts a conversation. Someone you might fancy the look of. All very pleasant, and then you're chatting along, and she, or he, we have men as well, mentions this great new streetwear label, or this brilliant little film they've just seen. Nothing like a pitch, you understand, just a brief favorable mention. […] And then they take it away with them," she suggests, "this favorable mention, associated with an attractive member of the opposite sex. One who's

shown some slight degree of interest in them, whom they've lied to in an attempt to favorably impress."

– "But they buy jeans," Voytek demands, "see movie? No!"

– "Exactly," Cayce says, "but that's why it works. They don't buy the product: They recycle the information. They use it to try to impress the next person they meet." (86-87)

With the spaces through which information is passed, like the Internet, "no longer the distinct analogical spaces that converge toward an owner—state or private power," power primarily becomes a function not of force, but rather of the capacity to engineer these informational flows to one's own benefit (Deleuze 6). And with advertising having become central to control society business practices, "marketing ha[ving] become the center or 'soul' of a corporation," and capitalism no longer existing "for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed," the position of characters like Bigend at the headwaters of global culture affords them advantages not available to workers and consumers like Cayce (Deleuze 6). For example, information has not only become dispersed, amorphous, and suspect in its credibility or usefulness, but is also used to signal things like belonging and obedience, as "codes that mark access to information, or reject it" (Deleuze 5). Consequently, characters like Bigend effortlessly obtain access to everything from exclusive restaurants to the inner circles of Russian oligarchies "not because he's known here, but because of some attitudinal tattoo, something people can read" (62). Conversely, those who lack such credentials, or the resources to obtain or fabricate them, tend to feel as though "I'm devaluing something. In others. In myself. And I'm starting to distrust the most casual exchange" (87).

Through these examples, *Pattern Recognition* joins *Neuromancer* in experimenting with a variety of cyborg figures, ranging from individuals like Cayce or Bigend, to groups like Blue Ant

or F:F:F, to radical outliers like the cloistered and codependent Volkova sisters, the novel's Wintermute/Neuromancer-equivalent. Unable to rewire their flesh, or build their gods, or dash through the fluorescent slipstreams of digital exchange, however, these cyborgs are fragmentary and hybridized in a strictly perceptual sense, whether they are presiding over the informational maelstrom that defines supermodern society, or being helplessly ferried along by its innumerable unseen currents. Culture is ultimately how a civilization articulates itself, and moreover how it articulates itself *to itself*—the means by which groups of people reach consensus on their collective values, goals, taboos, and raisons d'être—and in this regard, online culture is no different. What *is* different though, is that these myriad deliberations no longer correspond to any kind of locatable source or referent, cleansed of their context and history, like the Footage. For better or worse, ideas and ideologies have floated away from their foundations and set out to roam the world indiscriminately, no longer impeded either by natural barriers, or by the human institutions, authorities, and axioms that once separated knowledge from belief, fact from fantasy, information from misinformation, the enlightened from the positively medieval, and so on. Gibson thus appears to see in globalization an exciting turning point in public life—the ability to contribute our utmost on a worldwide basis, while our native spaces, cultures, and discourses are strengthened with foreign riches and wisdom in return. But he also seems to note that while the Internet has dramatically expanded the field on which these social relations play out, the relations themselves remain essentially unaltered, plagued by the old inequalities, prejudices, and propensities toward exploitation, suggesting that high technology alone is insufficient to remedy our hard-wired shortcomings and ills.

Like the highways examined at the beginning of this dissertation, the so-called 'information superhighway' was developed with economic and military applications chiefly in mind, with primitive networks like ARPANET initially designed to enable rapid response to national security threats and facilitate computer science research. And once more, these functional considerations have since given rise to massive outgrowths of social and cultural activity, which have arguably eclipsed even high speed transport as a central aspect of everyday life. Cyberspace is a site of perpetual cooperation and conflict between millions of people, a new theatre in which to wage the old disputes over supermodern public space that took root in the American road system following WWII. Though these sorts of culture clashes have now moved beyond even the physical world itself to affect human perception and opinion directly, however, their purpose is at bottom the same: to establish the formal and informal codes of conduct that define these spaces through everyday acts of inhabitation, to 'produce' them in the Lefevbrian sense, and thus to produce a public that uses them effectively, that follows their directions, internalizes their values and logics, and corresponds to their general orientation toward speed, mobility, dispersal, efficiency, and so forth. With these ideas in mind, I have sought in my remarks here to explore our ongoing effort to dwell together in this most unusual and exemplary of non-places, in many ways the cradle of a truly global society that has only recently begun to emerge.

Afterword

With this project I was looking to do something kind of broad and interdisciplinary in nature, as a way of exploring a lot of different styles, concepts, and scholarly exchanges. What this mostly required in practice was a series of simple, concrete landmarks around which to organize these disparate ideas and interests—in my case I chose actual landmarks, and ones most everyone is familiar with. Having these points of reference allowed me to more easily switch between several conflicting and complementary lines of thought while still maintaining a single coherent line of argument. I attempted to structure the dissertation in this way right down to the sentence, always searching for ways to fit into each a new observation, conundrum, or caveat both germane to the subject at hand, as well as freighted with obvious and copious additional implications of their own. Each chapter, similarly, works to maintain its own distinct feel and somewhat expansive set of concerns while still building meaningfully on the chapters before it, steadily increasing in scope and magnitude. This feeling of constant seamless transition, I found, was among the most difficult and important things to render effectively; describing not just actions but motivations, not just relationships but reciprocal relationships, not just effects but side-effects, not just phenomena but phenomena over time, and so on. In some respects this dissertation takes the form of a series of spiderweb patterns, each space of interest acting as a kind of conceptual home base from which to venture out in various directions. And in other respects it is written in sort of a straight line, moving briskly on a long journey from point A to point B while incorporating as much related material as possible along the way. In either case, it is very much its own kind of non-place, consistently striving to add something else or go somewhere new as it tries to imitate the ponderous dimensions of its subject matter.

As such, this dissertation indulges in some of the same bargains that non-places in

general do—opting for the panorama instead of the close-up—and consequently has to work around the same inherent advantages and drawbacks. The outer edges of my arguments here are intended not as hard barriers but as frontiers, pathways to further areas of interest gradually blending into the horizon. And scattered along these routes are the distant outlines of topics I could not get to for whatever reason but which nevertheless deserve direct mention, most of which I endeavour to refer back to or highlight occasionally as a way of gesturing toward research that strongly informed, but was ultimately adjacent to, my own. Many of the examples on this front involve further linkages between the five main chapters, motifs that show up repeatedly in each but usually didn't warrant elaboration in the context of the piece itself, and so were left mostly implied. These pertain both to questions of structure and geography—the relationship between speed and disaster, the separation of power from politics, movement as institution and imperative, positive versus negative globalization, etc.—as well as of culture, narrative, and discourse—hermeneutics of situation, mixophobia, cultures of fear, the many sides of disposable society, and in particular neoliberal and post-9/11 fiction, representing a timely convergence between the social and the literary. Each chapter also includes a brief list of other fictional appearances of the non-place being discussed there in order to emphasize the overwhelming presence of these spaces in both art and everyday life, but I mostly leave the details of these discussions for others to explore in favour of the texts I look at more substantively, which themselves range from indie flicks to Oscar bait, memoirs to journalism to genre fiction. And of course, although I do my best to faithfully reproduce the essential content of the different theories, histories, debates, and studies from which I borrow, useful and thought-provoking details are inevitably bound to be left out—my quotations and references here are by and large meant to signal not just my use of their ideas, but my ambition to include the rest of the

intricacies and points of contention behind those ideas, if only by way of a half paragraph and accompanying works cited entry.

In other words, for all its desire to capture something widespread, pervasive, and multifaceted, this project also acts as yet another point of departure, littered with a great many off-ramps and access portals, crisscrossed with shortcuts, back alleys, dead zones, and busy thoroughfares. It is meant to work as a kind of hub or terminal, a series of gateways to different nearby conversations, linking all them together. And while it tries to contribute in some small way to each of these conversations in this capacity, its main purpose is to invite new ones, to serve as its own network of unusual encounters, connections, and juxtapositions greater than the sum of their parts.

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