LEVIATHAN AND AUTOMATON: TECHNOLOGY AND TELEOLOGY IN AMERICAN
LITERATURE

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This dissertation examines the relationship between time and technology in American literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It focuses principally on the work of Herman Melville, Lewis Mumford, William Faulkner and Ralph Ellison, in the context of various historical and philosophical accounts of technology. It begins with the Leo Marx's analysis of American literature as being always concerned with the moment when the machine violently enters into the garden. The dominant American concept of technology asserts that technology is progress (which is not the same as endorsing technological progress); in Richard Heilbroner's classic formulation, "machines make history." This teleological drive within technology is ultimately eschatological: the world and the very self stand in peril of being turned into automatons. Whether or not the eschatos ends with the automation or liberation of the self, the internal teleological drive of technology threatens to end time, that is, the continuation of meaningful events, something which the mainstream of American literary criticism has failed to grasp, by focusing on technology as a contemporary crisis, rather than analyzing it as being constitutive of life itself. That is, attempts to resist technological eschatologies typically end up becoming technological eschatologies themselves, with Leo Marx serving as the perfect example.

An important tradition within American literature, however, has articulated an anti-teleological, anti-eschatological account of technology, one which denies the reality of progress in favor of change. This tradition includes the works of Herman Melville (including Moby Dick, Typee, Omoo, the Confidence Man and Clarel) and Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man and the essays, collected and uncollected), with William Faulkner's works (especially Light in August, the Snopes books, Absalom, Absalom and Pylon) being more ambiguously included in this tradition. Lewis Mumford, in opposition to the mainstream of literary criticism, which has always endorsed an eschatological vision

of technology, eventually approached Melville and Ellison's anti-eschatological position. These works present a vision which is a viable alternative to both "progressive" ideologies which advance the mechanization of humanity and reactionary anti-technological ideologies.

The dissertation argues that the Ellisonian-Melvillean anti-eschatological vision of technology precedes and is related to the critiques of progress advanced by certain contemporary theorists of biology and historians of technology, including George Basilla, Arnold Pacey, Richard Lewontin and Stephen Gould, and that this unified rejection of the very idea of progress is intellectually necessary and politically desirable. The dissertation identifies and participates in a critique not of the desirability of American progress so much as of the <u>reality</u> of American progress, and of the complicity of American ideologies of progress with racist traditions.

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A. THE MACHINE ARRIVES

In Leo Marx's <u>The Machine in the Garden</u>, American culture, literature and history all bear the marks of a traumatic event: the sudden entrance of the machine, or industrialism, into the garden, which is largely to be understood as the "middle state" of agricultural, tended nature.[1]

> What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world – a simple pleasure fantasy – is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind.... More often than not in these episodes, the machine is made to appear with startling suddenness. (15)

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[1] Marx, <u>Machine</u> 88. Marx argues, for instance, that Jeffersonian pastoralism advocated the middle state as the "best attainable" human condition – certainly better than industrialism. But we must not make the error of thinking that Marx's "middle state" is only Jefferson's original formulation of his goals for America: "The controlling principal of Jefferson's politics is ... dialectical. It lies in his recognition of the constant need to redefine the 'middle landscape' ideal, pushing it ahead... into an unknown future to adjust it to ever-changing circumstances" (139). The politics of the "middle state," although seemingly designed to counter industrialism and "over-civilization," seem to assume an industrial notion of progress.

Marx argues that nearly all major American writers have been deeply influenced by the "machine's sudden appearance in the landscape" (16). He traces a pattern of various authors who place the machine in contrast to an ordered rural landscape in order to emphasize the artificiality of the machine, beginning with such romantics as Blake and Wordsworth (18). Writing about Nathaniel Hawthorne, Marx says that the machine comes upon him as a "sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction" (29). In time, the machine's sudden appearance even becomes a cliché, as in the novels of Frank Norris, but a cliché rooted in the fact of America's "unbelievably rapid industrialization" (343). Marx's book ends with the assertion that artistic attempts to create a middle landscape have failed, and that the "machine's sudden entrance into the garden presents a problem that ultimately belongs not to art but to politics" (365).

Throughout the book Marx insists on the <u>suddenness</u> of the machine's arrival. It doesn't develop slowly, it isn't imported piecemeal, nor does it evolve.[2] It appears uproariously, a monster always already full-grown, what George Basilla describes somewhat sarcastically as a "masculine aggressiveness" contrasting with the "tender, feminine" landscape (29). Marx has his reasons for portraying the machine's arrival in this way – at first when writing about the perceptions of the authors he is concerned with, but ultimately from his own point of view as well – and his case is certainly aided by his focus on steam locomotives rather than other forms of technology, since steam locomotives often seem to embody an irresistible technological

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[2] See George Basilla's <u>The Evolution of Technology</u> for a detailed and convincing argument for the evolutionary nature of technology.

determinism, as in Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, when Clifford and Hepzibah

Pyncheon flee by railroad from any implication of complicity in the death of their cousin:

> ... this admirable invention of the railroad – with the vast and inevitable improvements to
>
> be looked for, both as to speed and convenience – is destined to do away with those stale
>
> ideas of home and fireside, and substitute something better.... These railroads ... are
>
> positively the greatest blessing that the ages have wrought for us. They give us wings;
>
> they annihilate the toil and dust of pilgrimage; they spiritualize travel! (575)

In Hawthorne's novel the miraculous railroad is ironically undercut: the Pyncheon siblings

shortly return home to face their fate, which is re-integration INTO the landed aristocracy.

Despite appearances, things don't change easily: "Shall we never, never get rid of the past?... It

lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body!" (Hawthorne 509). Hawthorne may be a skeptic

about progress, but Leo Marx speaks for a legion of other thinkers when he argues that the idea

that "history is a record of more or less continuous progress" was popular "among the educated"

in the eighteenth century, and became pervasive among all classes in the nineteenth, and that

technological works, in addition to natural events and wonders, became revered as sublime

(Machine 107). The story of modernity becomes the story of people who believe in progress,

specifically technological progress.

A curious contradiction stands revealed. The machine erupts suddenly onto the

landscape, as "the type and agent of an irreversible process... the implacable advance of history"

(Machine 252). When it appears everything changes; where there was once a middle landscape,

the organic and the mechanical are divided, at war. The locomotive is fast; its speed is sufficient,

argues Hawthorne's Clifford, to "return us to the nomadic state" (Hawthorne 574). The fact that

these lines are ironic, given the return of the Pyncheons to their origins at the end of the novel, is surely one reason why Marx avoids discussing The House of the Seven Gables, despite its almost monomaniacal interest in technology, to focus on simpler pieces like "The Celestial Railroad." The speed of the locomotive, to use a figuration which becomes a cliché (although the phrase originated with Alexander Pope), "annihilates space and time" (Marx, Machine 194). One might say, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, that the concept of the locomotive, if not the locomotive itself, moves with infinite speed. "The concept is an incorporeal, even though it incarnated or effectuated in bodies... It is like the bird as event. The concept is defined by the inseparability of a finite number of heterogenous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed.... it is thought operating at infinite (although greater or lesser) speed" (Philosophy 21).

The locomotive requires many parts, mechanical (the development of the steam engine was a long and tortured process, and required the solution of numerous technical problems), financial, and human (the railroad industry demands and generates various skilled professions). These professions, specialties, and mechanical parts are useless on their own, but united they create not only a machine but a new way of surveying the world and history: Descartes' theoretical spatialization of time becomes material. But despite the locomotive's ability to devour space and time, to say nothing of human lives and material resources, and even though it seems to propel history once it has arrived, it is itself the product of a slow historical process and, even given technological changes, it was a contingent development, driven by ideology more than economics; at the time of its adoption it was not clearly the equal, let alone the superior, of the existing canal networks, but that did nothing to slow its adoption; George Basilla argues that

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it was totally unclear at the time when railroads spreading rapidly whether they would be economically competitive with canals. The concepts of the railroad and its annihilation of space and time, not sound economic sense, carried the day (Basilla 196). The locomotive propels history, seemingly, but it is itself historically contingent. The concept of the locomotive as a finished artifact and a cultural reality erupts suddenly, moving with infinite speed, but the actual railroad, to say nothing of the technologies and work-force behind it, is centuries in the making. It took many centuries of coal mining and the industrial use of coal in England before the steam engine was developed; in fact, the development of the steam engine was driven by the need to find a power source for running the pumps to drain ever-deeper coal mines (Gimpel 81-4). The use of rails, of course, was already a commonplace in mines. Basilla argues in The Evolution of Technology that the so-called "Industrial Revolution" was in no sense a revolution in the actual technologies, which developed incrementally. The revolution was in people's lives and implicitly in their world-view; massive changes resulted from the widespread adoption of new machines and techniques (61). An incrementally achieved technology, in other words, becomes revolutionary as soon as it is perceived and distributed as a revolutionary advance: the ideology, not the machine, is the real revolutionary force.

The point of this discussion is not to downplay the importance of technology in general, nor that of any particular technology, nor is it to question the tendency of Leo Marx and others to draw particular attention to the relationship between the railroad and American literature, which is certainly a worthy subject. Rather, I mean to draw attention to the unexamined assumption that the railroad erupts suddenly onto the scene, for as far as the history of the technologies themselves, there is nothing sudden about it. The construction of railroads requires, among other

things, the mass-production of iron, preferably wrought iron, which requires rolling mills. Building a steam engine requires the ability to properly drill cylinders. Both the locomotives and the iron industry require massive quantities of coal (in the form of coke in the latter case), with extremely inefficient engines leading the way; there is no other place where early steam engines would have been useful other than in the depths of coal mines, at the very source of the fuel they consumed so prodigiously. Long-distance railroads become impractical without the telegraph, which requires practical batteries, and so on. Furthermore, all of these technologies went through a troublesome gestation before being born: see Arnold Pacey's <u>Technology</u> in <u>World</u> <u>Civilization</u> for one compact discussion of everything involved in building a functioning railroad system (108-17, 135-42). Ironically, the railroad can <u>appear</u> sudden only after it has become an accomplished fact, or even a reified object, after decades of direct development and millennia to develop the technologies it depends on. In <u>The</u> <u>House</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Seven</u> <u>Gables</u> Holgrave wants to be free of the "dead giant" of history. "In fact, the case is just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of the old giant, his grandfather, who died a long while ago... It will startle you to see what slaves we are to by-gone times – to Death, if we give the matter the right word!" (509). Holgrave, a daguerotyppist, is more invested in technology than anyone else in the novel, and far more desperate to be freed from the chains of history. This desperation to be free from history is a vital part of how technology is generally understood: it is usually understood as being fundamentally <u>dis</u>continuous, leaping from one inventor to another, simultaneously freeing the inventor <u>from</u> history and making him an important figure <u>in</u> history.

Basilla argues that there are three sources for this belief in the discontinuity of technology. First, antecedents to particular technologies are forgotten or concealed: the history of engineering is, in Siegfried Giedeon's formulation, a largely anonymous history. Second, inventors of incremental improvements are promoted, both by themselves and others, as heroes. When anonymity is replaced with names, the naming is inaccurate: to be precise, the names are inaccurate and late; we might also add, in passing, that innovators of the wrong racial background and social class are habitually marginalized: the inventions of slaves, for instance, were legally assigned to their masters (James, "Invention" 50). Finally, technological change is confused with socioeconomic change, as in the case of the railroad (Basilla 57). We try to drop the dead giant from our shoulders, by emphasizing discontinuity, particularly that of our own achievements, but he's with us regardless.

Technology unfolds or evolves, rather than erupts. Granted, the incremental developments can be overwhelming (hydrogen bombs, Sputnik) in their impact, but <u>as</u> <u>technological</u> <u>developments</u> they remain incremental. Nonetheless, we tend to understand technology as erupting rather than unfolding. Not only does it erupt, but in its eruption it threatens all: the integrity of the human self, the integrity of the future. As Leo Marx implicitly understands, once we're in the position of understanding the machine's arrival as sudden, astounding, disruptive, we must see that the scene upon which the machine arrives is disrupted. When giving an account of the pro-industrial lobbying of Tench Coxe, who was among other things an assistant to Alexander Hamilton, Marx discusses the fact that Coxe uses the word "mechanism" positively:

There are few words whose shifting connotations register the revolution in thought and feeling we call the "romantic movement" more clearly than "mechanism." Once the influence of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle had been felt in America, no writer... [would] use "mechanism" in the unselfconscious, honorific sense in which Coxe uses it. His entire argument for what we would call industrialization rests on the assumption that celestial mechanicals . . . even the factory system – all embody the same ultimate laws of nature... The identification of visual nature with the celestial "machine" is difficult to grasp because of our own feeling, learned from the romantics, that "organic" nature is the opposite of things "mechanical." But it is impossible to appreciate the dominant American attitude toward technology if we project this sense of contradiction too far back into the past. (Machine 162)

One point that Marx doesn't make explicit, possibly because he fails to question the suddenness of the machine's arrival, is that he himself places both the beginning of the organic/machine conflict and the near-universal belief in techno-historical progress at the same time, around the beginning of the nineteenth century. As something which doesn't belong to the landscape, the machine must arrive suddenly, unnaturally: artificiality and suddenness imply one another. The arrival of the machine, the clash between machine and organism and the imminent resolution of that conflict belong to the contemporary; each successive generation claims the critical moment of that battle for itself. Leo Marx himself, by not questioning the suddenness itself, necessarily sees his own moment as the critical one in the final words of the first edition of The Machine in the Garden: "The machine's sudden entrance into the garden presents a problem that ultimately belongs not to art but to politics" (365). At the end of the 2000 afterward to the book he

ironically notes that he had believed (at the time he wrote the first edition) that "the pastoral

response to industrial society had almost certainly become anachronistic" (384). And yet, later

he witnessed the generation of the 1960s organize around allegedly pastoral ideals – although one

should note that such formative figures as Herbert Marcuse and Abbey Hoffman were believers,

not in a pastoral ideal but in the idea that industrialism was already so productive that basic

subsistence could be provided to all at no cost, i.e., they embraced an idea of industrialism as

infinitely productive[3] – and then later generations join assorted green movements. Yet, after

ironically noting his own failure to understand the ongoing power of the pastoral (and thus of the

concept of the organic/mechanical divide), he closes the afterward with practically a rephrasing

of the previous ending: "Could it be that this kind of [green] oppositional politics is what the

future now holds in store? If so, it is enlightening to recall that its emergence was foretold by

American writers in their initial responses to the appearance of the new machine power in the

national landscape" (Machine 385). The irony has repeated itself; the critical moment, the turning

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[3] In One-Dimensional Man, Marcuse attacks economic "freedom" as the freedom to "work or starve," arguing that, with centralization, "The technological processes of mechanization and standardization might release individual energy into a yet uncharted realm of freedom beyond necessity. The very structure of human existence would be altered; the individual would be liberated from the work world's imposing upon him alien needs and alien possibilities" (2). The productive power of modern industrialism is both real and desirable, but organized for insane, Ahabian ends. This belief is one of the obvious influences on Abbie Hoffman's Revolution for the Hell of It.

Thus, what could appear as "pastoralism" was, as often as not, a novel form of the ideology of progress, which emphasized the idea that material progress had attained a sufficient level of abundance that humanity could turn to more artistic and spiritual concerns.

This is not to say that there was never a genuine element of pastoralism in 1960's radicalism, but that the genuine pastoralism often had a reactionary element, as in the case of Edward Abbey's great "anti-Kantian" 1968 book Desert Solitaire (Abbey 6):

> It will be objected that a constantly increasing population makes resistance and conservation a hopeless battle. This is true. Unless a way is found to stabilize the nation's population the parks cannot be saved. Or anything else worth a damn... For my own part I would rather take my chances in a thermonuclear war than live in such a world. (52)

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point of history and the mechanical/organic divide is <u>now</u> – although once he saw the pastoral

dying, and now he sees it becoming possibly ascendant. We are teetering at the brink of the <u>telos</u>

of western technological civilization, or so we are told.

I have chosen Leo Marx as a starting point not to victimize him, but because he is a

sufficiently historically astute writer that he continually almost, but never quite, recognizes his

own teleological thinking; he is troubled by a way of thinking that sees the world pulled towards

a technological <u>telos</u>, but he doesn't himself abandon that way of thinking, nor can he, since he

has accepted the suddenness of the machine as a given. For Marx, the <u>actual</u> suddenness of the

machine drives the Romantic perception of the machine's suddenness, which drives the

problematic world-picture of the organic/mechanical divide, which is oriented towards the <u>telos</u>

or <u>eschatos</u> at which the order of the world will be definitively determined.

The danger presented by the conflict between the organic and the machine, for Marx, for

the Romantics and for the other authors he studies, is that the organic will be overcome and

mechanized (which is the moment of the <u>eschatos</u>). Interpreting Henry David Thoreau, but

presumably also operating under the influence, direct or indirect, of the Frankfurt school's

critique of instrumental reasoning, most thoroughly articulated in Horkheimer's <u>Eclipse</u> <u>of</u>

<u>Reason</u> (1947) and Horkheimer and Adorno's <u>Dialectic</u> <u>of</u> <u>Enlightenment</u> (1947), Marx writes:

"In the machinery of our collective existence, Thoreau says, we have 'constructed a fate, an

<u>Atropos</u>, that we never will turn aside. And until we confront the unalterable, he would add,

there can be no redemption from a system that makes men the tools of their tools" (<u>Machine</u>

355). Marx continues by showing that not only Thoreau but Herman Melville, Mark Twain and

Henry Adams and F. Scott Fitzgerald all see this same danger in technological civilization – that

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is, in the sudden, infinitely fast emergence of technological civilization. For all of his studied

skepticism of the organic/mechanical divide itself, both endings to The Machine in the Garden

and Marx's uncritical acceptance of the suddenness of the machine show that he essentially

accepts this conflict as the telos (or Atropos) of Western Civilization. Mankind stands in danger

of becoming a tool to its tools, of being mechanized, of being subsumed within a mechanical

historical determinism.[4]

B. THE MACHINE BEFORE "INDUSTRIALISM"

The idea of a mechanized self considerably predates Romanticism; the concepts of progress, a

mechanical universe and "man the machine" are conventionally assigned to Enlightenment

thinkers and institutions, as in Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish:

> The great book of Man-the-Machine was written simultaneously on two registers: the
>
> anatomico-metaphysical register, of which Descartes wrote the first pages and which the
>
> physicians and philosophers continued, and the technico-political register, which was
>
> constituted by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods relating
>
> to the army, the school and the hospital, for controlling or correcting the operations of the
>
> body.[5]

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[4] See also Leo Marx's "The Idea of 'Technology' and Postmodern Pessimism" on this subject.

[5] Foucault, Discipline 136. Also see Porter, Blood 66-8 for a sophisticated discussion of anti-mechanistic conceptions of the body in medicine which paralleled and rivaled mechanistic conceptions of it. Foucault's account of the history of medicine, at least, is oversimplified – although Porter is, to be

It's important to understand that Romanticism, with its idea of a struggle between the organic and the machine, existed in response to already dominant – at least in intellectual circles – ideas about a mechanical universe. But these mechanical philosophers looked back to even earlier concepts of a crafted universe (world as technē); James Lennox points out that Robert Boyle (1627-1691) referred to Plato's belief in a universe crafted by the demiurge when formulating his own specifically mechanical theory of the universe. Industrialism greatly preceded "the Industrial Revolution" (a topic I'll be discussing in detail later), as did the concept of the mechanical universe. There are important literary antecedents of Man-the-Machine and the mechanical universe, forerunners of mechanical philosophy, to say nothing of mechanical philosophy's Romantic opponents. I will examine a few of these antecedents, including Shakespeare, Edmund Spencer, Thomas Hobbes, and (predictably) Rene Descartes, leading up to a discussion of Mary Shelley, in order to demonstrate the continuity of ideas about a mechanical self, which were already well-formed with Shakespeare, as best exemplified in Coriolanus. This discussion is far from exhaustive and deliberately canonical (by way of demonstrating that the continuity of the idea of the mechanical self is by no means hidden, or if it is hidden, that it is hidden in plain sight); furthermore, I emphasize that I am making absolutely no Bloomian claim that Shakespeare or Spenser invented the modern notion of the mechanical self. To the contrary, I mean to show that the concept has a long history, and was already well-formed when Shakespeare put it to use.

In the fifth act of Coriolanus (1608), Coriolanus himself, the mightiest and most terrible of Shakespeare's heroes (who nonetheless takes part in the same ongoing deconstruction of the

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sure, also indebted to Foucault.

hero which takes place in <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Cressida</u> [1601-2]), has grown so strong and terrible that

he seemingly undergoes a metamorphosis, as revealed in this conversation between two of his

old friends, who anticipate his imminent assault on Rome, their common home; Coriolanus has

been driven from Rome, and plans to attack it, despite the presence there of his mother and his

friends, in league with his old enemies the Volscians (all emphasis mine):

MENENIUS: See you yon coign o'th' Capitol, yon cornerstone?

SICINIUS: Why, what of that?

MENEIUS: If it be possible for you to displace it with your little finger, there is some

hope the ladies of Rome, especially his mother, may prevail with him. But I say there is

no hope in't, <u>our</u> <u>throats</u> <u>are</u> <u>sentenced</u> <u>and</u> <u>stay</u> <u>upon</u> <u>execution</u>.

SICINIUS: Is't possible that so short a time can alter the condition of a man?

MENENIUS: There is a differency between a grub and a butterfly, yet your butterfly was

a grub. This <u>Martius</u> <u>is</u> <u>grown</u> <u>from</u> <u>man</u> <u>to</u> <u>dragon</u>. He has wings, he's more than a

creeping thing.

SICINIUS: He loved his mother dearly.

MENENIUS: So did he me, and he no more remembers his mother now than an eight-

year old horse. The tartness of his face sours ripe grapes. When he walks, he moves <u>like</u>

<u>an</u> <u>engine</u>, and the ground shrinks before his treading. He is able to pierce a corslet with

his eye, talks like a <u>knell</u>, and his <u>'hmh!'</u> <u>is</u> <u>a</u> <u>battery</u>. He sits in his state as <u>a</u> <u>thing</u> <u>made</u>

<u>for</u> <u>Alexander</u>. What he bids be done is finished with his bidding. He wants nothing of a

god but eternity and a heaven to throne in. (5.4.1-20)

Here Shakespeare blends fate, godhead and technology together. The extremity of Coriolanus'

power and wrath cannot be expressed merely by likening him to a god or demon: only reifying

him into a series of machines and objects fully reveals his power. To hold ultimate power, one

must be a thing, not only a man. Coriolanus the engine of war arrives as suddenly as Leo Marx's

locomotive. Rome's only hope is to somehow derail him from his purpose; it can no more resist

his actions, which are compressed into the moment of his bidding, than wheat can stand against a

McCormick reaper. Coriolanus' mother is ultimately able to derail his eschatological purpose,

but then, like a derailed locomotive, he is immediately destroyed, being unwilling or unable to

help himself once he has left the predetermined track of his power; it should be noted that, to the

extent that he is a made thing, crafted by techné, he is crafted by his mother for his station in life.

Coriolanus is powerful and dangerous beyond compare, vital to the success first of Rome and

then of the Volscians, but powerful only as a resource, unable to claim his power in a new and

different way, and as bereft of "authentic" possibilities as the technologically dominated mankind

which concerns such figures as Martin Heidegger, Max Horkheimer and Lewis Mumford. The

most remarkable thing about Coriolanus is that for all of mechanical might, he doesn't find

himself to have any meaningful choices; having been convinced not to destroy Rome, he returns

to Volsces to be decommissioned (killed). His mechanical power makes him like a "thing made

for Alexander"; because of his power he is without options, a clockwork soldier, like Foucault

discusses in reference to the eighteenth century: "By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has

become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required

can be constructed." Coriolanus is his mother's creation, not merely by birth but by craft; the

military machine of the French revolution is implicit in Coriolanus (Discipline 135).

The power of Edmund Spencer's Talus is even greater, but his options even more restricted, for while Coriolanus is only metaphorically a machine, Talus is literally a machine, an outright possession where Coriolanus is theoretically a man. Talus plays a large role in the fifth book of <u>The</u> <u>Faerie</u> <u>Queene</u> (1596)[6], where he is the "yron man" who attends on Artegall, at the command of Artegall's adoptive mother. He serves Artegall and Britomart as they struggle both apart and separately, as a protector, interlocutor and guide. Although he is literally a mechanical man, a machine of justice (Artegall is the knight of justice), he is sentient, with thoughts and feelings, as when he hesitates before giving Britomart bad news (790; Bk. 5 Ct. 6. Vs. 9-11). But for all of his gentle feelings, his brutal mechanical power has no rival in the poem, as when he attacks the defeated warriors fleeing from Britomart's rescue of Artegall from the Amazon Radigund:

> There then a piteous slaughter did begin:
>
> For all that euer came within his reach,
>
> He with his yron flale did thresh so thin,
>
> That he no worke at all left for the leach:
>
> Like to an hideous storme, which nothing may empeach. (807; Bk. 5 Ct. 7. Vs. 35)

When serving his appointed function, as a machine of justice and truth, no fine feelings interfere with Talus' execution of his duty, which is figured in both naturalistic and economic language: the mechanical man's wrath is like a farmer threshing and also like a storm. Talus's nature is detailed somewhat when he is introduced, together with Artegall:

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[6] That is, the fifth book was first published in 1596. Different parts of the poem were published between 1590 and 1609.

But when she parted hence, she left her groome

    An yron man, which did on her attend

    Always, to execute her steadfast doome,

    And willed him with Artegall to wend,

    And doe what euer thing he did intend.

    His name was Talus, made of yron mould,

    Immoueable, resistlesse, without end.

    Who in his hand an yron flale did hould,

With which he thresh out falshood, and did truth vnfould. (730; Bk 5. Ct. 1. Vs. 12.)

Talus is iron, made in an iron mold, remorseless, irresistible, perfectly obedient and dedicated to truth. He is justice personified, a machine of truth, imagined in the late sixteenth century in a country which had made heavy use of mills and clockwork for centuries, which was centuries into one stage of "industrial revolution," although we conventionally put the "Industrial Revolution" more than a century later; London itself had suffered air pollution from coal since the thirteenth century, and England was about to enter into a new coal era driven by the discovery that coke as well as charcoal could reduce iron ore (Gimpel 81-2). We should understand, in other words, that there was nothing "pre-industrial" about Spenser and Shakespeare's Britain; if it was less industrialized than the Britain of the Romantics, the difference was far less than we typically imagine. Spenser's imagination, preceding what we call mechanical philosophy, but operating in what had already long been an industrial society, flirts with a world where human agency is fully subject to a mechanical determinacy, and forthrightly describes a world in which

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the boundary between man and machine is permeable, and in which a machine (or a mechanized

man) can wield a power that ordinary men cannot hope to match.

> But when they thought on Talus hands to lay,
>
> He with his yron flaile amongst them thondred,
>
> That they were fayne to let him scape away,
>
> Glad from his companie to be so sondred;
>
> Whose presence all their troups so much encombered
>
> That th'heaps of those, which he did wound and slay,
>
> Besides the rest dismayd, might not be nombred:
>
> Yet all that while he would not once assay,
>
> To reskey his owne Lord, but thought it just t'obay. (777; Bk 5. Ct. 5, Vs. 19.)

Talus obeys his master's command to <u>not</u> rescue him, but is as promiscuous in his violence as

Coriolanus or a B-52 bomber, mass-producing death (despite his own sometimes gentle feelings)

as brilliantly as a guillotine or a Chicago slaughterhouse. Talus implies the end of human agency

in two ways. First, he is ambiguously a machine and a man at once, with human feelings but

fully subject to the will of another – he is a slave as much as anything, in a British empire that

was coalesce around the slave trade, which existed mainly to serve the sugar industrial-

agricultural-trade complex (as detailed in Curtin's <u>The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex</u>).

Second, by dispensing truth and unfolding justice mechanically – significantly he fights with a

flail rather than a sword: war and justice have become economic and industrial activities – he

reduces the world about him to a deterministic (and presumably eschatological, given that the

poem's background of Protestant-Catholic conflict, so often framed apocalyptically by Protestant

writers) mechanical order. He is both mechanical and mechanizing, a forerunner to various

science fiction robots, along with the cyborgs, starting with Captain Ahab, who populate

nineteenth-century American literature, according to Klaus Benesch's argument in Romantic

Cyborgs (2002).

The appearance of mechanized and mechanizing people, cyborgs or robots in literature is

mirrored in philosophy, as I mentioned earlier, although Shakespeare and Spencer are operating

well in advance of the thinkers who mechanized and regularized the universe as a whole: if

anything, philosophy should be thought of as operating in the wake of literature as well as

historical reality. These thinkers are easily and habitually mentioned as a set group, as Klaus

Benesch does in the introduction to his Romantic Cyborgs, writing on the American Romantic

backlash against mechanical philosophy: "the writers of the American Renaissance adopted the

imagery of the man-machine, which was handed on to them through the lingering influence of

mechanical philosophy" (12). Hobbes' concept of the state as an artificial man in a universe

where people are themselves already machines is one vital example of this mechanical

philosophy, as we see in the opening to Leviathan (1651) [all emphasis original]:

> NATURE (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the art of man, as
>
> in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial animal. For
>
> seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part
>
> within; why may we not say, that all automata (engines that move themselves by springs
>
> and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the heart, but a spring;
>
> and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to
>
> the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer? Art goes yet further, imitating that

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> rational and most excellent work of nature, <u>man</u>. For by art is created that great
>
> LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, (in Latin Civitas) which is but
>
> an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural... (7)

For Hobbes, there is no clear line demarcating the organic from the mechanical; a blast furnace, a

musket, a dog and a man are all equally machines (with the cautionary and possibly insincere

caveat that the man has a soul), and given sufficient knowledge we could actualize Spenser's

Talus. Nature is God's art (<u>technē</u>), a larger and better version of human art. Interestingly,

despite the lack of a single motive physical power behind the individual parts which comprise a

state, Hobbes still sees the state as an artificial – which, note, is not clearly distinguished from

natural! – man. The connection to Talus could be extended further. Even as Talus is a single,

localized machine for compelling obedience or "administering justice," Hobbes' Commonwealth

is a pervasive, non-localized machine with much the same goals: the "subjects" of the "sovereign

power" at the head of the Commonwealth are "... bound by covenant, to own the actions, and

judgements of one, cannot lawfully make a new covenant, amongst themselves, to be obedient to

any others, in any thing whatsoever, without his permission" (115). Already with Hobbes we are

dealing with cyborgs, humans interfaced with machines in such a way as to make distinctions and

boundaries between the human and the machine not only impossible but meaningless. The true

project of Romanticism (to leap ahead of myself) is not to oppose the machine's recent, sudden

arrival, but to deal with its entrenched facticity, both as a socio-technological presence and as a

philosophical-literary concept. In a sense, <u>the Romantic garden is what erupts onto the</u>

<u>mechanical stage</u>.

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Descartes (1596-1650) does not go as far down the road of the mechanical man as Hobbes does – but he takes more than a few steps along the path, by arguing that the human body is a machine which is distinct from other machines by its degree of perfection, not in its fundamental nature: "they will regard this body as a machine which, having been made by the hand of God, is incomparably better ordered than any machine that can be devised by man" (44). The human body is a machine controlled by reason, whereas animals are machines through and through, such that a well-designed machine made by a man could be indistinguishable from an animal (44). A human being, for Descartes, can theoretically only be distinguished from an ideally designed humanoid automaton by speech and reason, the "universal instrument which can be used in all kinds of situations" (44). Incidentally, Descartes prefigures the "Turing Test" for artificial intelligence, according to which a computer is intelligent when an observer having a written conversation with both a computer and a person can't tell which one is which; Descartes couldn't believe, or perhaps couldn't safely say, that intelligence can be viewed as mechanically as life can be. On the one hand, the difference between life and the machine is eroded if we, like Turing, imagine a machine capable of Cartesian rationality. But the difference is eroded earlier and more thoroughly if the edifice of rationality itself is troubled, as with David Hume, for whom what seems like learning and reason is simply a matter of repetition: the death of reason as such by no means implies the abandonment of a mechanical world-picture.

One of the great distinguishing characteristics – which is not to imply that the characteristic is <u>unique</u> to post-Cartesian thinkers – of the Cartesian mechanical or "clockwork" universe is that time can be represented in space. This characteristic of Cartesian or Enlightenment thought has received exceedingly wide commentary. For Foucault, for instance,

one of the characteristics of the Enlightenment is that its disciplinary methods involve a continually finer, more microscopic management of time, down to the smallest of gestures, forming a "machine in time as well as in space" (<u>Discipline</u> 162, 164). Understanding the world as clockwork (regardless of what era in which we place that understanding) enables a fine-grained, detailed control that extends through both time and space.

But despite the claim of Romanticism and its descendants, which attempt to draw attention to an apocalyptic battle (in which the current moment is always <u>the</u> fulcrum on which history turns), we should be skeptical: by pretending that the machine belongs to a <u>new</u> order rather than an <u>old</u> order, Romanticism has already preemptively justified a return to the "old order" – the revolutionary Holgrave's return to the landed aristocracy in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> – as a response to the machine's eschatological arrival. Romanticism permits something which even Hobbes doesn't allow: the old order, or at least parts of it, get to be <u>natural</u>.

In line with Foucault's emphasis on the infinitesimal, Victor Frankenstein's work demands attention to the finest of details; he works in the finest increments of both time and space. "I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me" (51). Frankenstein's discovery emerges from close observation of the minute causes which lead to transformations from death to life and life to death; he discovers that the universe is mechanical in the sense that, like clockwork, all processes can be reversed. To connect this to the larger project of Romanticism: if we were once in a garden, and now there is a machine in the garden, then we must be able to return to that garden, and it's worth the price of the <u>eschatos</u> to do so.

Romanticism fully inherits the mechanistic philosophers' faith in reversibility, a faith which

Henri Bergson derides: "Change must be reducible to an arrangement or rearrangement of parts;

the irreversibility of time must be an appearance relative to our ignorance; the impossibility of

turning back must be only the inability of man to put things back in place" (Creative 17). For

Frankenstein and for Bergson's hypothetical metaphysician (who is internal to all of us,

according to Bergson) every transition must have a discrete cause in the moment preceding that

transition, and therefore be reversible.

One might argue that, since Frankenstein's method works, Mary Shelley is more in the

camp of Descartes or Hobbes than Bergson. True, Frankenstein mechanically creates life, and he

can certainly mechanically destroy life. But the behavior of his creation is anything but

mechanical; the monster is not calculable, and Frankenstein even discovers that his own actions

are irrational and incalculable. He is congenitally unable to pursue his own best interests, and yet

remains thoroughly entrenched in an old order, rather than successfully establishing a new order.

Frankenstein's rationalization of his creative urge is both rational and Foucaultian; it is

the irrational rationalism which threatens civilization in Herbert Marcuse's One-Dimensional

Man and Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment (both written long after Captain

Ahab's irrational rationalism, of course). Frankenstein aims, after all, to create a race of superior

beings who "would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would

owe their being to me. No father should claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I

should" (52). Frankenstein then drifts immediately into a fantasy of learning to reverse death

(change must be reducible to an arrangement of parts...). Frankenstein does not dream of a

family of children, but a race; not of affection, but of boundless gratitude; not of equality, but of

duties claimed. Frankenstein dreams of a fully spatialized – and hence reversible, chartable and masterable – time, and of near-infinite power administered first upon and then through his creations.

But his calculated creation doesn't merely fall apart; it falls apart as soon as it has begun. His calculations don't fail him a week or a year in the future, but at the very moment that his mastery of the "minutiae of causation" summoned his monster to life. His creation's beauty immediately seem like ugliness to him, and a "breathless horror and disgust" fills him. The monster pursues him and presents, not the aspect of a Talus, an infinitely grateful and obedient follower, but of a babbling baby: "His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks" (57). The machine turns out to be an organism. Frankenstein's reaction is to flee once more – and this flight, of course, causes the chain of disasters and tragedies that constitute the rest of the book. Despite Frankenstein's ability to create life, and his ambition of being able to resurrect the dead and thus, metaphorically, reverse time, he finds the rest of his life altered by one irreversible moment. The future is not calculable, but the past cannot be eradicated; Victor Frankenstein's new world order has fallen to pieces already at the instant that he takes the first step towards it. The outside world is nearly unaffected by the events of the novel, and the only person who is affected, Captain Walton, takes away a single lesson: that he should return to the household, the oikos, rejecting the irrational rationalism of the power quest. The telos of history is a return to the garden, the cultivated middle landscape of the landed aristocracy.

C. THE MACHINE IN THE "INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION"

The eschatological fears that, first, the outer mechanization of the world will bring the mechanization of the inner self and that, second, this mechanization is a problem belonging only to the contemporary seems ubiquitous in nineteenth and twentieth century writing.

Karl Marx, in the book-length chapter on "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry" in the first volume of Capital (1867), illustrates the age's obsession with the suddenness of the machine's arrival. He argues that "fully developed" machines consist of three parts: a motor mechanism, a transmitting mechanism, and a "tool or working machine." He writes: "It is this last part of the machinery, the tool or working machine, with which the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century begins" (494). Although Marx understands that there is a continuity between the tool and the machine, he emphasizes the revolutionary suddenness of the machine's arrival. In its suddenness, the machine is apocalyptic:

> In handicrafts and manufacture, the worker makes use of a tool; in the factory, the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the instrument of labor proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machine that he must follow. In manufacture the workers are the parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, who are incorporated into it as its living appendages. (548)

Life is subordinated to the Machine, becoming merely its servant; a monster subordinates all life to its unholy will "under which each man is bound hand and foot for life to a single specialized operation... the capitalist form of large-scale industry reproduces this same division of labor in a

still more monstrous shape" (614). The power of this unliving monster is tied to invention, and in particular to the steam engine, "an antagonist that enabled the capitalists to tread underfoot the growing demands of the workers" (562). The steam engine is a machine "which makes history," in Robert Heilbroner's classic formation. For Marx, "modern industry" is essentially revolutionary, with all "earlier forms of production" being essentially conservative (617).

Marx draws an abrupt, eschatological line at which the battle between capitalist and worker, organism and machine is joined, roughly coinciding with the adoption of the steam engine, which drives the "industrial revolution." There is nothing original, of course, in pointing out that Marxism is continuous with a long line of teleological-historical thinking, as Lyotard argues in Postmodern Fables: "Although secularized, the Enlightenment narrative, Romanticist or speculative dialectics, and the Marxist narrative deploy the same historicity as Christianity, because they conserve the eschatological principle" (97). My concern is to simply point out that this eschatology is fixated on the machine's eruption onto history as the equivalent of the arrival of the Beast of Revelation: the end of history is nigh.

Thomas Carlyle's 1829 essay "Signs of the Times" also emphasizes both that the self threatens to become mechanized in the wake of the mechanization of production and that mechanization is the particular problem of the contemporary, although he is more ambivalent about the truly revolutionary nature of the time: "we too admit that the present is an important time; as all present time necessarily is" (33-4). Carlyle accepts that mechanization is the important question of the time, although he doesn't say that it's necessarily a more important question than those facing other times. The age is a Mechanical Age, which, with "its whole undivided mights, forwards, teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends... all is

by rule and calculated contrivance" (34). Again we see the emphasis on the artificial, as if the artificial has suddenly violated a natural order, even though, if we attend to the mechanical philosophy (and its antecedents in Shakespeare and Spenser) which preceded Romanticism, clearly there is a sense in which the artificial, with the emphasis on art (technē), actually precedes the organic.

Carlyle argues that this adaptation of means may begin with physical machinery, but does not end with it: "Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also" (35). Education, religion, the state and science are all operated mechanically rather than "dynamically" – that is, organically. "Men are grown mechanical in head and in heard, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavor, and in natural force, of any kind" (37). The enormous physical power of the mechanical age has led to great deeds – "in the management of external things we excel all other ages; while in whatever respects the pure moral nature, in true dignity of soul and character, we are perhaps inferior to most civilized ages" (46). For Carlyle, the solution to the problem of excessive internal mechanization is simple: we must turn back to the cultivation of the individual spirit. "To reform a world... no wise man will undertake... the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each beings and perfects on himself" (54). As Leo Marx emphasizes, for Carlyle mechanization represents a change not only in tools and techniques, but most of all in worldview, or world-picture, as Martin Heidegger might say (Marx, Machine 174). In contrast both to Leo Marx and Karl Marx, for Carlyle the proper response to mechanization is more interiority, not more or different politics. Leo Marx argues that Karl Marx's concept of alienation – created in large part by machine technology – parallels (and in fact is psychologically less sophisticated

than) Ralph Emerson and Carlyle's critique of the subordination of the "dynamic" to the

"mechanical" (Marx, Machine, 176-8). Romanticism and Marxism see history teleologically: for

them history, contrary to mechanical philosophy (not to mention St. Augustine, who undermined

the literal eschatos for a millennium), begins with nature and ends with the conflict between

nature and the machine.

In American literature the notion of an eschatological conflict between organism and

machine has generated utopian as well as dystopian eschatologies: the machine, rather than being

a cousin of the Beast of revelation becomes a cousin of Christ as the white rider named faithful

and true, also identified as the logos; the saving power of the machine is linked to the saving

power of democracy. Leo Marx gives the example of Timothy Walker, who wrote a "Defense of

Mechanical Philosophy" in response to Caryle (Marx, Machine 181-2). In Civilizing the

Machine, John Kasson gives an elaborate series of examples of American utopian ideas about

mechanizing the world, the landscape, and even the self. For instance, Benjamin Rush, following

Tench Coxe and Alexander Hamilton, argued that the purpose of education in America was to

generate "republican machines," that is, citizens (32). This line of utopian mechanistic thinking

has many other exemplars, from Edward Bellamy to some of those who both advocated and

admired the textile mills at Lowell, which were organized by physical and moral machinery, and

where the lives of the unmarried women who worked the mills were regulated on many levels

(Kasson 100). In America, the battle lines have often been drawn over the question of whether

the mechanization of industry and of the self supports or undermines the republican order; it is to be a Romantic republic or a mechanical republic?[7]

Perhaps the most cited example of the mechanization of the self and the theory behind it in America is Frederick Winslow Taylor's <u>The Principles of Scientific Management</u>. Taylor was an efficiency expert working in the early twentieth century who analyzed workers in order to break their motions into parts which could then be streamlined algorithmically. Following such thinkers as Coxe and Rush, Taylor argues that the first duty of employers is to stop continually looking for ideal workers, for ideal workers are <u>made</u> (themselves a product of <u>technē</u>), not discovered: "It is only when we realize that our duty, as well as our opportunity, lies in systematically cooperating to train and to make this competent man, instead of in hunting for a man whom some one else has trained, that we shall be on the road to national efficiency" (iii). Efficiency requires rigid, enforced standardization, not only of tools but even more critically of techniques and motions, which must be enforced by management, albeit through the compensation of increased wages (Taylor 41). Despite the ever-increasing restriction on the worker's movements, though, Taylor argues that a nearly infinite freedom can be realized within these narrow movements. Within automation, the spirit <u>develops</u>, as if in a secularized monasticism, or a synthesis of Romanticism and mechanical philosophy in which the self is a machine, but the development of that machine is highly valued:

> Now, when through all of this teaching and this minute instruction the work is apparently made so smooth and easy for the workman, the first impression is that this all tends to

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[7] This question of the relationship between the machine and the republic (and the republican self) is the main topic of Kasson's <u>Civilizing the Machine</u>, but it is, of course, also an important part of <u>The Machine in the Garden</u> and David Nye's <u>American Technological Sublime</u>.

make him a mere automaton, a wooden man... The same criticism and objection, however, can be raised against all other modern subdivision of labor. It does not follow, for example, that the modern surgeon is any more narrow or wooden a man than the early settler of this country. The frontiersman, however, had to be not only a surgeon, but also an architect, house-builder, lumberman, farmer, soldier, and doctor.... The workman who is cooperating with his many teachers under scientific management has an opportunity to develop which is at least as good as and generally better than that which he had when the whole problem was "up to him" and he did his work entirely unaided. (Taylor 65-6).

Freedom and progress lies not in an organic craft, but in further refining a mechanized self: utopia dwells not in the victory of the organic over the machine, but in the victory of the mechanical man over the errors of the "natural" man. "Maximum prosperity can exist only as a result of maximum productivity" (Taylor 2). Maximum productivity exists only under scientific management; under maximum productivity "prosperity will be permanent" (Taylor 1). The utopian telos of humanity is eternal prosperity and the continual refinement of scientific management's control over certain movements, combined with the suppression of errant movements.

Taylor has often been understood, both by his friends and by his enemies, as being in his era's history-producing vanguard, because of his embrace of the mechanization of the self. But there was nothing new about the study and mechanization of movement; at most, Taylor managed to formalize an old process which already existed within American factories and elsewhere. Arnold Pacey argues in Meaning in Technology that the development of mechanized motion in seventeenth century armies, in marching, in reloading and firing muskets, etc., was

organized around rhythm. The creation of clockwork soldiers, as detailed in such works as

Foucault's Discipline and Punish and Manuel De Landa's War in the Age of Intelligent

Machines, is based on musical rhythms, a process partially enabled in turn by the mechanization

of music: "toward the end of the eighteenth century [composers began] to recommend

metronome settings... on the scores of their music. So now music might sometimes be played –

and armies might be drilled – by the precise rhythms of a machine."[8] Ezra Pound, in fact, argues

explicitly for the reorganization of factories to produce a kind of musical harmony, when he

writes on the "Acoustic of Machinery":

> Factory Work is done day after day, and people can and do practice the best way of doing
>
> it. The idea that a factory, or at least the more organized and organizable parts of a
>
> factory can not be "harmonized" is no sillier in 1927, than the idea that a horseless
>
> carriage could move, was in, let us say, 1880. (72)

My point is that although Frederick Taylor understood his own moment and technique to be

transformative, and he has often been perceived as a critical innovator, it isn't clear that his

development of technique is in any way discontinuous from, for instance, the development of

rhythmic musket-loading which ensured that "Reloading was carried out more quickly and the

soldiers made fewer errors," or with musically or rhythmically timed labor (Pacey, Meaning 19).

The rigidly mechanized Greek (and even Sumerian) Phalanx, along with the musical rhythms of

slavery and serfdom, also precedes Taylor's techniques. The mechanization of labor or war, that

is, the mastery of the laborer's or soldier's movements, need not be understood as a

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[8] Pacey, Meaning 17, 27. Also see Foucault's Discipline and Punish and De Landa's War in the
Age of Intelligent Machines on clockwork soldiers.

contemporary phenomenon, as Lewis Mumford points out in great detail in <u>Technics</u> <u>and</u> <u>Human</u> <u>Development</u> and <u>The</u> <u>Pentagon</u> <u>of</u> <u>Power</u>. Mumford's almost archaeological interest in the primeval nature of mechanization will be of great concern in my second and third chapters.

Siegfried Giedion (1888-1968) places the origins of the assembly line not with Henry Ford or Frederick Taylor as "innovators," but with largely non-mechanical (dis)assembly lines in butchery and biscuit-making, the latter especially for naval consumption, starting as early as 1804 (77-8; 87). The factory, whether it be for disassembly of a pig or assembly of a biscuit, doesn't necessarily require, and isn't necessarily driven by, actual machines: mechanical rhythms can precede the machine, as in the slaughterhouse, or follow it, as with <u>some</u> of Taylor's "innovations."

The mechanized self and mechanized movement are linked with the meatpacking industry once more again in Upton Sinclair's <u>The</u> <u>Jungle</u> (1906). Jurgis, the protagonist of the novel, marvels at being a "cog in this marvelous machine" before he sees any of the actual machines of the slaughterhouse. The hogs move under their own power to a great wheel, and are then swept away on the disassembly line: "looking down this room, one saw, creeping slowly, a line of dangling hogs a hundred yards in length; and for every yard there was a man, working as if a demon were after him. At the end of this hog's progress every inch of the carcass had been gone over several times..." (36). Jurgis wonders at seeing a hog "dressed by several hundred men. It was like a wonderful poem to him" (37). Sinclair is working in 1906, so of course actual machines have entered the picture, but following Giedion, we can say that the essential picture is no different than it would have been decades earlier. Machines have been added, techniques have developed, but the (dis)assembly line does not belong to the slaughterhouses of the turn of

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the century: the assembly line preceded both Carlyle the skeptic and Rush the apologist. The historical reality of the assembly line, as with the steam engine, greatly precedes its own sudden, earthshaking arrival.

This process, in which the machine's actual slow and incremental arrival is displaced by its suddenness, is aided by the fact that technology devours its own history: "Henry Ford does not mention Taylor. He is the self-taught man, who does everything for himself" (Giedion 115). Innovators want to <u>be</u> innovators; revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries want to <u>be</u> revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. The crisis must be unfolding <u>now</u>, not gradually through the course of history.

Other examples of American visions of a technological <u>eschatos</u> abound. One perfect example is the writings of Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), who fled so far from the horrors of mechanized civilization that he went to Japan, where he took a Japanese name and a Japanese wife, and wrote articles for <u>The</u> <u>Atlantic</u>, among other publications, where he made a case for the spiritual superiority of Japanese civilization. He not only predicted but hoped that Japanese civilization would triumph over Western Civilization, by military means if necessary: there was no other true hope for humanity. In a remarkable passage Hearn remembers, from Japan, the cities of the West:

> And all this enormity is hard, grim, dumb; it is the enormity of mathematical power applied to utilitarian ends of solidity and durability. These leagues of palaces, of warehouses, of business structures, of buildings describable and indescribable, are not beautiful, but sinister. One feels depressed by the mere sensation of the enormous life which created them, life without sympathy; of their prodigious manifestation of power,

power without pity. They are the architectural utterance of the new industrial age. And

there is no halt in the thunder of wheels, in the storming of hoofs and of human feet. To

ask a question, one must shout into the ear of the questioned; to see, to understand, to

move in that high-pressure medium, needs experience. The unaccustomed feels the

sensation of being in a panic, in a tempest, in a cyclone. Yet all this is order (15).[9]

For Hearn, Western civilization is doomed by its obsession with order, regulation, and building

on a titanic scale; most of all, building permanent structures is a problem which causes cultural

ossification. Japanese civilization is distinguished by its focus on impermanency, the necessity

and perpetuity of change. "Yet all this is order," he writes ironically, in the midst of his vision of

the mechanized and mechanizing horrors of the West. The result of the civilization of Coxe and

Hamilton, Rush and Taylor, in which every movement is regulated, is spiritual chaos in the midst

of mechanical order. We are driven by the urge to control and produce; for Hearn, Taylor's

"endless prosperity" produces only a "useless multiplicity of daily wants" (Hearn 27).

Mechanization for prosperity drives us to a mechanical eschatos, in which the "power of

independent movement" is lost (Hearn 24). Total mechanization is the telos of Western history,

which must be vigorously resisted, but can only be resisted by a place beyond the West. By

embracing an implicitly organic "change" over mechanical "order," Hearn reveals his own

Romantic roots, but he also anticipates Bergson's vision of evolution (which in turn is vitally

important to the thought of Deleuze), an idea to which I will return (Hearn 30). For Hearn a

concept of endless flux has the potential to unthrone Western teleology.

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[9] Ernesto Fenollosa, who was an important influence on Ezra Pound, among others, wrote nearly
identical sentiments several years after Hearn.

The enormous power of the Western system – the system, the only system, in Lyotard's terminology – in Hearn's work is matched and exceeded by the all-devouring power of Henry Adams' Dynamo, which threatens explicitly, rather than implicitly, to bring an end to history itself. When faced with the power of the Dynamo at the end of The Education, Adams does everything except write the actual word eschatos: "Here was a breach of continuity – a rupture in historical sequence! Was it real, or only apparent?" (340). The machine, product of historical process though it is, arrives with infinite suddenness, moves with infinite speed. "One lingered long among the dynamos, for they were new, and they gave to history a new phase... The historical mind can think only in historical processes, and probably this was the first time since historians existed, that any of them had sat down helpless before a mechanical sequence" (342). This mechanical determinism, in opposition, perhaps, to the mechanical sequences of past history (Gibbon) and philosophy (Descartes and Hobbes), this history-driving machine threatens time itself, making sequence itself incomprehensible, unapproachable: what happened before ceases to connect with what happens after, leaving the historian as mute and aghast as the universe is at the opening of the seventh seal in Revelation. "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (8.1). Thus the pairing of the Dynamo with the Virgin: one eschatos has displaced another, leaving the old eschatological worldview destroyed and yet strangely intact; as Lyotard says about Marxism, among other modern systems of thought, the eschatological principle has been conserved. To Adams the "dynamo became a symbol of infinity... he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross" (380). Early Christianity, too, is oriented towards the imminent and utter remaking of the world, as is Protestantism. "Before the end," writes Adams, "one began to pray

to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force" (380). The universe which is coming is, like the New Jerusalem, fundamentally unlike the old world: "In these seven years man had translated himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old" (381). Adams' new world follows the New Jerusalem in the discontinuity of its dimensions with the dimensions of the old world: "The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal" (Revelation 21:16).

From the standpoint of a historian of technology, Henry Adams' understanding of technology, and in particular the <u>rupturing</u> effect of the Dynamo upon history, is just another version of Romanticism, as Lynn White has argued in <u>Medieval Technology and Religion</u> (108). But the interesting thing about Adams' technological <u>eschatos</u> is that it is not an idea that belongs only to him, or to a handful of Romantic artists. The transformative, rupturing, apocalyptic nature of technological change is taken for granted by admirers and critics of technological change alike, with little regard for the granular, evolutionary nature of actual technological change. The <u>image</u> of the arrival of the locomotive, the dynamo, the rocket or the engineered organism covers up its own history and contingency.

Following Richard Chase, Leo Marx argues that <u>The Education of Henry Adams</u> demonstrates the dialectic nature of the American novel. According to Marx, Adams both endorses and recoils from the technological determinism which has separated him from his family traditions (<u>Machine</u> 346). The Virgin and the Dynamo "figure an all-embracing conflict: a clash between past and present unity and diversity, love and power. In his Manichaean fashion he marshals all conceivable values" (<u>Machine</u> 347). Marx is even able to use the word

apocalypse when describing Adams: "The apocalyptic image of the Dynamo and the Virgin is the ultimate expression of the tragic doubleness that Adams locates at the center of modern history" (Machine 349) – a doubleness between the organic and the machine which Lee Quinby points out in Anti-Apocalypse is also the dualism of seasons which begins the book and the dualism of gender which pervades it (84). Leo Marx sees and analyzes Adams' apocalyptic mode, but what he does not do, what he cannot do, is turn and see that he, too, in accepting the machine's suddenness, writes in an apocalyptic or teleological mode every bit as much as Adams does, which fits well with Quinby's claim that Adams' "ironic apocalypse" is paradigmatic for twentieth century apocalypses, which operate by "restoring a totalizing [apocalyptic, technological] vision while denying unity and totality of vision" (77, 78). Quinby and White's readings of Adams contextualize his work as essentially united with the visions of a technological eschatos which precede and follow him.

But has American literature always been dominated by an understanding of the machine as sudden, the machine as telos? Must the dialectic between the machine and the garden, the organic and the mechanical, progress and resistance to progress, begin with an earth-shattering event that threatens, finally, to destroy history and time entirely? Must change be understood as progress, especially as progress towards a telos, like Bacon understood technological progress as the means to hasten the coming of the Antichrist and the end of history?

In Leo Marx's words, The Education of Henry Adams begins with "a variant of the pastoral design in describing the rhythmic alternation between the seasonal attitudes toward nature and civilization he had known as a boy" (Machine 348). Similarly, near the beginning of his own book Marx envisions the action of Shakespeare's The Tempest as the movement of a

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pendulum between the "poles of nature and civilization," with Prospero's goal being to still the pendulum, thus achieving harmony in a middle state (Machine 66). But the flaw beneath this conception of the pendulum swinging between nature and civilization (the machine) is that, in a historical sense, the machine is very old, a fact to which I have alluded and will soon detail. We may, it is true, at any moment be confronted with the problem of particular machines and technologies, but there is never a true absence of technology and civilization (consider, for instance, the movement of Enkidu towards civilization and his use of the axe in The Epic of Gilgamesh).

But the image of the pendulum is not useless. In fact, it becomes more useful, not less, if we see its motion as the motion between competing technologies and visions of time, if we see the pendulum as representing a conflict between different kinds of technological determinisms, different concepts of history.

D. THE PENDULUM'S SWAY

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" opens with an epitaph which rejoices in the destruction of the Jacobins and thus, implicitly, in the restoration of the old regimé. Yet, the narrator of the tale is no exemplar of traditional values, but a "recusant," a religious dissenter, who is rescued from the Inquisition's pit and fire by General Lasalle, one of Napoleon's generals. The story ends on a harsh note for the old order: "The inquisition was in the hands of its enemies" (207). The story begins with the promise of the restoration of the old order, and ends

with the chronologically earlier overthrow of that same old order. The story, then, is an account

of multiple overthrows and reversals, both on a historical level of revolutions and counter-

revolutions and on the personal level of the narrator's repeated escapes from death. Consider

these lines, immediately after the narrator has received his death sentence from the Inquisition:

"After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate

hum. It conveyed to my soul the idea of revolution – perhaps from its association in fancy with

the burr of a mill-wheel" (212). The inquisitors sound like a mill-wheel revolving. This literal,

physical revolution is implicitly connected to the political revolution which threatens the

inquisitors, and destroys them at the end of the story. Revolution qua physical, rotating machine

implies revolution qua political transformation.

The fact that revolution-as-rotation implies revolution-as-overthrow rather than vice-

versa is critical: the political revolution will face counter-revolution, as the wheel continually

revolves. Interestingly, the story was written in 1843 and revised in 1845, at the brink of the

revolutions of 1848, which historically overthrew the counter-revolution. The wheel rotates,

from old regimé to Jacobins to Napoleon to restoration to revolution again.

I'm hardly original in pointing out that most eighteenth and nineteenth century

intellectuals believed that science and technology progress, in a relatively straightforward way,

and that, for the most part, this material progress goes hand-in-hand with moral and intellectual

progress, although we must also attend to the critical response of Romanticism to mechanization.

But the contemporary conventional wisdom about the mainstream of Enlightenment thought goes

something like this: "The intellectual heritage of technological determinism can be traced to the

enthusiasm and faith in technology as a liberating force expressed by leaders of the eighteenth-

century Enlightenment" (Smith 2). One might choose Benjamin Franklin, for instance, to demonstrate belief in the positive transformative power of technology, with Thomas Carlyle demonstrating belief in its negative transformative power (Smith 3). In either case, the <u>newness</u> of technology is critical, offering a sudden, transforming threat or promise. Franklin's stove, for instance, promised radically more efficient and therefore cheaper heating – such a pure and admirable advance that Franklin wanted no remuneration for his invention (1417-18). That same unalloyed good, though, was a threat in Nathaniel Hawthorne's eyes, for whom Franklin's wondrous stove threatened to drain the soul from fire, in "Fire-Worship" (<u>Tales</u> 841-8).

From either viewpoint, mechanical innovation drives history forward. In Robert Heilbroner's formulation, the fact that "machines makes history in some sense- that the level of technology has a direct bearing on the human drama – is of course obvious." We move towards, or are moved towards, depending on how deterministically one formulates it, some point or moment. What are we moving to? Two concepts of this movement are, to borrow Malcolm Bull's wording from his introduction to <u>Apocalypse</u> <u>Theory</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Ends</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>World</u>, "scientific projections of universal catastrophe" and "the Kantian dream of unending progress" (1). We may use our mechanical ingenuity to destroy the world through nuclear war or global warming (Neville Shute's <u>On</u> <u>The</u> <u>Beach</u> may remain the most uncompromising secular vision of this <u>telos</u>), or we may progress eternally in a science-fiction utopia (the "Golden Age" of American science fiction provides many examples). Endless night and endless progress are conventionally our possibilities, at least within the secular realm; when religious ideas are added, the significance of technological innovation can be, as with Francis Bacon, that it will hasten the end of history, bringing us towards the literal <u>telos</u> of Christ's return. <u>Ego</u> <u>to</u> <u>alpha</u> <u>kai</u> <u>to</u> <u>omega,</u>

ho protos kai ho eschatos, hē archē kai to telos, announces Christ near the close of Revelation (Aland, Revelation 22:13). "I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." For Bacon, improved technology will both hasten the end of the world and provide vital weapons against the power of the Antichrist (Pacey, Maze 30).

The convention, then, is that technology offers or threatens a new order (or Jerusalem), potentially a new eternal order. For the moment I'll leave aside the question of whether this convention is true or useful, and focus on another point: "The Pit and the Pendulum" plays with and problematizes the convention. In Poe's story, we aren't presented with a single mechanical telos, but with two, and this duality, mirroring the duality of self that torments his fiction in "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Man of the Crowd," etc., changes everything. Each competing notion of "history" in "The Pit and the Pendulum" wants to impose its own first (protos) and last (eschatos), its own beginning (archē) and its own end (telos), but the larger story is one of a rhythmic motion between the two sets of possibilities.

Whatever else Poe's Inquisition is, it is mechanized in several senses. First, its justice is mechanical, in the sense of seeming implacable (Poe 212). The narrator's contact with them is "as if I had touched the wire of a galvanic battery" (213). The dungeon is a technological wonder, with hinged iron walls which can be uniformly heated while in motion. The pendulum itself can be freely lowered and raised while in motion. The appearance of the pendulum warrants particular attention: "It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum such as we see on antique clocks" (220). The pendulum is supposed to be reminiscent of an antique clock, but is also an effective killing machine, like a guillotine (more

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on this later). As with any clock, it spatializes and demarcates time: in particular, the time before

death. This spatialization of death-time, to coin a phrase, is a mechanical model of an

eschatological understanding of history, in which measured events (driven, perhaps, partially by

technology) lead inevitably to the eschatos. The death-time of the pendulum of the Inquisition's

justice is a scale model of God's own death-time. The clockwork universe ends in a clockwork

apocalypse, if the Inquisition understands history correctly. One barely needs to speculate to

conclude that, like Francis Bacon, the Inquisition hopes to compress the time before the eschatos

through technological innovation; this notion has also appeared in science fiction, for instance in

Arthur C. Clarke's "The Nine Billion Names of God".[10] God's judgement is certain, coming at a

known time, even if only God "knows the hour," like only the Inquisition knows the precise

timing of the pendulum's motions. Immediately before announcing that he is the Alpha and the

Omega, the Christ of Revelation announces Idou erchomai tachu: "surely I am coming soon."

Frederick Winslow Taylor's rhythmic control of workers and of their time resembles nothing so

much as the way in which Poe's Inquisition has mastered time, which in turn is directly rooted in

the supervisory understanding of time established in Revelation.[11]

But for all its mechanical ingenuity, the Inquisition does not understand history correctly.

The narrator's multiple escapes do not, in themselves, cause a problem for the Inquisition, as they

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[10] In fact, Clarke's body of work sometimes seems to be an inventory of eschatologies, technological (2001: A Space Odyssey) and spiritual (Childhood's End), indefinitely delayed (The City and the Stars) and infinitely compressed ("The Nine Billion Names of God").

[11] Although not, I submit, before Revelation. The four gospels, for instance, contain widely differing concepts of time, from the already-finished nature of time in the Gospel of John to the intense now-ness of time's crisis in Mark. Only in Revelation does "our" notion of a prolonged supervision of time emerge.

only mirror the element of free will within the larger deterministic picture, or the lack of certain

foreknowledge of the hour of Christ's return. That the narrator's methodology is a revolutionary

methodology is more of a problem. He deals with his imprisonment by making "effort to

exercise my reason," and he "deduces" his real condition (215). He makes a "circuit" – a

revolution – of his cell, measuring it deliberately; these "researches" are driven only by a "vague

curiosity" (216). In the midst of his terror in the face of the pendulum's death-time he suddenly

masters himself. "For the first time during many hours... I thought," which leads to the

"calculations" that enable him to manipulate rats into freeing him from his bonds (223-4). His

calculated, Enlightenment-style reasoning is insufficient to free him from his prison. But

because he exists within a larger political context, in which the overall cause of the

Enlightenment/revolution is advancing (towards its own telos, not the telos of the Inquisition), he

gains enough time to be freed.

Does this mean that, within Poe's story, the Kantian-teleological concept of time and

technology is victorious over the Christian-teleological concept of time and technology? Hardly!

Despite all the "innovations" of the French Revolution, like total warfare (which, of course, has

antecedents) and the guillotine's industrialization of execution (which is an even earlier version

of the disassembly line than the one Siegfried Giedeon finds in the slaughterhouses of Ohio and

Chicago), it is crushed at the beginning of the story by the counter-revolution, implicitly

associated with the Inquisition. But the mill-wheel revolves: presumably the wheel of history

will turn again, replacing the Christian-teleological understanding of time and technology with

the Kantian-teleological once more. Poe, typically, refuses to turn two into one: there is no

single stable concept of time and technology and the relationship between them; this is a surprising similarity between Poe's work and Ralph Ellison's, the subject of my fifth chapter..

Rather than portraying machinery as being essentially modern, Poe portrays his machines as gothic, with the pendulum seeming like a painting of a pendulum dominated by the image of Father Time. In this story, technology has not erupted onto the stage of history, but is embedded in the medieval as well as in the modern; rather than disrupting or ending history, it has history and continuity. Whether deliberately or by happenstance, Poe's gothic technology makes a vital historical point: to whatever extent machines do or do not make history, they have been doing so for a very long time. The spinning mill-wheel which Poe invokes at the beginning of "The Pit and the Pendulum" was, although still at the core of nineteenth century industry, not a creation of it. According to Lynn White, the Domesday Book, for instance, lists 5,624 mills for 3,000 English communities in 1086, which is one of many pieces of evidence indicating that "by the eleventh century the whole population of Europe was living so constantly in the presence of one major item of power technology that its implications were beginning to be recognized."[12] The medieval use of power technology was so pervasive that some have argued that there was a medieval industrial revolution, one just as worthy of the name as the "Industrial Revolution" of the nineteenth century; Jean Gimpel argues that there were as many as one mill for every fifty households in eleventh century England (12). The medieval use of power technology was certainly not the earliest use of power technology, but it was the most intense up to that point, and therefore, arguably, the most transformative (Pacey, Maze 15). But in the eleventh century,

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[12] White, Lynn. Medieval Technology and Social Change 84. See also Pacey, Maze of Ingenuity, 8.

as now, technology was not used only to be productive, but as a means of social control: powered grain mills and cathedrals (technologically intricate and difficult creations) were used to centralize and symbolize power (Pacey, Maze 3). I'll also note that not only was the Church not opposed to power technology – contrary to a image of an atavistic church which derives from contemporary critiques the church's opposition to Copernicus, as Paul Feyerabend argues in Against Method (1993) – but both the Church as a whole and the Cistercian order in particular were at the forefront of the development and dissemination of power technology:

> The Cistercians, in their rapid expansion throughout Europe, must also have played a role in the diffusion of new techniques, for the high level of their agricultural technology was matched by their industrial technology. Every monastery had a model factory, often as large as the church and only several feet away, and waterpower drove the machinery of the various industries located on its floor.[13]

The real medieval church and the real medieval civilization, contrary to stereotypes, was anything but technologically backwards: this church and civilization were, in fact, mechanically oriented, even industrialized.

Thus Poe's association of the old regimé, the gothic, and medieval religious practices with mechanical ingenuity is, whether on purpose or by accident, no anachronism. Even as the symbolic mill-wheel of history brings both the revolution and the counter-revolution to power, neither the revolution nor the counter-revolution is any stranger to the literal use of power technology, as the dual death machines of the pendulum and the guillotine (implicit in Poe's epitaph about the Jacobins) demonstrate.

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[13] Gimpel 67. See also Lewis Mumford's Technics and Civilization.

Neither in actual history nor in "The Pit and the Pendulum" is the machine a sudden arrival on the scene of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The conflict in Poe's story is not between a progressive, revolutionary, technological world-picture on one hand and an atavistic medieval world-picture on the other, as one might expect in a story about a "recusant" trapped by the Inquisition. Rather, it is about a repeating or oscillating conflict between two concepts of time, technology and progress: a Christian-teleological concept and a Kantian-teleological concept. History is not driven by one technological determinism, but by two. Industry and technology are as medieval as they are modern, as European (and Asian and African) as they are American. The cyclical contest between the two kinds of history, one leading to the Christian telos which is eschatos, and the other leading endless upwards in "purposefulness without purpose," driven by a Kantian or Aristotelian teleology, hints that both conceptions of history are moments or ideas trapped within a larger cyclic history. Can either of these radically different linear understandings of history break free from cyclic history?

Both dueling world-pictures are associated with a death-machine, the pendulum on one hand and the guillotine on the other. In both deterministic accounts of history human life and potentiality are subordinated to mechanical process, rendering life itself mechanical, predetermined. But yet, the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum" is saved, precisely because neither linear-mechanical world-picture is purely dominant within the large cycles, or revolutions, of history. A tiny space is opened for meaningful action and an approximation of free will by the oscillation between counter-revolution and revolution (this anticipates the space Ralph Ellison sets up in his combination of technology and myth). Either form of technological

determinism would, by itself, eliminate human freedom; together, they allow a certain range of motion beyond what either Taylorism or monasticism would permit.

E. THE QUESTION CONCERNING TIME AND TECHNOLOGY

Recall that in Frankenstein, "the organic" wins at least a tentative victory against "the machine." This victory is neither final or heart-warming. When Frankenstein and the monster try to negotiate a settlement, they aim for a pastoral future for the monster and his as-yet un-created mate: "I will go to the vast wilds of South America. My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite... We shall make our bed of dried leaves..." (Shelley 141). The monster wants, in Leo Marx's terminology, to utterly reject "the machine" in favor of "the garden." Curiously, Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden, although it works with the idea of America as the place where the pastoral can be (re)discovered, does not discuss Mary Shelley substantively (100). Instead, Marx simply makes a backhanded reference to "stock expressions" of "the Frankenstein fable: the story of the robot that destroys its heartless creator" (Marx, Machine 184). This conventional postage-stamp simplification of Frankenstein makes it easy to use the novel as an image or straw man standing in for the conflict between man and machine. But this "machine" only wants to enter a garden: Frankenstein is the story of a creator and would-be controller who is not disciplined and mechanical enough himself to impose a mechanical discipline on his creation, and of a creation – or "robot" – who never from the beginning acts predictably or mechanically.

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Marx's failure to attend to the complexities of Shelley's monster, to say nothing of his failure to work with Poe, is significant. Instead of dealing with the long presence or complexity of the machine, he emphasizes the <u>abruptness</u> of the machine's appearance onto a pastoral landscape: "the sudden appearance of machine technology in the underdeveloped 'new world' provided the sensory components of a – perhaps the – great central figurative conception of nineteenth-century American culture" (<u>Machine</u> 184). Granted, he does acknowledge that the machine of the Industrial Revolution is preceded in the philosophy of "Newton, Descartes, and Bacon," but he insists that the ideal of the pastoral was upheld by the "exponents of the Romantic recoil" (<u>Machine</u> 376). He only mentions the origins in order to emphasize the suddenness, never to question it.

Despite being far more knowledgeable than most literary and cultural critics about technology and the history of technology, Leo Marx falls into the trap of seeing the arrival of the machine as sudden and, not only sudden, but recent. He, like many others, downplays the fact, detailed earlier, that "industrialization" and "mechanization" are exceedingly long historical processes which were well underway by the eleventh century, if not earlier (we might, for instance, regard all of our "industrial revolutions" as a sequence of footnotes to the "agricultural revolution" of the late Neolithic). Even the very technologies which were critical to the subdual of the "wild west" – barbed wire, for instance – were well within the practical reach of medieval engineering.[14] This long, textured history of technology and of the machine is, on the other hand,

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[14] Basilla 51. See also White, <u>Medieval Religion and Technology</u>, especially pgs. 112-20. White Points out that mechanical wire-drawing was practical as early as 1490 (114), and also emphasizes that actual technologies were more vital in the conquest of the West than concepts like "Manifest Destiny" (112).

I'm not the first to make the criticism that Leo Marx emphasizes the <u>idea</u> of the machine over

important in such "gothic" writers as Mary Shelley and especially Edgar Allan Poe. For Shelley,

Frankenstein's hyper-modern work is rooted in discredited alchemy; for Poe, "the machine"

belongs as much to the Inquisition as to the Enlightenment.

So why is the idea of "the industrial revolution" and of the sudden appearance of the

machine on the pastoral landscape so powerful and persistent? Why does the long history of

mechanization get buried and replaced with the urgency – whether utopian, dystopian, or

ambivalent – of the machine's sudden arrival? Our dominant accounts of the machine are

teleological, and as often as not explicitly eschatological. The machine makes history; the

machine promises a blessed new order or utter damnation; the machine literally hastens the

coming of the Antichrist, or will allow us to spread liberal democracy across the universe, or at

least Iraq. Perhaps the machine does "drive history"; I'm certainly not one to ignore the

importance of the hydrogen bomb or the McCormick reaper. But the machine which drives

history is also driven <u>by</u> history, that is, by our understanding of history and time. "We" do not

simply observe the machine's suddenness, or merely create it; we insist that it be sudden, and

create an account of the machine which renders its role as <u>telos</u> clear.

Again, I'll note the ironic fact that Leo Marx believed at the time that he wrote <u>The</u>

<u>Machine</u> <u>in</u> <u>the</u> <u>Garden</u> that the conflict between the machine and the garden had come to an end:

"I closed the book in the present tense with the implication that today (1964), in the era of high

technology, the pastoral response to industrial society almost certainly had become anachronistic,

and that it soon might be expected to lose its hold on the minds of disaffected Americans" (384).

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actual machines and technologies (Marx himself acknowledges as much in 2000 afterward to <u>The</u>
<u>Machine in the Garden</u>), but it remains a cogent criticism.

For an apocalyptic writer, <u>now</u> is always the fulcrum on which all time turns; history (which is, as Henri Bergson points out, really the present) is <u>now</u> being swallowed by a new world.   In his late essay "Postmodern Pessimism" Leo Marx recognizes that "the progressive world picture," formed "around the late-eighteenth century idea that modern history itself is a record of progress" is problematic; yet it is this same notion of progress that lies behind his notion (in 1964) that the pastoral had become an anachronism. Leo Marx, following in the footsteps of his intellectual grandfather Lewis Mumford, who will be at the heart of my third chapter, is enmeshed in the same teleology he wants to reject, and he never manages to disentangle his acceptance of it from his rejection of it. What, then, is to be done? How can we arrive at an authentic questioning of the machine as <u>telos</u> and <u>eschatos</u>, which will also be a questioning of teleology and eschatology (in science, in history, in religion) in general? To explore this issue demands nothing less than an understanding of the relationship between time and technology: why is technology persistently linked to "the end," and can it – or should it – be understood differently? I will return to these questions in the my last chapter, but I will lay at least the groundwork, and make an initial attempt at a theoretical answer, in the following section, through an initial exploration of a variety of philosophical texts and figures, including Martin Heidegger, Henri Bergson, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno.

Continuing in a long tradition of eschatological philosophy and history (especially following the messianic thought of Walter Benjamin), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno lay the blame for the desolation of modernity on the tradition of Enlightenment, in their jointly written <u>Dialectic</u> <u>of</u> <u>Enlightenment</u>, as well as in Horkheimer's <u>Eclipse</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reason</u>, both written principally during World War Two. The former begins as follows:

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. (1)

The world disenchanted is the world put to work: in other words, enslaved. "Technology is the essence of knowledge... What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings" (2). Under the growing sway of Enlightenment, animism is destroyed and meaning abandoned; all "Gods and qualities" are destroyed; the whole universe reduced to man's prey (3-6). In the "mathematization of nature," traced back to Galileo, "Thought is reified as an autonomous, automatic process, aping the machine it has itself produced, so that it can finally be replaced by the machine" (19). Finally, reason becomes purely instrumental, serving "as a universal tool for the fabrication of all other tools, rigidly purpose-directed..." (23). Reason enslaves the whole world, turning it into a mere, undifferentiated heap of matter and energy; Enlightenment, or technological Reason, or the Logos, becomes only means, and yet this means is enthroned as the only possible end. Doom seems complete and

omnipresent, although always looming in the background is the messianic promise of Horkheimer and Adorno's colleague Benjamin's philosophy of history. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin assails the enslavement of nature in favor of its transformation, praising Fourier as opposed to vulgar Marxism:

> The new conception of labor amounts to the exploitation of nature, which with naïve complacency is contrasted with the exploitation of the proletariat. According to Fourier, as a result of efficient cooperative labor, four moons would illuminate the earthly night, the ice would recede from the poles, sea water would no longer taste salty, and beasts of prey would do man's bidding. All this illustrates a kind of labor which, far from exploiting nature, is capable of delivering her of the creations which lie dormant in her womb as potentials (Illuminations 259).

In this school of messianic thought, spurred on by the threat of fascism and the gathering horror of technological Domination, the world calls out for redemption:

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only when he encounters it as a monad. In this structure, he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past (Benjamin, Illuminations 262-3).

The brutal tyranny of technological Reason can be confronted by arresting it in thought, a kind of thinking which, it is hoped, will lead to the utopian transformation not only of humanity and human relationships, but of nature and the earth itself: the "arresting of happening," the

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"crystallization of the monad" seemingly allows the flow of time to be mastered, or at least surveyed in such a way that it can be wholly known and understood.

Benjamin's Messianic cessation is, of course, related to various Biblical moments, including the appearance of the resurrected Christ in all four gospels in their most popular form, in which history is assigned a final meaning, but curiously unlike the original ending of Mark, the oldest gospel, which has been uncovered only by textual scholarship; the original text closes with the entry of the women into Christ's empty tomb, and their terror at its emptiness, in Mark 16:1-8: there is no actual encounter with an angel or the resurrected Christ, but only openness, possibility and fear. Like Benjamin's messianic moment, the original text of Mark is pregnant with tensions; unlike it, those tensions have no hope of crystallizing, of becoming comprehensible. In Mark, always sparse, the curtain of the temple is rent at the moment of Christ's death, and the meaning of that tear is left unresolved; in Matthew, to the contrary, assorted clarifying miracles are heaped on after the rending. In Mark, the possibilities ensuing from the torn curtain and then the opened tomb are terrifyingly open; in Matthew, etc., the full results of the messianic moment are known and foreclosed, as they are in the fully logocentric text of the gospel of John.

In the dominant Biblical texts, including even the familiar, "finished" – that is, maimed – version of Mark, the messianic moment is known, its potentiality explored, its revolutionary power exhausted (as Benjamin's messianism is seemingly exhausted for Horkheimer and Adorno, writing Dialectic of Enlightenment). The original version of Mark, though, cannot be crystallized or turned into a monad, for it ends with an opening into a terror which is also the fullness of possibility. The original ending of Mark could no more be integrated into an

institution than the gnostic gospels, and its suppression was equally vital to the formation of the church. Frank Kermode, in The Genesis of Secrecy, comments on both the impossibility of the institutional assimilation of the original ending of Mark and "The conviction that Mark cannot have meant this or that is a conviction of a kind likely to have been formed by an institution... one may, without violating the institutional consensus, prepare a text that conforms with one's own rigid fore-understanding of its sense" (71). That is to say, when the meaning of Mark is frozen into a monad, when it is supervised by knowledge from the other gospels and from the church, it can be interpreted. But when we approach Mark (especially the original Mark) without fore-knowledge, what we discover is "something irreducible, therefore perpetually to be interpreted; not secrets to be found out one by one, but Secrecy" (Kermode 143).

All of which is to say that Benjamin's messianic moment, or monad, like the dominant Biblical messianic moments (but unlike the originary and yet outsider text of Mark) is complete, closed, and wholly self-sufficient, such that, following Leibniz's Monadology, "Every present state in a simple substance [Monad[15]] is a natural consequence of its preceding state, in such a way that its present is big with its future" (256). The crystallization of Benjamin's messianic moment is, as with the messianic moment of Revelation (Christ's Ego to alpha kai to omega, ho protos kai ho eschatos, hē archē kai to telos), the crystallization (spatialization) of all time.

Curiously, although Benjamin asserts that a new kind of labor will "deliver" nature of her creations rather than exploiting her, the difference between a future in which nature is "exploited" and a future in which the beasts of prey "do man's bidding" is by no means clear.

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[15] "The Monad, of which we will speak here, is nothing else than a simple substance, which goes to make up composites" (Leibniz, 251).

In Benjamin's messianic moment, which is intimately and explicitly related to Biblical texts, time is frozen and known; the earth is remade, transformed (if only in thought) to bring forth its full potential. Is this not Domination?

Tellingly, when Horkheimer and Adorno assail Francis Bacon in <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u> as the originator of the disenchantment and enslavement of nature, they omit Bacon's dream of using "disenchanted nature" to hasten the Antichrist's coming, and to make weapons against him (1, 34; Pacey, <u>Maze</u> 30). Bacon's vision of technological domination, like Benjamin's "deliverance," is explicitly eschatological: nature will be made new, in a particular way. How different is Bacon's <u>eschatos</u> from Benjamin's?

This aspect of Benjamin's thought, the manner in which his eschatology clearly mirrors other technological eschatologies, may explain part of Horkheimer and Adorno's reluctance to create their own technological-utopian fantasy – but even they cannot resist one small step in that direction, when they lay out one of the reasons that "political reality" is literally insane: "Although the abundance of goods which could be produced everywhere and simultaneously makes the struggle for raw materials and markets seem ever more anachronistic, humanity is nevertheless divided into a small number of armed power blocs" (<u>Dialectic</u> 169).

Although there is surely a sense in which the ability of industrial civilizations to produce material goods is astounding, the belief that the struggle for "raw materials and markets" was becoming anachronistic shows a boundless, teleological faith in the potential of technological domination, a belief which should have been as open to question, if for different reasons, in 1947 as it is now, an era in which, in Roy Porter's dry words, "the Darwinian evolutionary battle between mankind and microbes is itself unpredictable" (<u>Benefit</u> 715). Not only should

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humanity's ability to dominate "nature" (as if there was one such monolithic entity) be in doubt, but the ability of nature to deliver the goods should also have been (and continue to be) in doubt: all technological wizardry aside, wartime Britain and Germany were hardly able to feed themselves. "Nature" does not answer all questions which are put to it in the affirmative – a point of particular importance and particular difficulty to get across in the United States, and a point which goes to the heart of the Frankfurt school's presence in the United States.

Adorno and Horkheimer's associate and sometime collaborator Herbert Marcuse, who was also Martin Heidegger's pupil, made arguments about technological Domination which were interdependent with theirs and Benjamin's, as well as with Heidegger's evolving thought on technology, most famously in One-Dimensional Man (1964). Marcuse's thought is of particular importance not only because of its connection to semi-mainstream American politics, but because it reveals the essential similarity of two major, apparently oppositional lines of twentieth-century thought on technology.

In his 1941 article "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology," published in the Frankfurt institute's journal Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, Marcuse, operating under the direct, cited influence of Lewis Mumford's Technics and Civilization (1934), makes an articulate distinction between Technics and technology, which many other thinkers on technology leave implicitly distinct but don't discuss explicitly.

> In this article, technology is taken as a social process in which Technics proper (that is, the technical apparatus of industry, transportation, communication) is but a partial factor. We do not ask for the influence or effect of technology on the human individuals. For they are themselves an integral part and factor of technology... Technology, as a mode of

production, as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterize the

machine age is thus at the same time a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing)

social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patters, an

instrument for control and domination. (42)

Drawing on Mumford and Veblen, Marcuse argues that all human spontaneity has been

transferred to machinery, with individual achievement being transformed into "standardized

efficiency" (44). That is, under technology, humanity is collectivized. But Marcuse warns

against critics of Technics as such, aligning them with fascism:

> The technological process itself furnishes no justification for such a collectivism.
>
> Technics hampers individual development only insofar as they are tied to a social
>
> apparatus which perpetuates scarcity, and this same apparatus has released forces which
>
> may shatter the special historical form in which technics is utilized. For this reason, all
>
> programs of an anti-technological character, all propaganda for an anti-industrial
>
> revolution serve only those who regard human needs as a by-product of the utilization of
>
> technics. The enemies of technics readily join forces with a terroristic technocracy
>
> [Nazism]. (63)

The problem is not machines as such, not technics, but the technological <u>system</u>, which assumes

its totalizing, dominating character by creating and enforcing scarcity. At this point, one

certainly can't be blamed for wondering what, exactly, the technological "system" has to do with

technics as such. And here lies the unspoken fulcrum of Marcuse's argument, which is still

present but even more completely silent in Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as their antecedents

right and left, including Marx and Carlyle. The connection between the technics which "hampers

individual development" to the "social apparatus which perpetuates scarcity" is simply asserted.

The "special historical form" in which "technics is utilized" is so readily apparent that it doesn't

even need to be defined; it is so obvious that we live "under industrialism" or "in the machine

age" (as it obvious was for Karl Marx and Carlyle, of course), that we need not attend to the

question of what industrialism is, or how it is differentiated from other historical moments or

states of being. The division between this historical moment and all prior historical moments is

so abrupt, so absolute, that only those blind to the eschatological event (that is, those utterly

ensnared by the system) could fail to perceive it. But as I have discussed elsewhere, the eruption

of the machine into the garden has been perceived as eschatological for some time, by a wide

array of thinkers – and yet, examination of technological change reveals that not only the West

but also the world have been far more mechanized for far longer than we tend to immediately

recognize, and that technological change has been far more incremental.

But under technological domination as the Frankfurt school understands it, time is

bifurcated into "before technology" and "after technology": the culture industry threatens to

replace art, manipulated abundance replaces true scarcity, domination replaces a contingent

freedom. These tendencies, already well-developed in Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse's work

of the 1940s, acquire a different prophetic glow in Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man – different

because in the midst of the completion of technological domination, a potential utopia grows:

> The technological processes of mechanization and standardization might release
>
> individual energy into a yet uncharted realm of freedom beyond necessity. The very
>
> structure of human existence would be altered; the individual would be liberated from the
>
> work world's imposing upon him alien needs and alien possibilities... If the productive

apparatus could be organized and directed toward the satisfaction of the vital needs, its

control might well be centralized; such control would not prevent individual autonomy,

but render it possible. (2)

The fact that the near-effortless satisfaction of vital needs is possible is simply asserted – it is a

non-problem. The efficacy of technological domination is known and trusted. Its efficacy is as

obvious as the very gulf between technological and pre-technological civilization.

But, as in "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology," Marcuse is clear on one

issue: the essence of technological civilization belongs to no particular technology.

Technological Domination emerges, rather, from a technological worldview, which is rooted in

Western science (and the metaphysics behind it), which "freed nature from inherent ends and

stripped matter of all but quantifiable qualities" (157). This technological worldview, rather than

emerging from, say, the impact of heavy industry, emerges from the history of philosophy,

including the use of slave labor in ancient Greece and Plato's prioritization of Logos over Eros

(147). The technological worldview, although tied to no particular technology, is certainly

related to the sum total of the impact and potential of all technologies, which enables the

strengthening of Domination even as its yoke seems to be lifted. In a paragraph which introduces

and summarizes a chapter on the one-dimensional (oriented towards one reality rather than

towards a dialectical struggle with reality) nature of technological thought, Marcuse writes:

In the social reality, despite all change, the domination of man by man is still the

historical continuum that links pre-technological and technological Reason. However,

the society which projects and undertakes the technological transformation of nature

alters the base of domination by gradually replacing personal dependence (of the slave on

the master..) ... With dependence on the "objective order of things" (on economics laws,

the market etc... domination now generates a higher rationality – that of a society which

sustains its hierarchic structure while exploiting ever more efficiently the natural and

mental resources, and distributing the benefits of this exploitation on an ever-larger scale.

The limits of this rationality, and its sinister force, appear in the progressive enslavement

of man by a productive apparatus which perpetuates the struggle for existence and

extends it to a total international struggle which ruins the lives of those who build and use

this apparatus. (144)

At the very core of this remarkable paragraph, which draws on several traditions to develop a

near-total condemnation of the contemporary "enlightened" West while yet acknowledging its

merits, lies a central belief which is also at the root of the ideologies which Marcuse (and

Horkheimer, Adorno and Benjamin) opposes: the belief in the manifest reality of linear,

directional progress. For all that Marcuse opposes technological reason, he believes that it

generates a <u>higher</u> rationality than pre-technological Reason; the abrupt rupture between pre-

technological and technological thought is also an ascension (albeit partially an ascension into

tyranny), which opens up at least the remote hope of a utopian turn. In fact, Marcuse implicitly

criticizes technological Reason for being <u>in</u>sufficiently directional and linear, by stripping nature

of an internal teleology (147). Marcuse accepts without question that the technological

worldview is essentially Western, that it is essentially contemporary, that we can speak

objectively of contemporary technology and technological Reason being <u>more</u> than other

technologies and Reasons, that science drives technology and that metaphysics drives science.

But the history of science and the history of technology are <u>not</u> one, and the assumed relationship

is wrong; technology, even "machine technology" is old, and while eliding science and technology together (into "technoscience," for instance) may serve some legitimate political purposes, it also causes problems, for to whatever degree science and technology are now one, this oneness is very recent: "Indeed, contemporary technology seems to have had a greater effect on science than the other way around, and one needs to be wary of concluding that the modern alliance of science and technology appeared with the Scientific Revolution" (Dorn and McClellan 269). Only with the turn of engineering towards science is technoscience created, around the end of the nineteenth century.[16] We easily forget that relatively recently engineering required little or no formal education; my own great-grandfather, who designed and built machines by eye, serves as a case in point. The history of technology, being, in Siegfried Giedion terminology from Mechanization Takes Command largely an anonymous history, partially because of the oft-noted, partially class-based inability or disinclination of most engineers until relatively recently to write about their works, is easily devoured by the histories of philosophy and science, which have no such reticence. This anonymity (and marginality) has many causes, of course, but it also serves various purposes: it ensures that we are always at a new and wondrous or critical technological moment, perhaps an eschatological moment. Consider, for instance, the recent ubiquity of grandiose claims for the transformative power of the Internet, which do not consider the granularity of changes in communications technology and techniques, from the development of postal services and signaling systems to the telegraph, telephone, modem, and finally the Internet. The granularity is skipped: we are in or at the brink of a revolution. The relevant must be new.

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[16] See David Noble's America By Design as one excellent resource on this subject.

Marcuse's particular attack on the modern technological system is based partially on the undefended assertion that this "system" is based on a cohesive (scientific, metaphysical) technological worldview – an assertion which does not mesh well with the eternally ad-hoc nature of most technological practice, and even of scientific practice – a subject which Paul Feyerabend details in Against Method, in which he asserts that the only workable motto for Science would be "anything goes." Marcuse operates under the assumption that technological reasoning is fundamentally scientific and systematic, while, as discussed earlier, the actual relationship between formal science and technology is both late and tenuous, and while even "mathematical" science is far less systematic than it appears.

One particular element of Marcuse's belief that deserves further mention is the belief that the "technological transformation" of nature is essentially modern. But humanity has been massively transforming its environment since, at the latest, the discovery of fire: the "natural" landscapes so admired by many writers who constructed the New World as an Eden, for instance, had been radically shaped for millennia by the deliberate and widespread use of fire. This issue, and similar related issues, is discussed at great length in Shepard Krech's oft-caricatured The Ecological Indian: Myth and History (2000). Which is not to say that there is no distinction to be made between the details of how the technological transformation of nature works, for instance, among the canal-building peoples of Arizona in comparison to the contemporary United States: Krech's book is not an apologetics for our own ecological travesties. His purpose (as well as my own), rather, is to strip away a veil of romanticization, which conceals that "aboriginal" peoples, too, "transform nature," and can and do think of nature instrumentally. Our essentially Romantic tendency to believe the contrary says far more about our insistence on understanding technology

teleologically and eschatologically than they do about the actual practices of "aboriginal" peoples.

For Marcuse, as for other members of the Frankfurt school and many previous thinkers, the difference between technological and pre-technological civilization is essentially a question of world-view, or World Picture, rather than of particular technologies as such. "Technology has replaced ontology," is how Marcuse puts it most succinctly in "From Ontology to Technology." Put another way, as Samir Gandesha does in "Marcuse, Habermas and Technology," the technological system or worldview is not merely instrumental, but paradigmatic (203). Gandesha explains Marcuse's understanding of technology through Thomas Kuhn's paradigmatic understanding of science, as articulated in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1970), according to which scientific development is straightforwardly accumulative, but that anomalies accumulate along with refinement, such that eventually a scientific "revolution" and a complete new paradigm, exemplified by the transition from Newtonian to relativistic physics, is required to make sense of the world; there is a fundamental gap or barrier between the old and new paradigms, such that, in Kuhn's terminology, the two paradigms are fully incommensurable, with no equivalence being possible between them. Gandesha's interpretation of Marcuse by way of Kuhn is convincing: we are currently fully enveloped, according to Marcuse, by a one-dimensional technological worldview, which has fully replaced the two-dimensional dialectical way of understanding the world – and yet we cannot simply return to that paradigm, any more than Newtonian physics can be resurrected. Even in the midst of Domination, though, we may be drawing close to another Kuhnian "paradigm shift."

The problem with Gandesha's argument is also a problem with Marcuse, not to mention Adorno, Horkheimer, etc.: they take a highly abstract, philosophical and mathematical understanding of the sciences, based heavily on a particular view of physics, and then apply it to "technology" as a whole, as if technology is nothing but applied science, when even the history of machine technology as we know it extends back, at the least, into medieval Europe. Andrew Feenberg, in fact, begins to make this point in the final pages of <u>Heidegger</u> <u>and</u> <u>Marcuse</u>: <u>The</u> <u>Catastrophe</u> <u>and</u> <u>Redemption</u> <u>of</u> <u>History</u> (2005), arguing that Marcuse "emphasizes that reason is bound to civilizational projects but he cannot explain concretely how this actually plays out because he confuses two very different levels of rationality. The level of natural scientific abstractions must be distinguished from the concrete technical disciplines through which those abstractions become historically active" (132). Marcuse attempts, starting in "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology," to distinguish between technics and technology, while explaining the relationship between them, but this attempt is never entirely successful, and if he cannot show how particular technics relate to technology (as domination) as a whole, then he cannot show that the technological system, in fact, belongs to any particular time – that is, our time.

Even Feenberg, in discussing Marcuse's error, repeats it to some extent, by assuming the priority of science over technology. The history of technology is devoured by the history of science, which in turn is made subordinate to the history of metaphysics: the printing press and the culture industry, the organ and the mechanization of music, cannons, warships and the mechanization of war all become mere consequences of a certain philosophical worldview which more likely was slowly created in their wake. And yet, as Donna Haraway demonstrates in

Crystals, Fabrics and Fields (1976), it is problematic at best to apply a Kuhnian notion of (eschatological) revolutions even to biology, which is at least a formal scientific discipline; to apply such a conceptual structure to technology should seem far more perilous, but is nevertheless an intellectual habit, driven by the belief, regardless of whether one criticizes or praises it, in teleological, eschatological technological progress. In the absence of attention to the historical details of how technology actually unfolds in history (as in Basilla's The Evolution of Technology and Arnold Pacey's Technology in World History), it is easy, even obvious, to fall into thinking about the history of technology as a process of discontinuity and separation, in which technology moves from being the realization of "objective essences inscribed in the nature of the universe" to being "purely instrumental, value free" (Feenberg, Catastrophe 12). The essential problem with this way of understanding technology and its history, as exemplified by a variety of the figures whom I have discussed, is that technology does not essentially belong to the history of philosophical Reason, but to the history of reason as based in action, a point I will later discuss in relationship to Bergson.

Marcuse's eschatological critique of a technological worldview which is not, itself, derivative of any particular technology or set of technologies, is deeply connected to Marx and the Frankfurt school, but is equally indebted to the most persistently relevant reactionary philosophical critic of technology of the last century, Martin Heidegger: biographically, Marcuse went from being a Marxist to one of Heidegger's students (and still a crypto-Marxist), to being a member of the Frankfurt school, partially in response to Heidegger's embrace of Nazism in 1933, but intellectually he was always in tension with Heidegger, as John Abromeit details in "Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Heidegger," and yet he never fully broke with him

intellectually. Marcuse's understanding of technology, in particular, always drew both on the history of Marxism and on Heidegger.

But this should be no cause for wonder, for there are deep similarities between the account of technology in Adorno and Horkheimer on the one hand and Heidegger on the other. Andrew Feenberg argues that in Adorno, Horkheimer and Heidegger, Platonic ethical questions have become displaced by modern technology:

> The ethical problem of right and might is superseded by the ontological problem of the destructive transformation technology operates on both its users and its objects. We are less worried about whether Callicles' descendants have the right to rule us than with whether the world they dominate can survive the means set in motion by their vaulting ambition. (Catastrophe 14)

Despite the fact that Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse are operating from the political left, and Heidegger is operating from the far right, all four assume that there has been a fundamental transformation both in the nature of technology and, accordingly, in the nature of human Being, and that another utter, eschatological transformation is absolutely necessary.

Heidegger's terminology differs greatly from that of the others, but the substance of his understanding of technology is much the same. Rüdiger Safranksi's intellectual biography of Heidegger places him in a family of thought which sees Hobbesian materialism, in which humanity is seen as a machine, as a choice: "We are free to make ourselves into machines" (31). Safranski reminds us that Heidegger's Germany was saturated by visions of a technological apocalypse, for instance in Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West, a work which has also been influential in American circles (92). In Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity, Michael

Zimmerman gives a much more detailed discussion of Heidegger's indebtedness to a variety of reactionary texts which predicted an array of technological apocalypses; again, Oswald Spengler qualifies as an influence on Heidegger, but Zimmerman demonstrates in detail the greater influence of Ernst Jünger, who envisioned a future humanity which would fully embrace and submit to machines as "organs of power" (46-7). But while Heidegger, following Jünger and in step with National Socialism, believed that "humanity must submit to the technological Gestalt," he believed (according to Zimmerman), that this did not mean accepting oneself as an object or an instrument, but "being open to the bodily pain and spiritual grief associated with the technological domination of humanity and the earth. Only such submission would make possible the fulfillment of the technological destiny, so that thereafter a new start could be made" (Zimmerman 89-90).

Heidegger's infamous embrace of Nazism was at least partially driven by the belief that Nazism could oppose the "technological frenzy" of America and Russia; Nazism could, in essence, offer an organic world-picture rather than a mechanical one. In An Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger writes:

> Russia and America, seen metaphysically, are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man. When the farthest corner of the globe has been conquered technologically and can be exploited economically; when any incident you like, in any place you like, at any time you like, becomes instantly accessible... when time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from all Dasein of all peoples... what then? (40)

As with many other thinkers, including those of the Frankfurt school (not, for the most part, including Habermas), Heidegger believes that the fundamental problem of technological thinking is that it flattens or even in a sense abolishes time, eliminating true historical Being. In some ways anticipating the anti-globalization movement (which, while primarily leftist, draws considerable support from the populist, proto-fascist elements of the far right), Heidegger argued later in his career "in his lectures on Hölderlin [that] dwelling occurs only when entities are 'gathered' (versammelt) into a world in which the integrity of things is preserved. Such a world would be intrinsically 'local,' bound up with place in a way wholly foreign to the planetary reach of modern technology" (151). Modern technology is essentially wrong and dangerous because it uproots connections to place and history, turning all things and people into mere instruments. Because technology threatens to displace time as it is normally understood, a response to it demands nothing other than total transformation, in Heidegger's case, a rediscovery of an early Greek orientation towards the world. Heidegger takes it for granted that the spatialization of time can be literalized, that history really can be destroyed, that we really are standing on the brink of doom.[17] The correctness or applicability of teleology and spatialized time to all things never comes under question and hence, inevitably, Heidegger anticipates the eschatos.

At some point during or at the end of World War Two, Heidegger came to understand, not precisely that the Nazis had been wrong, but that he had been wrong to see Nazism as the

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[17] By making the "meaning of Being" into Time, instead of revealing Being itself to be duration, Heidegger becomes in some ways an echo of Bergson, certainly in Heidegger's own project of erecting a firewall between the Organic and the Mechanical. The point for Bergson is that, as in Frankenstein, living time can never be spatialized, and living things can never be fully mastered; the firewall between the Organic and the Mechanical is intrinsic to the nature of time. It needs articulated, but it doesn't require Fascism (or capitalism, etc.) to defend it.

world's last best hope against the machine's sudden (infinitely fast, history-destroying) entry into the garden. Heidegger still hoped for "the Occidental," the Organic, but, according to Safranski, he came to believe that "Official Germany can no longer be its location, for there, as Heidegger keeps reiterating, the 'machine economy' and man's degradation into mere material have been victorious.'" (Safranski 329). Technological domination, as for Horkheimer and Adorno, seems more and more inescapable.

In the post-war "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger assumes that modern technology is essentially different from previous technologies:

> The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such. But does this not hold for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it. . . . The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. . . . (14)

The world under the gaze of the modern technological mind becomes Enframed: it becomes standing reserve, to use two of Heidegger's key terms. The terminology is powerful and remains useable in spite of the gaping flaws in the argument – and there are gaping flaws. Heidegger assumes the otherness of "modern" technology: the hydroelectric dam and the steam engine are essentially different from the windmill, the peasant's farm essentially different from the mine. But mining, like agriculture, has been a human activity for thousands of years. If mining is modern technology, then we have always been modern. As I discussed earlier, coal has been used in European industry for many centuries, and understood within its original mining context,

the steam engine shows great continuity with earlier mining technologies. As Arnold Pacey details, following David Nye, Leo Marx's "middle landscape" – equivalent to Heidegger's own pastoral ideal, which is theoretically rooted in Hölderin and the German peasantry – was never anything but technological: "The middle landscape was essentially a remade garden, harmonizing with nature to a degree, but artificial in its control of planting and wildlife and its use of machines. Moreover, the early phases of industrialization could often fit neatly into this middle landscape."[18] Medieval Europe was, in fact, a civilization thoroughly enough mechanized that Lynn White argues that it rested not "on the back of sweating slaves or coolies but primarily on non-human power" (Religion 22). Medieval European technology, as detailed throughout Arnold Pacey's Technology in World History, is fully continuous with earlier technologies and the technologies of other parts of the world, from the Middle East to China and India. The machine is precisely rooted in what Heidegger sees as the garden. Heidegger, like many Romantics before him, bases his attack on modern technology on an idealized vision of peasant life which has limited historical validity: the late German model of agriculture (in opposition to various forms of nomadism – Deleuze's thought, following Bergson, is an important response to this model – and limited-tenure, slash-and-burn agriculture which for the most part historically preceded it) becomes the model for authentic Being itself. The same is true, albeit to a lesser extent, for Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse.

Heidegger's eschatological response to what he perceives as the eschatological power of modern technology (differentiated from pre-modern technology in an essentially Romantic way)

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[18] Pacey, Meaning 139. Also see David Nye's American Technological Sublime.

calls for a "turn," which will emerge from the heart of modern technology itself: the way out is through, and the critical moment (as always) is <u>now</u>.

> Yet when destining reigns in the mode of Enframing, it is the supreme danger... As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, he then comes to the brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. ("Question" 27)

If we are to be saved, according to Heidegger, interpreting the poetry of Holderlin, it will be by discovering a saving power in the presence of technology: "Thus the coming to presence of technology harbors in itself what we least suspect, the possible arising of the saving power" ("Question" 32). Grace descends at the Omega moment: a familiar story. But Heidegger's notion of the saving power is based in art – more precisely, in a primordial connection between art and technology:

> There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name <u>technē</u>. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearing also was called <u>technē</u>.
>
> Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called <u>technē</u>. And the <u>poiēsis</u> of the fine arts was also called <u>technē</u>. (34)

Through art (principally poetry), the original meaning – or a new meaning based in the original meaning – of <u>technē</u> can be restored, or so we can hope. The hope is that through the sheer

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extremity of technological domination, the true essence of technology can be revealed. "The frenziedness of technology may entrench itself everywhere to such an extent that someday, throughout everything technological, the essence of technology may come to presence..." (35). But only through art, "a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it," can the reflection upon technology take place, but "only if reflection on art... does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are questioning."

In Heidegger's thought, modern technology is utterly divided from pre-modern technology, and also from its own essence, which can only be understood through art, an argument which is also the primary theme of Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man (238). For Heidegger, unlike for Marcuse, the "turn" in technology is not essentially political, but ontological – it concerns understanding the essence of technology, rather than anything as worldly as technological means and ends; as Zimmerman summarizes it, for Heidegger modern technology is not essentially "a development within the history of humanity" – it is a development within the history of being (166). For Marcuse and other critics on the left, the problem of modern technology does belong to the history of humanity, and the eschatological "turn" to be hoped for in the history of technology involves physical and cultural transformations, the "pacification of nature," in Marcuse's terminology. As with Heidegger, so with Marcuse: there is a potential in the essence of technology (to be revealed artistically) which is utterly different than Domination, but in Marcuse's case, the eschatological promise is relentlessly material, as it is in Benjamin's:

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To the degree to which the goal of pacification determines the Logos of technics, it alters

the relation between technology and its primary object, Nature. Pacification presupposes

mastery of Nature, which is and remains the object opposed to the developing subject.

But there are two kinds of mastery: a repressive and a liberating one. The latter involves

the reduction of misery, violence, and cruelty. In Nature as well as in History, the

struggle for existence is the token of scarcity, suffering, and want. (Marcuse, <u>One-</u>

<u>Dimensional</u> 236)

For Marcuse, as for the authors of Isaiah, who dream of the wolf lying down with the lamb and

the leopard with the kid, nature itself must be physically remade (Isaiah 11:6). In fact, Marcuse

explicitly invokes the notion of what Leo Marx would call the "middle landscape"; the proper

destination of humanity lies in a transformation of nature which will make it into a garden, with

the garden being idealized, because "Cultivation of the soil is qualitatively different from

destruction of the soil, extraction of natural resources from wasteful exploitation... Civilization

has achieved this ... liberating transformation in its gardens and parks and reservations" (240).

Nature is to be saved, not with teeth intact, but as a permanently ordered and obedient

subject; it is to be pacified for its own benefit, as well as humanity's.

In short, for all of the complexities of Heidegger and the Frankfurt's schools

understandings of technology, both ultimately idealize the same "middle state" – localized and

agricultural – which Leo Marx shows is idealized through the history of American political and

literary writing. In all of these cases, a machine erupts onto the stage of history, threatening

humanity and even, in a sense, time itself. A purely instrumental way of interacting with the

world replaces one which was tied intimately with the world – but this intimate tie is a tie with

pacified, agriculture "nature." The crisis is recent and the turning point of the crisis is <u>now</u>. Heidegger and Marcuse are not (at least in their discussions of technology) essentially different from dozens or hundreds of other believers in a technological <u>eschatos</u>.

Why, then, the insistence on understanding the incremental and complex process of technological change and development in terms of revolution and apocalypse? Why the persistent tendency to see modernity and modern technology as fundamentally other than the past and past technologies? Why do "we" – that is, intellectuals – almost invariably see technological change as being both eschatological and teleological? And what, if anything, is to be done?

Although these are questions which will animate the rest of this project, I will now begin, as Heidegger might say, to open a way for these questions.

Heidegger and Marcuse, like many before and since, are simply wrong to see a discontinuity, a <u>gap</u>, between "traditional" and "modern" technology. The machine does not arrive abruptly, but incrementally, and if there is a world-view characteristic of the users of modern technology – call it Enframing – then there is no particular reason to see it as arriving abruptly instead of incrementally. The insistence of most recent thinkers on speaking of the "essence" or the "nature" of modern technology is fundamentally a prejudice and a set of blinders, inherited from Kant and Aristotle among others. Modern technology does differ from "other" technologies, but the devil is in the details, not in the "essence." It is critical to wrestle with technology as an incremental, or better, following Henri Bergson, an <u>evolutionary</u> process – and moreover, one that does not belong only to humanity. Heidegger himself demonstrates one peril of believing in the machine's eschatological suddenness: horror of the "frenziedness" of American and Russian technology drove him to see the Nazis as the garden's defenders, against

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the Soviet-American machine. Seeing the Nazis as gardeners is a natural consequence of eschatological, teleological thought, always obsessed with Destiny. If the conflict between Nazis, Americans and Soviets had anything to do with technology (and it surely does) then the opposing technologies are more analogous to the complex, historically specific opposing technologies of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" than to, say, the apocalyptic divide between Henry Adams' Dynamo on the one hand and the pastoral scenes of his youth (and the pastoral vision of the Virgin) on the other.

I have discussed in detail why technological change should be understood as a far more granular and incremental process than it usually is, and why it should be understood as being less rational than it usually is. Power or machine technology is based, at the latest, in Medieval Europe, not in the "industrial revolution" of the nineteenth century; the sophistication of pre-modern and non-European technologies is often underrated; an obsession with mechanical artifacts rather than the whole complex of technique-tool-container similarly leads to underestimating "other" technologies; the fact that both actual technologies and literary works dealing with technology precede the "mechanistic" philosophies of science which are supposed to generate those same technologies is ignored. The belief in the machine's time-shattering entrance into the garden is just as fundamentally rooted in ideology – specifically, in an ideology of progress, albeit sometimes an inverted notion of progress – as the beliefs of any eschatological technological enthusiast. Both critics and enthusiasts, political leftists and reactionaries ascribe to a few central belief: that technology is sudden, that its moment is now, and that some kind of telos or logos drives it, towards some end, whether it be wondrous or terrible.

Even those who view technology most deterministically tend to acknowledge that there is, or should be, a human element within it: that technology is, has been, or ought to be a human means for human ends; apologists for modern technology, with important exceptions, tend to ascribe to this line of thinking: Habermas, for instance, emphasizes the humanity of technology in his critiques of Marcuse's technological thought (Vogel 243). A deep confidence that technology is and can be regulated by human reason for human ends lies, for instance, at the heart of Habermas' The Future of Human Nature, a meditation on genetic engineering which is reasonable to the point of being half-witted. Habermas's ever-careful and measured argument ends on a Kantian note: "This reading leads to the question I have dealt with elsewhere: Would not the first human being to determine, at his own discretion, the natural essence of another human being at the same time destroy the equal freedoms that exist among persons of equal birth in order to ensure their difference" (115). This supremely, even sublimely liberal critique of unrestrained gene manipulation (which nonetheless is confident in the capabilities of limited and regulated gene manipulation) ends on Leo Marx's divide between organism and machine: we must draw the line in genetic engineering at making the essence of another human being. The human "essence" must not be a made thing, that is, technē. This is the line which neither liberal nor reactionary can cross.

But the line between modern and pre-modern technology is absurd, as is the line between bios and technē, as is the line between manufactured life and life which has its own "natural" essence. Life makes and is made – contemporary humanity may manipulate the environment in a particular way, but the environment in its entirety, and all environments, is made by life, as R.C. Lewontin (a geneticist who is, among other things, a critic of the deterministic and capitalist

ideology he sees at work in most contemporary biology) points out in <u>Biology</u> <u>as</u> <u>Ideology</u>:

"Organisms do not experience environments. They create them" (109). Life creates its world, and, in a way, the life around it. Genetic engineering is certainly perilous – more so than even Habermas acknowledges, I would argue – but it threatens no original true essence, for the essence of life is to create and be created. Even the very notion of "species" has become problematic, which badly undercuts the idea that the idea of "essence" is anything but an intellectual chimera.

The argument that modern thought mathematizes and spatializes Time is central to most philosophical critiques of technology; a curious attribute of this critique of mathematized, spatialized time is that the critics themselves accept this model: we are approaching a known, theorized, analyzed destination. In other words, the critics of spatialized time tend to accept that spatialized time <u>works</u>, that it really reduces the world to raw materials or standing-reserve. One remarkable exception is Henri Bergson, who criticizes not the ontological or ethical impact of spatialized time, but rather the reality or effectiveness of that model.

Bergson writes on the persistent illusion of the suddenness and discreetness of change, arguing that it is easier and more natural to think in terms of discrete change and spatialized time – because spatializing time is natural to thought, if not to sensation – than thinking in terms of evolution:

> In vain, therefore, does life evolve before our eyes as a continuous creations of
> unforeseeable form: the idea always persists that form, unforseeability and continuity are
> mere appearance – the outward reflection of our own ignorance. What is presented to the
> senses as a continuous history would break up, we are told, into a series of successive
> states. (<u>Creative</u> 30)

The machine <u>must</u> arrive suddenly in the garden because the question of the machine is important and, as yet, it would seem, undecided. Therefore, it <u>must</u> have arrived recently and suddenly, or else we would have already resolved the crisis, or been destroyed by it.

For Bergson, the spatialization of time and instrumental thought are constitutive not of modernity (an understanding which necessitates a radical division of history into modernity and pre-modernity), but rather of intellect itself. In Bergson's masterpiece <u>Creative Evolution</u>, he makes a detailed critique of the very applicability of a spatialized time (which is Heidegger's time of nothing but speed, instantaneity and simultaneity) to living things, writing:

> in astronomy, physics, and chemistry... certain aspects of the present, important for science, are calculable as functions of the immediate past. Nothing of the sort in the domain of life... the present moment of a living body does not find its explanation in the moment immediately before, [all] the past of the organism must be added to that moment, its heredity – in fact, the whole of a very long history.(20)

For Bergson, the spatialization of time is useful, but nevertheless inaccurate when applied to living things: plants and animals, let alone people, are built out of the complexity of history, not out of linear equations – Bergson anticipates and lays the way for chaos theory and nonlinearity, as used by Manuel De Landa, building on Deleuze, building on Bergson. Spatializing time is useful and even necessary, but at some level it doesn't really work. It is useful and necessary that we think instrumentally, as problem solvers, but the very structure of the problem-solving intellect necessitates spatialized time and viewing the universe as raw materials and an empty space to be filled.

Bergson has been criticized since his own era by various brands of positivists, starting

with Bertrand Russell, who labeled him an anti-intellectual, in part because he argues for the

ongoing relevance of instinct to human life (Russell 36). It is true enough that Bergson argues

that human life is not the only life that matters (he ascribes value even to vegetable life), nor is

the intellect the only thing that matters in human life. But he does analyze reason from a

particular angle which is problematic for positivism: he argues that reason is specifically and

primordially oriented towards changing the world (or the environment, in Lewontin's

terminology). It is instrumentality itself. To speak of non-instrumental, that is, philosophical,

intelligence is problematic, as Bergson argues when criticizing both sides of the vitalist-

mechanist debate of the early twentieth century:

> Originally, we think only in order to act. Our intellect has been cast in the mold of action.
>
> Speculation is a luxury, while action is a necessity. Now, in order to act, we begin by
>
> proposing an end; we make a plan, then we go on to the detail of the mechanism which
>
> will bring it to pass... We are born artisans as we are born geometricians, and indeed we
>
> are geometricians only because we are artisans. Thus the human intellect, inasmuch as it
>
> is fashioned for the needs of human action, is an intellect which proceeds at the same
>
> time by intention and by calculation, by adapting means to ends and by thinking out
>
> mechanisms of more and more geometrical form. (Creative, 45)

The physical sciences "can and should" proceed as if the universe were a machine – in fact, given

the nature of human reason, it would hardly be possible for it not to. Philosophy, however, must

do otherwise. But attempting to think of the universe non-instrumentally goes against the very

nature of reason and, in fact, the impetus of life itself. For Bergson, all life is oriented towards

"an effort to engraft on to the necessity of physical forces the largest possible amount of indetermination," that is, freedom (114). Life gathers energy from matter and releases it: in a certain sense, life can be regarded as a machine, but as a machine which produces freedom or indeterminacy (115). To retroactively apply Heidegger's terminology: life itself (as opposed to modern technology) arrays the universe as standing-reserve. The great paradox of intelligence is that it exists <u>for</u> generating freedom (more action, more life), but can only do so by treating the universe instrumentally. In order to manipulate and make, intelligence must understand time spatially, and fix on forms which can be controlled and altered. Intelligence is inextricably bound up with manufacture; mankind would be better called "<u>Homo</u> <u>Faber</u>" than "<u>Homo</u> <u>Sapiens</u>," and intelligence is characterized originally in "the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects, especially tools to make tools, and of indefinitely varying the manufacture" (139). Given developments over recent decades in the history of technology, Bergson obviously commits a serious error here, by prioritizing tools-as-technology over process-as-technology, but this does no essential damage to his point.

Bergson does not simply justify instrumental reasoning. To the contrary, he explains the pervasiveness of instrumental reasoning, which is not only the fundamental nature of intelligence but which derives from a basic orientation of life itself towards shaping its world or, in Bergson's terminology, creating freedom. Most of all, Bergson is concerned with explaining the human perception of time. We live time as duration (the continual history or flux of my first quote from Bergson), but we <u>think</u> it spatially and incrementally. "Just as we separate in space, we fix in time. The intellect is not made to think <u>evolution</u>... That is, the continuity of change that is pure mobility... Suffice it to say that the intellect represents <u>becoming</u> as a series of <u>states</u>, each of

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which is homogeneous with itself and consequently does not change" (163). The nature of life –
in particular, of consciousness, which for Bergson is synonymous with freedom – is paradoxical:
"It was to create with matter, which is necessity itself, an instrument of freedom, to make a
machine which should triumph over mechanism, and to use the determinism of nature to pass
through the meshes of the net which this very determinism had spread" (264). For Bergson, the
mind does not suddenly, eschatologically become threatened by modern technology, although he
hardly downplays the significance of specific modern technologies, arguing that the steam engine
will characterize his era more than all its wars and revolutions (139). Rather, the nature of life
itself is an ongoing struggle between consciousness and "automatism" (264). What so many
have seen as the crisis of modernity, the threat posed by modern technology to freedom, to the
mind, and to time itself, for Bergson is constitutive of life. Life is a struggle to act in a universe
where life has limited resources, to be free and conscious against a universal tendency towards
automatism. Consciousness, which is the freedom towards which life urges, is similarly
conflicted, for in its very freedom it perceives the universe instrumentally. "We are at ease only
in the discontinuous, in the immobile, in the dead" (29). The machine's cataclysmic arrival and
its assault on Time is, in fact, equiprimordial with thought itself, if not life itself. The conflict
between organism and machine is real, but enduring and internal rather than external and abrupt.

In his final book, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (1932), which has been
described as being an early and formative work of sociobiology, Bergson takes it on himself to
explain the origins of religion and morality (Mullarkey 89; Douglass 370). Bergson again finds a
great tension in humanity, between closed and open societies as well as between biological
destiny and freedom; these tensions, which clearly mirror the tension between automatism and

consciousness in individuals, are exemplified by these lines: "We do not believe in the fatality of history. There is no obstacle which cannot be broken down by wills sufficiently keyed up, if they deal with it in time. There is thus no unescapable historic law. But there are biological laws..." (Sources 282). Similarly to Heidegger's concept of "thrownness," human freedom is real, but operates within the parameters of biological law. In the course of his sociobiological analysis, Bergson deals with a question regarding the ends of science and technology: do contemporary science and technology generate artificial needs (one should refer to Karl Marx on this point), or are they driven by artificial needs?

To answer this question, Bergson gives the sort of brief analysis of modern technology which one might expect from someone whose central ideas are the continuity and duration of life and history:

> The fact has been recalled that man has always invented machines, that antiquity has remarkable ones to show, that many a clever mechanical device was thought of long before the development of modern science, and, at a later stage, independently of it: even to-day a mere workman, without scientific culture, will hit on improvements which have never occurred to skilled engineers. Mechanical invention is a natural gift. Doubtless its effects were limited so long as it was confined to using actual ... forces: muscular effort, wind or water power. (Sources 293).

Although scientific contributions to technology are significant, as is the development of new power sources, modern technology is not eschatological (which is not to say that war is not utterly disastrous, a topic which Bergson does discuss), and we should understand technology as being continuous; it, like the life that creates it, endures. Despite Bergson's overemphasis on

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machines as such, rather than on technological processes, this discussion of modern technology

anticipates the much latter work of scholars like Pacey and Basilla, who reveal the material

details (rather than the theory) of technology's continuity, duration, and evolutionary character.

But despite all of this, even Bergson can't resist an eschatological turn in his discussion

of technology. For despite all of Bergsons' skepticism about suddenness and abruptness in

history, he is a believer in progress: the continual evolution of life is primarily, although not

exclusively, an upward movement, and this belief conditions his understanding of technology, for

all the care he normally takes not to view time as segmented. Bergson argues, anticipating

cybernetic theorists, that tools can be viewed as a part of the body; in fact, he sees continuity

between organs and tools (this is a theme which is also of great importance in Heidegger's <u>Being</u>

<u>and</u> <u>Time</u>): "If our organs are natural instruments, our instruments must then be artificial organs"

(<u>Sources</u> 298). This leads to a rather distinctive understanding of the nature of modernity.

Because our tools have grown enormously in scale and complexity – meaning that, following the

analogy of organ and instrument, the human body, there is a way in which we don't measure up

to them:

> Now, in this body, distended out of all proportion, the soul remains what it was, too weak
>
> to guide it. Hence the gap between the two. Hence the tremendous social, political and
>
> international problems which are just so many definitions of this gap, and which provoke
>
> so many chaotic and ineffectual efforts to fill it.. What we need are new reserves of
>
> potential energy – moral energy this time... We must add that the body, now larger, calls
>
> for a bigger soul, and that mechanism should mean mysticism... Machinery will find its
>
> true vocation again, it will render services in proportion to its power, only if mankind,

which it has bowed still lower to the earth, can succeed, through it, in standing erect and

looking heavenwards. (<u>Sources</u> 299)

A particular kind of teleology is central to Bergson's thought. Bergson may have, in contrast to

the vast majority of thinkers before and since, rejected the notion of a sudden change in the

human self (or mind, or soul, or Being), which either leads to the creation of large-scale

machinery or is caused by it; he rejects the illusions of discreetness and suddenness in

technological development, as he does in the enduring self. He rejects the machine's sudden

entry into the garden, in other words. Nonetheless, he affirms confidence in progress:

mechanization, which has both its goods and its evils, is integral to the progress of life as a

whole, and of human consciousness in particular.

Bergson helps to illustrate philosophically a lesson which contemporary historians of

technology have demonstrated empirically: that assuming the suddenness and newness of

technological change is both problematic and fundamentally ideological; furthermore,

mainstream attempts to criticize "modern" technology embrace the most fundamental notions of

the lines of thought which they attempt to attack (we might think of Frederick Winslow Taylor,

for instance): they accept that the fulcrum of Time and human Being is <u>now</u>.

But even Bergson's thought is poisoned by <u>progress</u>, which still ends in eschatology, a

suddenly mystical, mechanized humanity reaching up for the stars. Perhaps Bergson sounds a

little like a utopian-mystical author of science-fiction, along the lines of Olaf Stapledon. He

should.

A substantial part of this project will be dedicated, both directly and indirectly, to

developing a way of thinking of the relationship between time and technology which goes farther

than Bergson, towards the complete abandonment of teleology and eschatology, without denying the reality of change and of duration.

The illusion which Bergson insists upon is that of clear and unambiguous <u>progress</u>. A theme of this project, which will enter into every chapter in various ways, is that change, even directional change, even change towards increasing complexity, is not progress. Bergson shows theoretically (as others have shown empirically) that the "modern" relationship of humanity with its technology is primordial, although not unchanging, while messianically opening the possibility that this problematic relationship, although it may not disappear, will blossom like a flower. My view is otherwise: technological change, like change in general, is ambiguous and irreversible – it is an evolution, and one which tends in certain directions, but that direction is not towards the good or towards the bad, only towards the complex, as with Stephen Jay Gould's concept of directional evolution in biology.

But this is a project in literature, and the difficulty experienced by philosophy when grappling with the relationship between technology and time brings me around, at last, to Poe once more. Leo Marx does not address the question of the machine via Poe (here he follows Lewis Mumford, F.O. Matthiessen and Van Wyck Brooks' significant disinterest in Poe) because Poe lays bare the length and texture of the history of the question of the machine, and the fact that there are multiple mechanical teleologies, rather than one, which in turn opens the problem of competing or oscillating concepts of history, which allows for an individual's exploitation of, or balancing on the knife-edge between, competing ideas of time and the machine: mechanization and its history leaves its mark on or even takes up residence inside the self; the mechanization of the self is not a sudden discrete event, but an old, if changing, aspect of human

Being, and one which offers no promise of any final resolution. "Real duration is that duration which gnaws on things, and leaves on them the mark of its tooth. If everything is in time, everything changes inwardly, and the same concrete reality never recurs" (Bergson, Creative 46). Leo Marx, along with nearly everyone else from Carlyle to Heidegger – even Bergson – fails to imagine a time and a machine which are not teleological. Poe, however, begins to open a different path, which will concern me through the rest of this project.

I could mention other incarnations of the machine's apocalyptic entry into the garden. Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion of "The Inhuman" is particularly striking (I will ultimately have much to say about it), and there are endless incarnations in popular and elite art forms, from Edward Abbey to J.R.R. Tolkien to Fritz Lang to Chester Himes. But rather than go through more examples at this time, I want to return to my overall purpose, which I will then elaborate in the last part of this introduction.

Western thought has mainly been teleological since the ascendance of Christianity (by which, incidentally, I mean the institutionalization of Christianity, which had textual basis but also closed off other textual possibilities) at the latest; more likely this dominance began with Aristotle or even earlier. More particularly, for at least the last several centuries, teleology and eschatology have dominated thinking about technology. This intertwining of eschatology and technology is perilous, and leads to thinking of "modern" technology as the bearer of doom or salvation, rather than as a fact of human life – albeit an ever-changing, evolving fact – which is integral to all of our thought, to our very being.

But Shakespeare and Spenser were in advance of Hobbes and Descartes. Poe is an example of an author who, no matter how incompletely or tentatively, has begun to imagine

technology, in its full relation to human Being, as being part of our being and our time. It is

something which endures with us and evolves with us. Its threat and its promise, too, endure;

they do not belong to any eschatos, but to the whole of time.

My project, then, is to tell a ongoing story of American literature(s) in which the machine

both unfolds over and projects into time; in which the machine does not represent "progress", in

which it is not a telos, nor does it point to one or result from one; in which the machine, or better,

the technological self, continually opens and forecloses possibilities, rather than reducing all

possibility to an already-calculated moment.

G. THE PROJECT

My purpose in this project falls into three parts.

First, I want to expose an underlying assumption of many (and largely dominant) literary,

philosophical and theoretical understandings of the history of technology: that the machine

arrives suddenly on the scene with apocalyptic results, not only in the world, but on the human

self. The machine's arrival threatens to eliminate or flatten time, obliterating or transfiguring the

self in the process; moreover, the self that survives, if one survives, is apt to be artificially

created (as in Frankenstein and various science-fiction robots) or recreated to be like a machine.

Exposing this assumption isn't the end of the issue, though. More importantly, my goal is and

has been to critique the historical and philosophical thinking which creates this worldview, in

order to offer an alternative based partially on an incrementalist or evolutionary understanding of

technology and its impact on the world and self. My concern in establishing this background and this critique has mainly been with American literature, but also with its influences and antecedents. The bulk of this goal has been accomplished, though not in any final sense, in this introductory chapter, although I will both refer to and extend this background work in subsequent chapters.

My second goal is to show how a more nuanced and non-teleological understanding of the history and essence of technology has been articulated in American Literature. In other words, I want to show that there has been more than utopian and dystopian alternatives, two sides of the same eschatological coin. There is a long tradition of important American works which understand not only that technology both threatens and promises, beckons and repels, but that both the promise and the threat have a history and a future: we may _feel_ the machine's sudden arrival, we may experience a devastating threat and a transfiguring promise to the self, but this "sense of the end" is a state of mind, first and foremost. It is ancient, and it will endure. I have made a gesture towards this part of the project in this chapter, especially in the section on Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," but this purpose will absorb most of the succeeding chapters, which are studies of individual authors.

My third goal is to begin to detail a better, generally applicable, critical method for discussing the literary and cultural impact of "the machine," and in particular for discussing the impact of mechanization upon the self, as understood in literature and criticism. I have made gestures towards this goal in this introduction, and will continue to do so through the following chapters on individual authors.

My second and third chapters concern the works of Herman Melville and Lewis Mumford, who is famous both for his importance in the genesis of American Studies and for his critiques of technology. My particular focus is on Mumford's ongoing reading of Melville, from his early work on American culture and utopias through his various attempts at an autobiography. Through Mumford's work, but especially in the two-volume The Myth of the Machine he teeters on a knife's-edge between understanding history and technology totally non-teleologically on the one hand and fully eschatologically on the other hand. Both his own work and his readings of Melville (and most other critics' readings of Melville) are ultimately eschatological; however, Mumford begins to show a way to read Melville, and through Melville all of history and technology, in a non-teleological, non-eschatological way. One reason for Mumford's ultimate failure is his inability to link Melville's interest in "the machine's appearance" with his interest in slavery.

In the second and third chapter I will, first, discuss the relationship between Melville and Mumford, as well as the impact of the fact that Mumford was pushed to the margins of Melville studies, rather than being at the center of the field. Second, using Mumford, some of his peers, Melville's works and a variety of contemporary sources, I will articulate and extend Mumford's incomplete and partially unsuccessful understanding of Melville. Finally, I will detail how this quasi-Mumfordian reading of Melville, as well as a new Melvillean reading of Mumford, begins to show a way to understand technology non-teleologically and anti-apocalyptically; this is a way of reading, moreover, which is more consistent with the actual history of technology than more traditional and teleological understandings. The second chapter, as part of this integrated

argument, will focus on Melville; the third will principally work with Mumford's relationship to Melville.

The fourth chapter will be concerned with William Faulkner's work. There is a sense in which, across Faulkner's work, time is already finished: we are living past the <u>eschatos</u>; critics from Sartre on have written about this element of Faulkner. Faulkner has often been read as a kind of Romantic, an Agrarian, but his "pastoral" southern landscapes are cluttered with airplanes, automobiles and mechanical geniuses. The machine is integral to Faulkner's world and his conception of time; Faulkner's understanding of both the machine and time are further linked, as with Melville, to his understanding of slavery and oppression. My distinct contribution to Faulkner studies will be to link his teleological understanding of time to his understanding of the machine. In Faulkner the self is threatened by and overwhelmed by mechanization precisely because he is unable to think of technology non-teleologically.

The fifth chapter will concern Ralph Ellison, who is able to achieve what Faulkner cannot: he <u>does</u> understand the long, even mythological duration of the relationship between the self and the machine. Ellison's political project, in fact, involves a counter-fascist interaction between technology (and its temporality) and myth (and its temporality). Despite the fact that the Negro (in Ellison's terminology) has already been transformed into standing-reserve, or a kind of machine – or perhaps because of that fact – in Ellison's version of the story mechanization isn't something that broke into the garden suddenly, as with Leo Marx, Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Faulkner and all the others I have mentioned, but is integral to the long histories of both enslavement and liberation. Even though Ellison continually flirts with eschatological thought,

he ultimately is able to accomplish something entirely different, which in some ways expands on

Melville and Mumford.

My sixth and final chapter is a return to a more theoretical mode, and an attempt to turn

from the relationship between time and technology to the relationship between life (bios) and

technology. This discussion will draw on theorists like Haraway, Agamben and Lyotard, but will

also begin a discussion (to be continued in future work) of science fiction.

II. "PYRAMIDS STILL LOOM BEFORE ME": HERMAN MELVILLE, THE PYRAMID

AND THE MACHINE

It has become almost a cliché that Herman Melville's works critique Western imperialism and

Western metaphysics, as well as industrialization and capitalism. Interest in this aspect of

Melville's work has provided much of the fuel for the ongoing bull market in Melville criticism.

I propose to add to that literature in this chapter, but from a distinctive angle, while adding in the

subsequent chapter to the limited literature on the role played by Herman Melville in the works

of Lewis Mumford, the historian and theorist of technology, architecture and the city, and a

literary/cultural/architectural critic. More precisely, I am interested in showing how a Mumford-

influenced reading of Melville combined with a Melville-influenced reading of Mumford can be

used to articulate an understanding of the relationship between time and technology which is

neither eschatological nor teleological. Thus, the immediate subjects of the following two

chapters are Melville and Mumford, but they are also the means to a further end.

To these ends I will, first, analyze the character of Queequeg in <u>Moby-Dick</u>, and his

relationship to technologies of war, which has received remarkably little critical attention.

Second, I will discuss Melville's ongoing interest or even obsession with Egypt and its

monumental architecture, which will illuminate his understanding of time. Third, I will detail

Melville's obsessive interest in the mechanization of humanity, partially in relationship to his portrayal of "actual" physical technologies.

In the subsequent chapter I will first discuss Lewis Mumford's ideas about technology through the course of his career, showing how those ideas were in dialogue with his changing understanding of Melville, a topic which has received no critical attention. Second, I will analyze Mumford's concept of the Necropolis, the city of death, and how both Mumford and Melville find the source and image of mechanistic tyranny in ancient Egypt, and what that means for their understanding of time and technology. Third, I will deal with the threshold which Mumford refuses to cross, but that Melville does cross: for Melville, ultimately, there is a sense in which resistance to what Mumford would call the Megamachine is doomed, whereas Mumford still struggles to find hope, even as he draws closer to Melville's understanding of the world. Fourth, I will detail the failure of criticism to deal with the relationship between Mumford and Melville, and the absence which this has created in Melville studies. Fifth and last, I will return to the character of Queequeg to discuss how Melville and Mumford can be used to articulate a better, non-eschatological understanding of the relationship between time and technology. This sequence is, among other considerations, intended to draw out the full importance, in both Mumford and Melville, between ideas about history (including what might be called orientalist histories) and time on the one hand and those about technology on the other hand.

A. QUEEQUEG'S WAR

In an oft-quoted passage in the chapter "Biographical" in <u>Moby-Dick</u>, Ishmael relays his understanding of why the "savage" Queequeg has taken to sea, abandoning his ancestral royal home. Ishmael imagines how the captain of the whaling ship that Queequeg boarded must have been impressed by Queequeg's urgency:

> Struck by his desperate dauntlessness, and his wild desire to visit Christendom, the captain at last relented, and told him he might make himself at home. But this fine young savage – this sea Prince of Wales, never saw the captain's cabin. They put him down among the sailors, and made a whaleman of him. But like Czar Peter content to toil in the shipyards of foreign cities, Queequeg disdained no seeming ignominy, if thereby he might haply gain the power of enlightening his untutored countrymen. For at bottom – so he told me – he was actuated by a profound desire to learn among the Christians, the arts whereby to make his people still happier than they were; and more than that, still better than they were. But alas! the practices of whalemen soon convinced him that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked . . . (56; Ch. 12)

Queequeg yearns to visit Christendom, but his desires are clearly different than they would be in a conversion narrative. He wants to visit <u>Christendom</u> and learn Christian <u>arts</u>; Christianity itself goes unmentioned, which is unsurprising for the Queequeg who listens to part of Father Mapple's famously logocentric, Hellenistic sermon but leaves "before the benediction some

time," as Ishmael dryly phrases it (49; Ch. 10).[19] From the phrasing of the last sentence of the

passage, it might seem that the wickedness of Christians came as a surprise to Queequeg. This

apparent surprise at Christian corruption, though, is merely apparent, as revealed by the explicit

purpose of Queequeg's voyage.

"Like Czar Peter" Queequeg is willing to "suffer ignominy" if that will help him

enlighten his countrymen. Here we would do well to remember the purpose of Peter the Great's

two famous trips to Europe in 1697-8 and 1717. The first voyage, in Nicholas Riasanovsky's

words, involved Peter's attempt to learn "navigation, but... also other technical skills and crafts,"

as well as an attempt to form a coalition against the Ottoman Empire. The second trip, similarly,

was partially motivated by his need for allies against Sweden (242-5). Czar Peter, although

interested in a variety of crafts and trades, was principally focused on advancing Russia in the

technologies of war: navigation, shipbuilding, ballistics, etc. The image of Czar Peter laboring in

"ignominy" in foreign shipyards is the image of warrior-king serving a technological

apprenticeship which is vital to the prosecution of present and future wars, both to expand Russia

to the east and south and to enable it to stand toe-to-toe with the European nations which, if

much smaller and less populous, were vastly more sophisticated as war machines.[20] Queequeg is

no innocent young traveler seeing the world, with his head stuffed full of illusions about

Christendom. Queequeg is at war; the purpose of his mission, following Ishmael's hint, is to

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[19] See Eric Wilson in "The Nomad, the Pilgrim, and the White Whale," among many others, on Father Mapple's Logocentrism.

[20] See Daniel Headrick's The Tools of Empire on the central role of specific military technologies in Western imperialism and colonialism, and De Landa's War in the Age of Intelligent Machines on the simultaneous mechanization of the self (military discipline) that was necessary for the prosecution of western-style wars.

learn the Western arts of war and return with them to his people. Navigation, shipbuilding, ballistics, gunsmithing: these are the arts by which Queequeg plans to "make his people still happier than they were": he plans to make them happier through <u>security</u>.

One should recall that three of Melville's five novels preceding <u>Moby-Dick</u> were at least in part accounts of the spread of Western military power. As Joyce Adler writes, "Melville's history of the war the nineteenth-century colonialists waged on the people of the South Pacific is the real, though not the external story of Typee/Omoo" (7). Moreover, the nature of Western power is unambiguously condemned in <u>Typee</u>, while being linked to race:

> The fiend-like skill we display in the invention of all manner of death-dealing engines, the vindictiveness with which we carry on our wars, and the misery and desolation that follow in their train, are enough of themselves to distinguish the white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth... His remorseless cruelty is seen in many of the institutions of our own favoured land. (150; Ch. 17)

The thing that most distinguishes "white, civilized" man is not religion, science, or culture, but a peculiar aptitude for war and its technologies, as well as for related techniques of oppression at home, particularly the penal system; Melville's ongoing, proto-Foucaultian critique of the American penal system has been thoroughly detailed in Michael C. Berthold's "The Prison World of Melville's <u>Pierre</u> and 'Bartleby'" (1987) and Carol Colatrerra's <u>Literature</u> <u>and</u> <u>Moral</u> <u>Reform</u> (2002). This same point about the "superiority" of the West being based on the technologies of war is underlined repeatedly in <u>Typee</u>, for instance when Tommo, whom the chiefs of the Typees account an "inferior sort of white man" because of his lack of knowledge of gunsmithing, arms the Typees with the best weapon he can devise: pop-guns (172; ch. 19, 219;

ch. 25). This might seem like a joke, especially given Melville's lengthy description of the

Typees' antics chasing and ambushing each other with the pop-guns, except for the fact that the

same chapter carefully details one of the principal native crafts of Tapa-making (Tapa being a

fabric), thus contrasting a "civilized" art of war with a "savage" art of peace. Perhaps counter-

intuitively for readers of the time, Western culture is associated principally with technologies of

war, while the "cannibal" technologies are principally peaceful. In fact, ideologies of Western

superiority have often focused on military technologies to the exclusion of all else (Adas 175,

187).

Typee and Omoo take place, as Adler argues, under the shadow of French warships (6).

The mock war of the pop-guns is like a shadow cast by the reality of the warships; Tommo's

fumbling attempts at martial technologies are a projection of the real war-machine from which he

emerges. The Typees don't know it yet, but their days are numbered, and the crimes committed

against the people of Tahiti and Hawaii (enumerated by Melville in Typee and Omoo,

respectively) will be committed against them in turn.

It's easy enough to (mistakenly) see Queequeg as simply standing for "life," or

alternative, anti-Western values. In one typical example of this belief, Adler argues that

Queequeg stands for "values of life" against Ahab's "values of death" (61). And on one level,

who could deny it? Queequeg's tattoos, the visionary system of a native prophet, represent a

"complete theory of heavens and the earth"; his love seems to save Ishmael's spirit, even as his

coffin saves Ishmael's body (481; ch. 110). Queequeg is surely, radically other, in some way a

living rejection of Western values. But yet, Queequeg's project is Czar Peter's: he plans to defy

the West by arming and modernizing his people. To push the point farther: he is struggling to

adopt the tools, technologies and techniques which comprise the Western war-machine in order to oppose that war-machine. No wonder that he realizes he has become too corrupt to assume the throne! "... he was fearful Christianity, or rather Christians, had unfitted him for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan Kings before him. But by and by, he said, he would return, – as soon as he had been baptized again... They had made a harpooner of him, and that barbed iron was in lieu of a sceptre now" (56; ch. 12). Queequeg never makes any pretensions of being a Christian; what has corrupted him is precisely that which he has sought and continues to embrace: the techniques and technologies of war, which he has uncovered via the whaling industry, which is itself, as Melville continually makes clear, a variety of war, run by "fighting Quakers... Quakers with a vengeance" (73; ch. 16). Whaling is a peculiarly Quaker form of warfare, even as the American prison and asylum, as documented in Foucault's Discipline and Punish and Madness and Civilization, are peculiarly Quaker disciplinary institutions. Following Foucault, one might argue that Queequeg stands in an absolutely ideal place to understand (and hence, adopt) at least some aspects of Western power; we should not forget that Queequeg is technically an officer, who lives and eats in the cabin, the panoptic position within the ship.

For all of his tattooed otherness and halting speech, Queequeg willingly joins Ahab's mad quest, and willingly gives his blood to temper Ahab's steel. Like Ishmael, who "could perceive a horror, and still be social with it," Queequeg is able to embrace – or rather, learn at the feet of – that which he most opposes (7; ch 1). Ahab in all of his world-ordering megalomaniac power is the very image of what Queequeg has gone to sea to oppose, but also, necessarily, the very image of what he, like Czar Peter, seeks to become.

If Ishmael is saved from the wreckage of the Pequod because he has somehow been reshaped by his encounter with Queequeg and Queequeg's values, as his attitude towards Queequeg and his own tattooed body attest, then Queequeg is destroyed because he could not stop becoming like Ahab: because his end, his <u>telos</u>, is to somehow assume the Ahabian power of the West, he shares in the West's own <u>telos</u>. Indeed, it would seem that at the moment when Queequeg lays down to die and then to be set adrift in a ritual vessel which at least derives from the practices of his own people, he has a single opportunity for escape from Ahab's vision. Standing over the dying Queequeg, Pip extemporizes on Queequeg's contradictions: "Poor rover! will ye never have done will all this weary roving? where go ye now.... Form two and two! Let's make a General of him! Ho, where's his harpoon?" (479; ch. 110). Queequeg is a rover and yet a general, lying in a coffin modeled and furnished after the customs of his people but by Western techniques, holding a harpoon that is a technological microcosm, and yet principally wielded by "savages." He is a wandering general without an army, unable to save his people without destroying himself. If the fundamental dilemma of <u>Typee</u>, as Daneen Wardrop has argued, is whether Tommo, a "renegade from his signifying culture," will "honor the logos of his birth culture with its attendant cruelties..." or "embrace... the superior pre-signifying culture of the Typees," then Queequeg's dilemma is that of a renegade <u>into</u> signifying culture, who, bereft of other options, takes up the ways of what Melville named "the war-world" to oppose that war-world (143).

After having heard Pip's words, Queequeg lies still for a time, "as if in a dream," and then rises, having decided to live: "at a critical moment, he had just recalled a little duty ashore, which he was leaving undone; and therefore had changed his mind about dying: he could not die

yet, he averred" (480; ch. 110). What duty does the rover have ashore, which he has so suddenly

remembered?   After Pip names Queequeg a general, he praises him for his courage, and

execrates himself (Pip) for his cowardice, for having jumped from a whaleboat.

Pip brings Queequeg to remember that he is not only a man, not only a rover, but also a

general; for a rover, his choice of spontaneous death may be brave, but for a general it is

cowardice and foolishness (Pip's character, after all, continually draws attention to reversed and

confused values). The duty he remembers to perform ashore is his duty as a general, his duty to

play Czar Peter's part. But embracing this mission, even if it is originally defensive in character,

he also embraces its telos, incarnate in Ahab. Ishmael has become just savage enough, for all of

his contradictions, to be saved; Queequeg is just civilized enough, for all of his contradictions, to

be damned.

This is not to say that Queequeg's war has been definitively lost; rather, it has been

continued by other means. His tattooed coffin delivers Ishmael, who becomes tattooed in turn,

and wanders the South Seas, investigating, refining and spreading the story of revolution in "The

Town-Ho's Story," owing allegiance to "The King of the Cannibals," learning of both "savage"

life and whaling life, continually mocking and reviling Western values like the Ishmaelite he is.

Ishmael, as signified by his oriental warrior's name, has become the avatar of Queequeg's war.

In Typee and Omoo, white sailors who permit themselves to be tattooed are permanently

marked as outsiders by the Western world.   Tattooing is a source of great anxiety for the narrator

of Typee, who fears meeting the fate of a man whose had his "face damaged for life, for the

cursed heathens tattooed a broad patch clean across his figure-head" (47; ch. 6). Later in the

novel, the fear of being permanently marked by tattooing is a primary motivation for his escape

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from the Typees.   In <u>Omoo</u>, most significantly, the narrator comes upon: "a stranger, a renegado from Christendom and humanity--a white man, in the South Sea girdle, and tattooed in the face" (353; ch. 7). The "civilizing" of Tahiti is marked by a law forbidding tattooing – a law which is part of the process which Melville names the "denationalizing" of the Tahitians (509; ch. 47). According to Daneen Wardrop's reading, Tommo's fear of tattooing is one way in which he manifests a fear of "his own forced acculturation into a community he has not fully embraced at the same time that he is fated ineluctably to wield the Lacanian Name-of-the-Father, the heritage of his white, logocentric culture" (136). Ishmael, following the model of Queequeg's own acculturation, is able to make the leap which Tommo cannot, and accepts this mark of a cannibal and an outcast from "Christendom and Humanity." Ironically, he even uses his now marked and savage body to record the measurements of a whale: the weighing, measuring and delimiting of Western technology is displaced onto a body-become-savage (451; ch. 102). Logocentrism is a tool in project which assaults logocentrism, as in the chapter "Cetology," where Ishmael endlessly itemizes the varieties of whales, real and legendary, before arguing that only a draft of this knowledge is either possible or desirable:

> Finally: It was stated at the outset, that this system would not be here, and at once, perfected. You cannot but plainly see that I have kept my word. But I now leave my cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. (145; ch. 32)

Elisa New points out that this very cathedral, which Ishmael praises for its eternal

incompleteness, was "particularly galling" to Goethe, precisely because it lacked and implicitly

denied any kind of unity, transcendental or otherwise; in short, she finds that in this passage

Melville is deliberately and explicitly advocating a kind of Hebraism in opposition to Goethe's

Hellenism and logocentrism (298). The Ishmael who mocks Goethe, who advocates Hebraism

and opposes logocentrism, who urges us to cast Kant and Locke overboard, is of course a work in

progress himself, but a work in progress radically altered, or better, remade, by his encounter

with Queequeg.

　　　The Ishmael who is projected beyond the novel's inevitable, apocalyptic ending by the

agency of Queequeg's coffin, marked with the "hieroglyphs" which Queequeg has copied from

his own body, is essentially projected beyond the apocalyptic end of time, past the eschatos – but

he does not enter into a New Jerusalem where "time is no more." Rather, as New writes, "if

allegory is finally, for Melville, an apocalyptic mode... his Ecclesiast toils on, living through the

apocalypse of metaphor" (301). For Eric Wilson, to take another example of someone writing on

Ishmael's passage beyond the end, we have reached "the passing of imperialistic metaphysics,

the violent dream of anthropocentric thought; the emerging of conjunctive thought, conjuration, a

new earth gathering primitive and civilized, a new heaven of natural culture" ("The Nomad,"

241). For Wilson, Ishmael is moving back to an earlier and better world, like the Eden which

"out-Edens Eden" – because it has no snake, no logos (or Sophia, in Gnosticism, to anticipate

one of my later points) – for Wardrop (Wardrop 141). Many other writers have made similar

observations about the end, or better, "end," of Moby-Dick.

But Ishmael isn't only an escaping free agent who has learned another way of looking at the world; he has not merely learned from Queequeg. He has been <u>hurled</u> by Queequeg, whose harpoon never misses. Pip awakened Queequeg-the-general, who then carved his coffin with the designs on his own body and established it as the buoy which would be Ishmael's deliverance. This projection beyond the end is anticipated at the beginning of the novel, in the chapter "The Spouter-Inn," in the chaotic description of a whaling ship and a whale in a terrible storm:

> It's a Hyperborean winter scene.--It's the breaking-up of the icebound stream of Time.
>
> But at last all these fancies yielded to that one portentous something in the picture's midst.
>
> THAT once found out, and all the rest were plain. But stop; does it not bear a faint
>
> resemblance to a gigantic fish? even the great leviathan himself? (13; ch. 3)

An apocalypse <u>should</u> end Time, turning it into ice or annihilating it, but under Queequeg's tutelage and because of his actions, ice-bound Time is violently broken up. To be even more precise: Queequeg's Petrine mission to arm his people with Western technologies of war is an embrace of apocalyptic Time (hence Queequeg's impurity and his death at the "apocalyptic" "end" of the novel), which also simultaneously enables him to hurl Ishmael (named after the Biblical character who is a wild man, a great archer) beyond that apocalypse, creating an ongoing history.

We should be wary of sentimentalizing the history into which Ishmael is hurtled. It is hardly a "new heaven of natural culture"; it is a battlefield, in which Ishmael sets the Priests of the Arsacides violently against one another in order to make the measurements with which his body will be tattooed, and in which he goes mockingly among the Dons of Peru in "The Town-Ho's Story", prophesying their doom (448-51, ch. 102; 242-59, ch. 104). This is not apocalyptic,

finished Time, but neither is it Edenic, stable Time: Ishmael is a violent projection into a violent

future; when the icebound stream of Time melts, it floods.

In "The Mat-Maker" – in which, incidentally, Queequeg and Ishmael are practicing a craft

which is not essentially different between the "civilized" and the "savages" – Ishmael serves as

Queequeg's page (we should be reminded that the knight who serves the page will theoretically

one day be a knight himself), providing his own arms at the shuttle to accompany Queequeg's

heavy wooden sword. Ishmael grows dreamy:

> ...it seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically
>
> weaving and weaving away at the Fates... Meantime, Queequeg's impulsive, indifferent
>
> sword, sometimes hitting the woof slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the
>
> case might be; and by this difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding
>
> contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; this savage's sword, thought I, which
>
> thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be
>
> chance--aye, chance, free will, and necessity--nowise incompatible--all interweavingly
>
> working together. (214-15; ch. 47)

In Ishmael's daydream, Queequeg's violent sword literally shapes time, but chaotically and

spastically, in stark contrast to Ahab's vision of time, in which his "one cogged circle fits into all

their various wheels, and they revolve. Or, if you will, like so many ant-hills of powder, they all

stand before me; and I their match" (168; ch. 37). Ahab's time leads inevitably to an explosive

and final end, as he recognizes from the beginning, yearning for the eschatos; Queequeg's time –

which, on the hand, is the time into which Ishmael is cast and yet is, on the other hand, Ishmael

himself as signified by the role that his arms play in the metaphoric weaving of time – is a

melted, fluid time, tumultuous and violent, forever unfinished. Most of all, though, it is a <u>made</u>

time, an anti-apocalyptic, anti-teleological Time which responds to Ahab's apocalyptic time; it is

not "organic," "natural," or "cyclical." It is as random, perilous, treacherous and open-ended as

the post-apocalyptic Ishmael himself.

Joseph Andriano argues in "Brother to Dragons: Race and Evolution in <u>Moby-Dick</u>" that

Melville's novel undercuts both the hierarchies of "white over non-white and of human over

animal" (141). Categories are continually challenged: Starbuck is superstitious, that is, "savage,"

and Queequeg seeks naturalist explanations for phenomena: for instance, when Starbuck takes a

giant squid to be a portent and Queequeg deduces that they will soon find whales (146). Ishmael

and Queequeg see the universe as driven by the essentially evolutionary struggle for survival, not

by transcendental good and evil, like the teleology-minded Ahab does. In short, <u>Moby-Dick</u>,

especially the characters of Queequeg and Ishmael, anticipates Darwinian evolution by, in Eric

Wilson's words, being a harbinger of Darwin's "momentous dissolution of the great chain of

being" ("Great Chain of Being," 132). But while Wilson recognizes Ishmael's affiliation with

evolution, he can't resist a tendency to make that very affiliation, in turn, transcendental:

"Ishmael devolves to the source of the <u>scala</u> <u>naturae</u>, primal water, rising again, baptized, to

repeople an earth without chains" ("Great Chain of Being," 148). Wilson's use of the word

"baptized" is significant; Queequeg could not return to his people until he was baptized, born

again: his baptism has been realized not directly but through Ishmael, "owning no allegiance but

to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him" (270; ch. 57).

Ishmael's rebirth, if we choose to call it that, doesn't simply signify the end of (or

resistance to) political, racial or biological hierarchies. It signifies an assault on temporal

hierarchies, upon which the other hierarchies are based. Melville's time, anticipating Bergson's,

leaves a bite: it is irreversible, never permitting a return to an Edenic or organic innocence

(Queequeg can't go home), never fully calculable (as we see in the repeated failures of Ahab's

ambitions), and ultimately counter-apocalyptic: the Hellenistic telos is achieved, but a new time,

generated by the deliberate, treacherous, Petrine encounter of the "savage" mind with the tools

and techniques of a teleological mind, has been created. When the ice-bound stream of time

melts, it sweeps both teleological and "natural" cyclic time before it.

B. SHEKINAH INTOLERABLY BRIGHT!

Melville's critics and biographers have often taken it upon themselves to explain what has been

called his "silence": his retreat away from fiction-writing and publicity into relative reclusion,

ordinary work at the New York customs house, and a few volumes of poetry, mostly privately

published. For Raymond Weaver, Melville's first full biographer, the years of his silence, in

which he "scorned the world" are so irrelevant as to be like death – although he does admit that

the "silent" years may well have been the best of Melville's life (16). For Lewis Mumford,

Melville's next biographer, Melville's "silent" years involve a reconnection with nature as well

as with family: after the long torment of his creativity, Melville embraces organic values

(Mumford, Herman Melville, 351-2).

More contemporary critics and biographers tend to acknowledge that Melville's poetry is

a substantial and perhaps even a worthy body of work, deserving of some attention in its own

right. Nonetheless, the vast majority is criticism implicitly accepts, even while explicitly

denying, that Melville's poetry amounts to silence. Gilles Deleuze, for instance, writes that

Bartleby "announces the long silence, broken only by the music of poems, into which Melville

will enter and from which, except for <u>Billy</u> <u>Budd</u>, he will never emerge" (<u>Essays</u> 72-3). The

poetry is <u>other</u> than the prose, which conveniently allows one to neglect any continuities between

the two. This is connected to the relative inattention given to Melville's early novels: most

Melville criticism has always lopped the head and the tail from his corpus.

Without trying to create a new Melville canon at the moment, I want to simply point out

that one has been implicitly accepted almost universally: <u>Moby-Dick</u> and, to a lesser extent, the

short stories (including "Billy Budd") receive the lion's share of classroom and critical attention;

<u>Pierre</u>, <u>Typee</u> and perhaps <u>The</u> <u>Confidence-Man</u> garner somewhat less; the other texts are to

various degrees ignored. The worst problem with this implicit canon is that most critics feel free

to focus on the "major" texts without addressing connected themes and issues in the "minor"

texts; the individual texts become more independent than they truly are. This is particularly

problematic for the novels; Melville published his first six novels between 1846 and 1851, and

the rest of his fiction (excluding "Billy Budd") by 1857, exceeding in compression even

Faulkner's "one matchless time" of 1928 to 1942. On the one hand it is no wonder that many

critics call the cessation of the fiction "silence," nor is it any wonder than many critics rightly

think that some of Melville's novels bear the marks of sloppy and hasty writing. The problem

that results from these judgements, though, is a hermeneutical obsession with a limited number

of texts which more properly flow and blur into the "minor" texts. Consequently, one of my

concerns is to work through a particular set of Orientalist themes across the full body of

Melville's work.

Two recent books about American Orientalism, U.S. Orientalisms (which importantly

steps far out of the mainstream by focusing on Melville's seemingly endless poem Clarel) and

Egypt Land, both carefully mention Melville's use of Egypt in a famous passage from "Bartleby

the Scrivener," immediately after the narrator-advocate notices that Bartleby has died:

> The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The
>
> Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft
>
> imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein,
>
> by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.
>
> (671)

Bartleby is trapped in the Tombs, New York City's infamous prison with architecture based on

Ancient Egyptian architecture, one of many buildings in which, as Scott Trafton argues in Egypt

Land (although this argument was well underway at least as early as Lewis Mumford's 1924

Sticks and Stones), "the iconography of empire – that of its wielders as well as its resisters – was

lavishly drawn from that of ancient Egypt" (Trafton 2). Egyptian imagery was used to symbolize

raw American power from the Washington monument to the Tombs, but the iconography of

Egypt and the escape from it was equally vital to the "resisters," including slaves and

abolitionists. Moreover, as Trafton details, the "wielders" are aware, even as they adopt the

mantle of Egypt, of the fact that they are choosing an ambiguous if powerful symbol, since the

Biblical story of Egypt is a story of its defeat; thus, those most inclined to use Egyptian history

and iconography to justify American hierarchies, especially racial hierarchies, had to replace the

Biblical story of nations (in which, after all, the Ham who allegedly is the forefather of all "Negroes" is Noah's son, even if an outcast son) with one based on a new proto-fascist interpretation of Egyptian history and artifacts (9; 51). Egypt and its artifacts represented power, empire, and the projection of that power and empire into the distant future, but the iconography of Egypt also carried anxiety, including racial anxiety, along with it. Even the very act of nicknaming the Halls of Justice and House of Detention, with their Egyptian-revival architecture, as "The Tombs" displays this ambivalence, which Trafton attributes to American Egyptomania in general: "The nickname marks a central feature of American Egyptomania: an interest in containment joined with a fear of escape, a desire for entombment combined with a fascination with excavation, a relief at interment mixed with a hope for resurrection" (149).

"Bartleby" is the story of a man who, despite an astonishing passive resistance, is obliterated by the legal and economic machinery of a culture in which he can only be a cog, and in which, when he is no longer a cog, he becomes nothing. Bartleby is casually annihilated in "the heart of the pyramid," but his death brings, or is at least is accompanied by, the impossible penetration of grass seeds into the pyramid's heart. The victory of the pyramid seems total, yet is troubled; the narrator has been touched, despite himself, by his encounter with Bartleby. Malini Schueller argues in U.S. Orientalisms based on this passage that "Bartleby's hermeneutical impenetrability... is explicitly tied to the resistance of the Near Eastern Orient to Western inquiry" (127). Bartleby can be destroyed, but he cannot be possessed and known in the ways so necessary to the mind of the Orientalist; the narrator's probing, penetrating questions are rebuffed, his charity rejected, and even his posthumous inquiries into Bartleby's past are of limited worth.

Schueller argues that this <u>impenetrable</u> otherness is further developed in Melville's

journal, written on his own 1856-7 journey to Egypt and Palestine, and especially in <u>Clarel</u>

(1876). In both works the primary experience of the Westerner confronted with the Orient is

powerlessness and confusion: "The process through which the New World hero saves or defines

the Near East, either as missionary or archaeologist and in both cases attempting to demarcate the

Oriental as other, gives way in <u>Clarel</u> to a more pronounced process of desire and identification,

an attempt to deny any separation between self and Other..." (139). This attempt to create an

erotics of confusion or impenetrability, displacing the "powerful, male, heteronormative, and

raced discourses of imperialism" is, in turn, reflected back to the New World and its own

imperialist wars in the Pacific and on the Western frontier (138-9). Melville's critique of the

growing Pacific empires of France, Britain and the U.S. in <u>Typee</u>, etc. is carried on by way of

Egypt.

Schueller's reading of <u>Bartleby</u> and <u>Clarel</u> (as well as "I and my Chimney) as a

"subversive Orientalism" is nuanced and convincing; other similar, if less developed, readings

exist elsewhere, for instance in Christopher Sten's "Melville's Cosmopolitanism: A Map for

Living in a (Post-) Colonialist World." But it is not, nor does it pretend to be, a complete

interpretation of Melville's particular Orientalism within the context of his whole life and career,

as opposed to within the context of U.S. Orientalisms in general.

The purpose of this discussion is not biographical: my focus is on Melville's work, not

his life, although I <u>am</u> attempting to address his whole work, his life's work. Nor is my purpose

to alter or extend what Trafton and especially Schueller have said about Melville's subversive

Orientalism. Instead, I want to tell a story of Melville's life's work which revolves around the

experience of the Pyramid, a story which also illuminates Melville's understanding of time and technology.

The confrontation of the self with the Pyramid is a powerful moment in "Bartleby," but not only in "Bartleby"; this moment recurs, a sameness with difference, through the body of Melville's work, "major" and "minor" alike. This pervasive, enduring moment has, as such, received no prior critical attention.

In Typee, Tommo, although he dwells among "untutored savages" faces the remnants of a monumental architecture which generate more awe in him than "if I had stood musing at the mighty base of the Pyramid of Cheops. There are no inscriptions, no sculpture, no clue, by which to conjecture its history; nothing but the dumb stones" (185; ch. 21). He speculates that the island housed an advanced civilization contemporaneous with the Egyptian empire; he wonders if these monuments could have been possibly constructed by the "indolent" savages who now inhabit the island; if their ancestors did construct them, the descendants have "sadly deteriorated in their knowledge of the mechanic arts." The romantic, Edenic savagery of the Typees is not eternal; it is, in fact, undergirded and preceded by a monumental, technological civilization which is repeatedly compared to Egypt's. The tattoos which mark the Typees and other islanders are called hieroglyphs, hinting at a technological-monumental civilization preceding or underlying them. Thus, contra Wardrop and others, it is far from clear that the Typees exist in a pre-signification Eden. In Mardi, in the chapter "Time and Temples," we are reminded, in a book peppered with various scattered references to Egypt, pyramids and hieroglyphic tattoos, that the eternity of the Pyramids is founded in a deeper eternity:

And that which long endures full-fledged, must have long lain in the germ. And duration

is not of the future, but of the past; and eternity is eternal, because it has been, and though

a strong new monument be builded to-day, it only is lasting because its blocks are old as

the sun. It is not the Pyramids that are ancient, but the eternal granite whereof they are

made; which had been equally ancient though yet in the quarry. For to make an eternity,

we must build with eternities; whence, the vanity of the cry for any thing alike durable

and new; and the folly of the reproach--Your granite hath come from the old-fashioned

hills. For we are not gods and creators; and the controversialists have debated, whether

indeed the All-Plastic Power itself can do more than mold. (890; ch. 75)

Duration is not of the future, but of the past. Even from the dawn of civilization, <u>nothing</u>,

properly, has ever been new. The technologies of monumental architecture reach backwards, not

forwards; they aspire for the old, not the new, even as the Egyptian and Hellenistic monumental

architectures of Melville's U.S. find their source and their power in the same past which renders

them, as in <u>Bartleby</u>, so horrific.

In an oft-quoted passage in <u>White-Jacket</u>, in one of the parts of the novel most concerned

with advocating the abolishment of flogging in the navy, White-Jacket famously urges America

not to be bound by the customs of the past:

Israel of old did not follow after the ways of the Egyptians. To her was given an express

dispensation; to her were given new things under the sun. And we Americans are the

peculiar, chosen people--the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the

world... We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the

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wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. (506; ch.

36)

Ironically enough, White-Jacket's plea for America to become the Israel to the Old World's

Egypt comes in a book which reveals the American warship itself as being an Oriental work of

architecture; the newness Melville invokes here is thick with sarcasm:

> She was going large before the wind, her stun'-sails set on both sides, so that the canvas
>
> on the main-mast and fore-mast presented the appearance of majestic, tapering pyramids,
>
> more than a hundred feet broad at the base, and terminating in the clouds with the light
>
> copestone of the royals... The three shrouded masts looked like the apparitions of three
>
> gigantic Turkish Emirs striding over the ocean. (676; ch. 74)

The ship is like a pyramid at sea; the sailors are cogs subordinated to a cruel war-machine. The

ship becomes, by analogy, a "world-frigate"; its amputations, beatings, rapes and state of

perpetual war are the eternal condition of the world. That is, the world's eternal condition is that

of a war-machine sailing into the unknown. White-Jacket, when making his plea on behalf of

abused soldiers, plays a required role and names America as the Hebrew to the Old World's

Egypt. But the ship's real condition is that of the Pyramid itself. Melville uses Egypt as a figure

for both the extremity and tyranny of American power (Trafford's "wielders" and "resisters" are

both represented), but with an unsettling tendency to literalize the figure. The Pyramid's power

is actual, not symbolic.

In Moby-Dick, Melville's use of Egypt is nearly continuous. It may be that the Pequod's

crew, according to John Birk's argument in "Unsealing the Sphinx: The Pequod's Egyptian

Pantheon," in some fashion represents the pantheon of Egyptian Gods. Regardless, both Ahab

and <u>Moby-Dick</u>, as well as sperm whales in general, are wrapped in a web of Egyptological references. At the beginning Ishmael jokingly refers to "those huge bake-houses the pyramids", but this is a joke in a novel in which laughter belongs most of all to the hyena, in the chapter named after him. The Sperm whale's "pyramidical silence" is proof of his genius; when Stubb dreams of being utterly overwhelmed by Ahab's power, "Ahab seemed a pyramid"; his feeble attempts to resist Ahab are figured as "stubbing my silly toes against that cursed pyramid"; Stubb's laughter here is surely the hyena's mad and despairing laugh (347, ch. 79; 131-3, ch. 31). The Egyptians were, according to Ishmael in "The Mast-Head," mast-head standers who built the pyramids for astronomical purposes – but we should remember that in <u>Moby-Dick</u> the stars are a source of power to be embraced or resisted, not merely objects to be studied (154-5, ch. 35). The Chapter "Moby-Dick" emphasizes his "pyramidical hump" (183, ch. 41). Mechanical outlines or impressions of the whale are no more useful than "taking the profile of a pyramid" (267, ch. 56). The markings on a whale's skin are literally hieroglyphs:

> These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious cyphers on the walls of
> pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connexion. By
> my retentive memory of the hieroglyphics upon one Sperm Whale in particular, I was
> much struck with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiselled on the famous
> hieroglyphic palisades on the banks of the Upper Mississippi. Like those mystic rocks,
> too, the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable. (306; ch. 68)

As much later in <u>Clarel</u>, according to Schueller's reading, the unreadability of the Orient is linked with that of the American West but also to the massively destructive power of the whale; the American project becomes not the Roman or Greek project but the Egyptian project.

Undecipherable languages and technologies lay everywhere just beneath the surface; Queequeg's lost innocence may only be the discovery that he and Ahab share the same past, for a "vital strength lurked in his [Ahab's] Egyptian chest" (185; ch. 41). The mark and image of the whale lie on Egyptian tablets so old that they are almost fossils (457; ch. 104).

In Moby-Dick the Pyramid signifies technology and learning, inscrutability and, most of all, power. Stubb is like Bartleby, caught in the heart of the pyramid with no hope of escape, and yet Ahab shares the same situation. Ahab thinks to own the crew utterly, to mechanize them. By the end of the novel they are "ground to finest dust, and powdered, for the time, in the clamped mortar of Ahab's iron soul. Like machines, they dumbly moved about the deck, ever conscious that the old man's despot eye was on them" (536; ch. 130). But for all of Ahab's ability to hold them in the heart of the pyramid, giving them Bartleby's mechanical movements, Ahab's own attempt to withstand Moby-Dick is only like kicking a pyramid in turn.

The trajectory of Melville's fascination with the pyramid eventually took him there in person (many prominent Americans, including Frederick Douglass, took the same journey). I quote from this remarkable passage (from his 1857 journal), written after his encounter with the great pyramids, at some length:

> Nothing in Nature gives such an idea of vastness. . . Pain in chest. Exhaustion. Must hurry. Nothing but the phlegmatic go deliberately. Old man with the spirits of youth – long looked for this chance – tried the ascent, half way – fainted – brought down. Tried to go into the interior – fainted – brought out – leaned against the pyramid by the entrance – pale as death. Nothing so pathetic. Too much for him; oppressed by the massiveness & mystery of the pyramids. I myself too. A feeling of awe & terror came over me. Dread

of the Arabs. Offering to lead me into a side-hole. The Dust. Long arched way, – then

down as in a coal shaft. . . I shudder at idea of ancient Egyptians. It was in these

pyramids that was conceived the idea of Jehovah. Terrible mixture of the cunning and

awful. Moses learned in all the lore of the Egyptians. The idea of Jehovah was born

here. . . Entrance of pyramids like a shoot [sic] for coal or timber. Horrible place for

assassination. As long as earth endure some vestige will remain of the pyramids. (75)

In David Nye's analysis of the technological sublime, the sublimity of the railroad, which is the

most amazing technological work of all, according to conventional wisdom, lies in its

annihilation of space and time; for some contemporaries of Melville, the steamboat transcended

the pyramids, and the Brooklyn Bridge was later compared positively to the pyramids (53, 57,

85). According to Nye the technological sublime, in contrast to Kant's sublime, "exalted the

conquest of nature" (152). Remarkably, Melville doesn't simply compare America's

technological wonders to the wonders of the ancient world, which would be in line with the

thought of his contemporaries; he is astute enough to see that the pyramid is the technological

sublime (again, the figure becomes literal): hence the image of pyramid's entrance as a coal shaft

or chute. This is a pyramid-as-machine. A machine for what, we might ask? A machine to

make power; a machine to make a God. A machine which, to paraphrase his words from Mardi,

operates from the past into the present and the future. A machine which, like the mysterious

ruins in Typee, underlies the contemporary world, "civilized" and "savage" alike. A machine

which is, as in White-Jacket, first and foremost a war-machine, or a world-machine, gliding

among the stars. Nature is not being conquered now, as the disciples of the railroad and the

suspension bridge would have it: nature was conquered (and replaced partially with the spirit)

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long ago – recall that Ahab and Starbuck are sometimes superstitious where Queequeg and Ishmael are naturalists.

In Pierre, Pierre's attempts at self-discovery are figured as the invasion of a tomb and the unwrapping of a mummy: "By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid -- and no body is there! -- appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!" (332; 21.1). The endless power of the pyramid, like both Ahab's power and the power of Moby-Dick that he despises, masks emptiness at its heart, like the literal empty space that Bartleby occupies in the pyramid.

In Book 2, Canto 11 of Clarel, titled "Of Deserts," Melville once more, following up on "Bartleby" and his journal entries, makes an association between modernity and the pyramids; near the beginning of the Canto he refers to Darwin's interest in Shelley, then compares "Western counties all in grain" to the Egyptian desert; later in the Canto he writes about the pyramids once more:

> When comes the sun up over Nile
> In cloudlessness, what cloud is cast
> O'er Lybia? Thou shadow vast
> Of Cheops' indissoluble pile,
> Typ'st thou the imperishable Past
> In empire's posthumous and reaching sway
> Projected far across to time's remotest day? (2.11, 168-69)

The ancient pyramid casts its shadow across the Libyan desert which has been previously associated with the American west; the empire is posthumous but still reaches; it is projected into

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the past – but is it not the projection ambiguous? Is it not also, being imperishable, projected into (or from) the future?[21] Darwin and Shelley's dread in the face of the wilderness is associated with a monumental work of architecture, which, standing in the midst of the wilderness, overlooks and dominates the course of human history. Egypt and the pyramids are once more associated with America and its destiny, but in this version of the relationship between Egypt and America, as in the 1857 journal entry, America is dwarfed by the monument which is supposed to merely figure its own power. That previous time and monument has projected onto and beyond the present; that vast shadow is our very being.

Melville's final book, Timoleon (1891), developed partially out of a dialogue with the Orientalist American painter Elihu Vedder: the book was dedicated to Vedder, and Melville's wife sent a copy (of the small private printing) to Vedder after Melville's death, as Dorsey Kleitz has documented. Both Melville and Vedder, according to Kleitz, are demonstrations of an Orientalism that was not only a closed and tyrannical system – "as seen in Melville's interest in Vedder, Melville looks to the Orient not so much as a site where answers are found, but as a site where questions are asked" (461). The second to last poem in Timoleon, entitled "The Great Pyramid," directly concerns an encounter with the pyramid – a variation on the encounter that appears first in Typee and endured through Clarel. The poem's first stanza blurs the categories of the technological and natural sublimes: "Your masonry – and is it man's? / More like some Cosmic artisan's. / Your courses as in strata rise, / Beget you do a blind surmise / Like Grampians" (Poems 339). The Grampians are a range of mountains in Scotland; this masonry is

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[21] In Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, Clifford types history as a "Dead giant standing on our shoulders." This image of the dead giant, a massive history that cannot be avoided or denied, is related to this concept of the pyramid.

indistinguishable from a mountain range. The artificial and natural are indistinguishable; if there

is a difference, it is irrelevant, as in what David Nye terms "the electrical sublime," in which the

erasure of the line dividing the natural and the artificial creates "a synthetic environment infused

with mystery" (Nye 152). But Melville discovers this "electrical" sublime in the pyramid alone,

with no modern intrusion; it belongs to the ancient as much as to the modern. The final stanza

reads: "Craftsmen, in dateless quarries dim,/ Stones formless into form did trim, / Usurped on

Nature's self with Art, / And bade this dumb I AM to start, / Imposing him." The "I AM" – that

is, the God YHWH, who speaks "I am that I am" out of the fire, is here a human creation, but not

only that: he is specifically formed by craftsmen out of stone; he is part architecture but also part

automaton: Jehovah as golem. God, the spirit, who in the previous poem in <u>Timoleon</u>, entitled

"In the Desert" emits light and fire "Holy, holy, holy Light! / immaterial incandescence, / Of God

the effluence of the essence, / Shekinah intolerably bright!" is created with – or simply <u>is</u> – the

Pyramid which is the pinnacle of <u>material</u> sublimity (338-9). The presence of God (Shekinah),

the emission of the essence of reality, the light of the holy spirit, is one with the imponderable

and utterly material power of the pyramid.   In short, the divine <u>logos</u> is a machine which

dominates Time: "Time's future infinite you dare, / While, for the past, 'tis you that wear / Eld's

diadem," ends "The Great Pyramid." The pyramid (or God) owns and supervises Time.

Ahab's apocalyptic time, the time which destroys Bartleby and underlies <u>Typee</u>, the time

which Queequeg embraces, betrays, and hurls Ishmael beyond, is the pyramid's time. It is a time

in which all is already known, created, calculated and destined. This time is as spatialized,

measured and demarcated as the very blocks from which the pyramids were constructed and the

laborers who built them.

The idea that Melville resisted the Western philosophical, teleological tradition (call it Hellenism or Modernity or Logocentrism – the differences are important, but so is the sameness) through his career may have become a cliché in Melville criticism, but even so the cliché still bears repeating. In Cosmopolis and Truth: Melville's Critique of Modernity (1996), Bernhard Radloff defines the modernity opposed by Melville thus:

> The final triumph of universal Reason over the limitations hitherto imposed on humanity
> by tradition is the telos of history conceived as the movement of the progressive
> emancipation of mankind in its collective, social being... What I propose to call the
> 'critique of modernity"... questions the premises of this project in essential respects. (1)

According to Radloff, Ahab's leadership is an "attempt to give sense to the sense-lessness of the modern economic enterprise and the atomistic social order of Lockean isolatoes..." (Radloff 2); that is, instrumental rationality is appropriated for a mad, ungrounded purpose. Similarly, he argues that Pierre and The Confidence-Man challenge the possibility of finding a grounding, political or personal, in "classical ideas" of truth and self-knowledge (5). In The Piazza Tales the "imperial" nature of truth is demonstrated; that is, the true is that which is "stable, upright, self-certain and secure," i.e., monumental. History and historiography are not truly rational, but "mythological" and "monumental" (Radloff 7-8). Melville becomes a postmodernist crusading against logocentric thinking. Ultimately the problem of modernity and Melville's response is described thus:

> the isolato covenants of desire – both the commercial, and the democratic, which already
> arise in response to the limitations of the commercial idea – cannot satisfy the
> fundamental dispositions of the isolato world... What remains, in Melville's world, is the

potential of sacrifice to institute a new beginning, and the potential of language to let the
originary speak without representing it. (232-3)

I have discussed versions of similar ideas earlier, from New's argument that Melville takes a

Hebraic stand against Hellenism and its telos, to Eric Wilson's vision of the apocalyptic passing

of western metaphysics. Similarly, for William Spanos in The Errant Art of Moby-Dick, the

thing that is extraordinary about Melville is that he

. . . proleptically delegitimized the discourse of the New World Order. I mean the

ontologically grounded and dialectically propelled discourse of the post-Cold War, the

"end-of-history" discourse that is essentially beyond the critical reach of the New

Historicism of the New Americanists. . . I offer this reading . . . as a contribution to a

New Americanist thinking that will make this insidious end-of-history discourse

thinkable. (278)

Melville's work – inevitably, Moby-Dick most of all –– is persistently interpreted as an articulate

response to Western metaphysics and Western teleology, offering something in its place:

sacrifice? evolution? Being-in-Itself?   This is the direction, at least, in which a large cluster of

theoretically-minded critics would take us. I am in sympathy with this tendency, as I am also in

sympathy with the urge to understand Melville as a "subversive Orientalist." My own argument

is that Melville's response to teleology and western metaphysics must not be considered apart

from his "subversive Orientalism," for the shadow of the pyramid still looms behind Western

metaphysics and teleology; in effect, the great pyramid is the telos towards which Western

thought inevitably hurtles, as well as its secret origin.

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Lyotard, among others, has argued that Marxism and Enlightenment thought are purely continuous with early Christian eschatology: "Although secularized, the Enlightenment narrative, Romanticist or speculative dialectics, and the Marxist narrative deploy the same historicity as Christianity, because they conserve the eschatological principle" (97). Melville proleptically outbids Lyotard: it is anticipated in Melville's novels and fully clear in his poetry that (for him) Christian eschatology emerges from the pyramid – which predates even the "natural" world of the Typees – under which God was created.

The Enlightenment, then, is but a pasteboard mask; the Christian eschatology which Lyotard sees beneath the Enlightenment is also a pasteboard mask. When we do attain a "little lower layer," in Ahab's words, we discover the identity of Egypt's monumental architecture and the technologies which built it with western metaphysics, eschatology and teleology, that is, with the deadening, mechanizing experience of modernity. Melville's (counter) Orientalism is his (post) modernism: the eternal heart of the pyramids is the heart of modernity. "Shekinah intolerably bright" is not a demiurge, a crafts(wo)man, but is herself a technological product. The experience of being reified, mechanized, and turned into standing reserve belongs to the invention of monumental history and the generation of teleological time with the pyramid's erection as much it belongs to the present, over which the pyramid still looms, as it surveys all of time.

C. MELVILLE'S AUTOMATA

Melville's works betray a fascination not only with technology as such and humanity as such, but with mechanized humanity and humanized technology: automata and cyborgs.[22]

Beginning with Typee, Melville's critique of colonialism and warfare is linked to a generalized critique of technology. He describes young Polynesian women: "... you might have seen a throng of young females, not filled with envyings of each other's charms... nor yet moving in whalebone corsets, like so many automatons, but free, inartificially happy, and unconstrained" (152; ch. 17). Ironically, the automaton-women at home are constricted by whalebone corsets; the same industry which rapes, murders and enslaves Polynesian women simultaneously mechanizes white women. While the Typees and other tribes live under the threat of imminent "asymmetrical warfare," the very process of colonization (in the case of whalers) and its products (in the case of women) enslave and mechanize the perpetrators and alleged beneficiaries of this warfare.

Omoo, the second half of what Joyce Adler argues is a war-story, is packed with references to a mechanized and mechanizing humanity. Unskilled sailors are treated like machines: "Regarded in the light of a mechanical power, whenever there is any plain, hard work to be done, he is put to it like a lever; every one giving him a pry" (380; ch. 14). Long Ghost, a doctor and the narrator's companion, imagines himself as a cyborg: "Oh, that one's joints were but provided with holes to drop a little oil through" (560; ch. 60). The whalers/invaders can't

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[22] At this point, by "cyborg" I simply mean a being that is part human and part machine; the reader should keep Donna Haraway's works in mind, but I am not yet making direct use of them.

resist making machines, using machines, making people into machines, or making themselves

into machines, even when the results are disastrous, as they are when an attempt is made to

introduce weaving machinery to Afrehitoo; the natives work for a time as a novelty, then the

machinery is abandoned (517; ch. 49). One is left to imagine that the next time machinery is

introduced, it will be with military force behind it. When Long Ghost imagines settling down in

Polynesia, he lays out his plans as follows: "I'll put up a banana-leaf as physician from London –

deliver lectures on Polynesian antiquities – teach English in five lessons, of one hour each –

establish power-looms for the manufacture of tapa – lay out a public park in the middle of the

village" (573; ch. 65). The doctor is half joking, but only half. Although he is a physician he

envisions himself as a teacher, an engineer, a supervisor and an architect, who will give a park to

people who live in a tropical paradise, immediately devise a factory which will improve and

render efficient the preeminent native craft, teach the natives about their own artifacts, etc. He

will engineer, discipline and re-order the village's entire life.[23] Long Ghost is not an engineer in

one of the science-based industries which will dominate American business starting in the late

nineteenth century, but he has confused ambitions along those lines: he will be a doctor-

anthropologist-teacher-engineer-architect, dominating a village through his scientific

knowledge.[24] Finally, and most remarkably, Doctor Long Ghost, after a night of drinking a local

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[23] See David Noble's America by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate
Capitalism on the political history of the engineering discipline.

[24] Typee and Omoo chart the domination of the South Pacific by capitalist Westerners, who
through military and technical skills (that is, proto-engineering), assert their dominance and start
businesses in Coconut-oil extraction, pearl diving and farming (Long Ghost and the narrator work for
potato farmers who supply ships), beyond the obvious whaling industry. This story is picked up
brilliantly in Jack London's South Sea tales. We would do well to remember that Melville's family
struggled to place him as an engineer on the Erie canal when he was young (Melville, Correspondence,
20-21).

brew called "Arva Tee" wakes up terribly sick, saying: "Heavens! my head's all wheels and springs, like the automaton chess-player! What's to be done, Paul! I'm poisoned!" (603; ch. 72). Although the doctor is at least theoretically an intellectual laborer, who isn't as vulnerable to becoming a "lever" as an ordinary sailor, he automatically thinks of himself as a machine when he feels sick. And why shouldn't he in a world where mechanization is humanity's ordinary fate: Polynesians, sailors and upper class Anglo-Saxon women are alike threatened by a seemingly inevitable mechanization of the self which moves in tandem with mechanized industry. This is a world where Ishmael's later line "Who ain't a slave?" could be rephrased "Who ain't a machine?"

The same story can be told about <u>Mardi</u>. The hammocks that sailors swing in are figured as pendulums at the beginning of the novel: "Time, and time-pieces! How many centuries did my hammock tell, as pendulum-like it swung to the ship's dull roll, and ticked the hours and ages." (665; ch. 1). The image of the pendulum is significant, for with the introduction of the pendulum clock in 1657 "it became possible for the first time... to build timepieces – chronometers – that possessed the extremely high accuracy necessary for determining longitude at sea" (Mayr 14). The swinging pendulum does not simply indicate the narrator's boredom, but also the mechanization of the sailors themselves: they are precision instruments, like the chronometer, as necessary for the ship's operation as the machine which determines longitude. The narrator mourns that he cannot raise them to rebellion, for "There was no soul a magnet to mine... there was naught to strike fire from their steel" (664-5; ch. 1). The sailors are machines which cannot be turned from the use to which the captain puts them, with the exception of Jarl, who mechanically follows the narrator: "... thou didst revolve upon thine own sober axis, like a

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wheel in a machine which forever goes round, whether you look at it or no" (695; ch. 11). The

narrator has broken Jarl away from the ship, but Jarl remains a reprogrammed automaton, and the

narrator is a little Ahab who later proves to be a violent monomaniac. When he and Jarl come

upon a derelict ship, the narrator launches into a desperate search for a chronometer on board

(754; ch. 29). Later, in one of the philosophical passages in the novel, a philosopher wonders:

> Who put together this marvelous mechanism of mine; and wound it up, to go for three
>
> score years and ten; when it runs out, and strikes Time's hours no more? ... What keeps
>
> up the perpetual telegraphic communication between my outpost toes and digits, and that
>
> domed grandee up aloft, my brain? (1195; ch. 163)

Taken out of context, this passage would seem relatively harmless; in the tradition of Descartes,

the philosopher is arguing that the body (like the world) is clockwork, but the soul is free. But

the souls of the sailors and of Jarl, figured as chronometers, are not free; even as the digits are

telegraphically controlled by the grandee of the brain, so most people are controlled by literal

grandees. In Mardi, as Wai-Chee Dimock among others have demonstrated, the freedom of one

(figured by Dimock as the tyrannical ego of the author) means imperialism for others.

Mardi's obsessions with automatons, independence and chronometers dovetail nicely

together; according to Otto Mayr, clock-making and crafting automata was a single art, which

primarily had political and aesthetic as opposed to strictly practical or economic significance:

> This tendency of emphasizing the automata capabilities of clocks while downplaying
>
> their time-telling capability culminated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
>
> Automata performances not only became standard requirements for the larger tower

clocks; they were also realized on various smaller scales, down to that of pocket watches.

(21)

Melville wrote in the age when the clock-as-chronometer was displacing the clock-as-automaton, but the association between the two had not yet broken, as it has been in our age of electronic and atomic clocks.[25] The early clock and the automaton were, Mayr argues, primarily symbols of power, which subordinated "the public life of the whole town to a common schedule," organizing the citizenry in "more and more tightly interlocking patterns," which were placed in the center of utopian town designs" (15). Accurate timekeeping was not the point of early clocks, which often had to be set using sundials (<u>Mayr</u>, 10). Early clocks <u>regulated</u> the world (performing a function that was perhaps earlier performed by astronomy), starting with the monastery; they illustrated (and some have argued, created) a deterministic worldview and authoritarian centralization.[26] Although Manuel De Landa does not explicitly argue that sixteenth century war machines are modeled on automata, he does argue that there is a relationship:

> These rigid squares of men and weapons, incapable of exercising any individual initiative
>
> on the battlefield, resembled a well-oiled clockwork mechanism. The time when the
>
> phalanx reached its peak, during the late eighteenth century, was also [when] technology

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[25] Consider, for instance, Hawthorne's meditation on time in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, occasioned by the appearance of an Italian boy with a portable automaton.

[26] Mayr, 119. One of the most interesting moments in Mayr's book is when he discusses an ongoing proxy debate between Newton and Leibniz, about whether the world was essentially clockwork or not: Newton said nay, Leibniz said yea. Hobbes, of course, made an analogy between the state and a clockwork automaton.

had extended the clockwork paradigm to its ultimate consequences, as can be seen in the elaborate mechanical gardens and toy automata of the period.[27]

This integrates well with Joyce Adler's argument that <u>Mardi</u> is to a large extent about war (Adler, 15-16). The modern war machine which Adler skillfully exposes in Melville's early works is not magically only mechanical at a higher level: rather, as De Landa argues, knowingly following Foucault and, presumably unknowingly following Mumford, the modern war machine requires fully mechanized parts: the mechanization and alienation of modernity are the mechanization and alienation of modern war. What many (Wai-Chee Dimock, for instance) have seen as <u>Mardi's</u> strident egoism is undermined by an intense anxiety about the mechanization of the self, specifically mechanization into Adler's war machine.

 In <u>Redburn</u>, too, the narrator serves as an automaton. When the ship sails through a fog, "the chronometer pronounced it noon," but the fog was so dense that "I, poor Wellingborough, mounted aloft... tolling the ship's bell, as if for a funeral" (108; ch. 20). Elsewhere in the novel the human body is compared to the body of a ship, and the narrator imagines that "There are classes of men in the world, who bear the same relation to society at large, that the wheels do to a coach: and are just as indispensable" (77; ch. 13; 153; ch. 29). A large swath of the world's population exists only to do work as machines, and Redburn suspects he might number among them.

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[27] De Landa, <u>War</u>, 65. This brief discussion hardly does justice to the use to which De Landa can be put in relation to <u>Mardi</u>. For instance, should the sailor-chronometers be classified as a clockwork army or a motorized army? I suspect new categories would need to be invented, to account for the fact that war at sea differs from war on land (one weakness of De Landa).

Life in White-Jacket is endlessly mechanized. In Chapter three, the narrator recounts the

endless ways in which the crew is subdivided: for each occasion there is a station, for each job,

each man has a task. "It is from this endless subdivision of duties in a man-of-war, that, upon

first entering one, a sailor has need of a good memory.... White-Jacket, for one, was a long time

rapt in calculations, concerning the various 'numbers' allotted him..." (358; ch. 3). With the

endless subdivision of labor and the numbers in place of a name, White-Jacket is reminiscent of

Zamyatin's We and other dystopian novels. The narrator is nearly flogged towards the end of the

novel for being in the wrong place during a particular exercise. It is no surprise that the narrator

is nearly flogged, for by not knowing his place he has wandered outside of both discipline and

regimented time. Foucault writes on how time, bodies and forces are regulated, which leads, in

his terminology, into the creation of "man-the-machine:"

> The disciplines, which analyze space, break up and rearrange activities, must also be
>
> understood as machinery for adding up and capitalizing time. This was done in four
>
> ways.... 1. Divide duration into successive or parallel segments, each of which must end
>
> at a specific time.... 2. Organize these threads according to an analytical plan.... 3.
>
> Finalize these temporal segments, decide on how long each will last and conclude it with
>
> an examination [White-jacket fails to be at his place during a drill].... 4. Draw up series
>
> of series; lay down for each individual, according to his ... ran, the exercises that are
>
> suited to him... it is a disciplinary polyphony of exercises. (Discipline, 157-9).

White-Jacket knows that he must know his place at all times, in accordance with the lists of

numbers which have been assigned to him, or he'll stand outside the clockwork of the ship. The

diverse numbers and positions he must know are Foucault's "series of series" and "polyphony of

exercises"; not knowing all of the numbers of his positions automatically requires him to be disciplined, for he has desegmentized, demechanized, and despatialized Time.

The authority of White-Jacket's captain is absolute. He is "lord and master of the sun," and, as Otto Mayr might predict in his discussion of the relationship between the measurement of time and authority, he controls even time itself, since literally "it is not twelve o'clock till he says so" (371; ch. 6).[28] The captain is the master chronometer. Living in a man-of-war is like "living in a large manufactory," or "living in a market" (384; ch. 9). The sailor-automaton of this supremely dystopian novel has no privacy, no possessions other than what fits in a canvas bag which can be accessed only at appointed times. He is manufactured, regimented, and controlled; as an interchangeable part in a war machine (still following both De Landa and Adler) he stands ready to manufacture death. The hearts of the sailors beat "like sledgehammers in those hot smithies, our bosoms... let them feel of our generous pulses, and swear that they go off like thirty-two-pounders" (427; ch. 19). The mechanized man, the component of the war machine, has a sledgehammer for a heart and a cannonball for a pulse. An elderly Commodore spends his time directing naval exercises, like Charles the Fifth diverted himself "watching the gyrations of the springs and cogs of a long row of clocks" (550; ch. 46). Charles the Fifth, who had once commanded armies, finds joy in clockwork; the Commodore finds joy in men who operate like clockwork, utterly under his command.

At one point in the novel the ship's surgeon, Cuticle, amputates a man's leg for insufficient reasons. Before he does so, he removes his own wig, glass eye, and false teeth,

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[28] Lewis Mumford makes a detailed argument in both volumes of The Myth of the Machine that sun-worship and the power of the sun remain central to modern megatechnics, an argument I will make use of later.

revealing himself as a kind of cyborg.[29] The man dies, the victim of a mechanistic scientific

curiosity. The sailors are well enough disciplined that, for all of their resentments, "like their

own guns, they have fought without a thought" (687; ch. 75). The men are weapons, as much as

their muskets are. Melville finally describes the man-of-war as a complete system of discipline:

"The whole body of this discipline is emphatically a system of cruel cogs and wheels,

systematically grinding up in one common hopper all that might minister to the moral well-being

of the crew" (742; ch. 89). The crew of White-Jacket is a precision clockwork mechanism, a

group of disciplined and mastered bodies, an automaton, a war machine, utterly subject to the

captain's will. Foucault, dealing with the concept of the docile body in the eighteenth century,

starting from the image of the ideal soldier, writes

> The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and
>
> rearranges it. A 'political anatomy,' which was also a 'mechanics of power,' was being
>
> born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may
>
> do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the
>
> speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and
>
> practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. (Discipline, 138).

The old commodore controls men and ships with the precision of a conductor, dominating not

one body but thousands, so well have they been disciplined. In Typee, Omoo, and Mardi the full

mechanization of man loomed; in White-Jacket it has finally arrived, despite scattered points of

resistance. Thus far, Melville anticipates Foucault, although in his later works he will outbid

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[29] He is much like the main character of Poe's "Man Who was Used Up," the colonel who, when all prosthetics have been removed, is hardly there at all. Like Melville, Poe had first-hand knowledge of being part of a war machine, through his experience at West Point.

him, by placing the mechanization of humanity farther into the past. Nor is there any argument

or facade, as in other American writers, that this discipline is integral to the creation of a true

republic (see my discussion of Benjamin Rush, etc., on the education system as a "republican

machine" in the first chapter); a republican machine is only another name for a war machine.

Two of the Sub-Sub's extracts at the beginning of Moby-Dick portray the Leviathan as a

machine or an artificial man. Melville quotes from the beginning of Hobbes's Leviathan: "By art

is created that great Leviathan, called a Commonwealth or State... which is but an artificial man"

(xx; extracts). This is an astonishingly rich sentence, especially placed at the beginning of Moby-

Dick: the Leviathan is the state, the whale, and an artificial man, a robot or automaton. This

third possibility is underscored by the preceding quotation, which Melville takes from Waller's

Battle of the Summer Islands:

Like Spencer's Talus with his iron flail,

He threatens ruin with his ponderous tail.

    *   *   *   *   *

Their fixed jav'lins in his side he wears,

And on his back a grove of pikes appears. (xx; extracts)

Waller is clearly referring to a whale-hunt, based on the ranks of spears imbedded in the

creature's back and the horrors of its tail. But we are left to remember that Talus in The Faerie

Queene, who serves Artegall, or justice, is an iron man who wields an iron flail. He obeys his

master with perfect, inhuman obedience, refusing to rescue him when that would defy his

master's commands, although that rescue would clearly be within his power – for he doesn't

simply kill one or two of his opponents at a time: he slaughters them in heaps.[30] He is a

mechanical man, an automaton, enormously powerful but nonetheless perfectly subservient: the

perfect dream of a clockwork soldier – so ideal, in fact, that he looks forward several generations

of mechanization, for he is a perfect soldier even operating alone, a type of warfare De Landa

discusses in relation to Hitler's army, writing

> ... tactical dispersal involved the creation of the self-contained soldier, possessed not only
>
> of an esprit de corps but also of an "esprit d'armee," the necessary discipline that allowed
>
> small groups of men to fight on their own or to coalesce into larger groups according to
>
> the circumstances.[31]

The Talus to whom Melville directs our attention is the perfect "army of one," to refer to

contemporary U.S. Army advertisements. This Talus, this army of one, refers to Moby-Dick, but

also Ahab and the army that Ahab dreams of constructing.[32]

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[30] Consider, for instance, the following lines:
But when they thought on Talus hands to lay,
        He with his yron flaile amongst them thondred,
        That they were fayne to let him scape away,
        Glad from his companie to be sondred;
        Whose presence all their troups so much encombred
        That th'heapes of those, which he did wound and slay,
        Besides the rest dismayd, might not be nombred:
        Yet all that while he would not once assay,
To reskew his owne Lord, but thought it just t'obay. (777; bk. 5 ct. 5 vs. 19)

[31] De Landa, War, 72. Here, as elsewhere, De Landa is working with Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus, in which they lay out the idea of a nomadic war machine in perpetual tension with a static state. Is the whale the war machine in conflict with Ahab's state? Or is Ahab special because he is struggling himself to move from the model of the static state to the nomadic war machine, with the tragedy being that he can't quite succeed? One is tempted to think the latter, especially because of Ahab's attempt to abandon the commercial purpose of the voyage, and because he must give in at times to the pecuniary ambition of his men.

[32] This also relates to Foucault's notion of increasingly fine discipline over increasingly small actions (Discipline and Punish); when regimentation is sufficiently deep-rooted, the solder can be on his

Waller makes use of the analogy between the Whale's tale and Spencer's flail to conjure up the image of Talus' immense destructive power, but Melville, by then immediately quoting Hobbes, is being more complex. The first passage makes an analogy between a whale and a powerful mechanical man; the second calls the Leviathan an artificial man. The three concepts of whale, mechanical man/soldier, and the state fuse together: the technological fantasy of a mechanical man both springs from and results in the State's mechanization of humanity, which nonetheless is literally a machine in Hobbes' view.

This is only the first appearance of the trope of the mechanical man in Moby-Dick; there are many more, many of them enumerated in Stephen Ausband's "The Whale and the Machine." David Mitchell has demonstrated that Ahab is critically shaped by his dismemberment and the prosthetic (whalebone) leg that replaces his natural leg: "Ahab is sentenced to the inflexibility of a prosthesis" (19). Ahab is, in other words, partially dependent on mechanical contrivances, as we also see when he needs to go to another ship. Perhaps, as Mitchell argues, this leads him to see himself more inflexibly, that is, more mechanically. In any case, he does view himself mechanically, for instance in "The Symphony": "Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm... By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike" (545; ch. 132). The image of the self as a machine is connected to a generalized mechanical determinism. Ahab envisions himself as a windlass, as dominated by outside forces, and as being mended by the blacksmith by having the seam in his head smoothed out (488; ch. 113).

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own and still be a soldier.

Ahab announces his totalitarian triumph in mechanical terms: "my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve.... or, if you will, like so many anthills of powder, they all stand before me; and I their match. Oh, hard! That to fire others, the match itself must needs be wasting!" (168; ch. 37). Ahab is the machine which controls the machines, the cyborg who dominates other cyborgs, mourning that he must burn out to light others; he dominates a system of machines, but regrets that he must be a machine to accomplish this, and resents – not to mention rebels against – the condition of the world which reveals him as mechanical, even as he mechanizes the world about him.

Ahab makes men into clocks, which are always already running down: "So man's seconds tick!"[33] But Ahab and the Sub-Sub are not alone in seeing humanity as mechanical: Starbuck sees himself as a mine and a clock : "But he drilled deep down, and blasted all my reason out of me ... But my whole clock's run down; my heart the all-controlling weight, I have no key to lift it" (169; ch. 38). The crew experience themselves as machines, especially as clocks. But we should, again, be wary of mistaking the world-picture of the Pequod for "just" the mechanistic Cartesian world picture. Lynn White argues at length that the near-universal introduction of the mechanical clock is connected not only to the regulation of humanity, but especially to the virtue of temperance, the great bourgeois virtue (Technology and Religion, 181-204). But Ahab has usurped the ship's clockwork for intemperate purposes. Melville has, throughout his fiction, problematized this classic meaning of the clock metaphor (the military system in White-Jacket, recall, destroys all virtue; the missionaries of Typee and Omoo introduce

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[33] Melville, Moby-Dick, 528; ch 127. Foucault associates Frederick the Great's military successes with his fascination with automata. Foucault, Discipline, 136.

technology but destroy native virtues without replacing them with Christian/Capitalist ones like temperance), and with Ahab he has overturned it. The temperance which the clock is supposed to symbolize and generate is, in fact, replaced by what Radloff calls the "rootlessness of desire" in his analysis of The Confidence-Man (Cosmopolis 40). The clock may stand for and generate power, but temperance and associated virtues are mocked, as revealed by Melville's many satires of Benjamin Franklin and his (in)temperance in Israel Potter, "The Lightning-Rod Man" and The Confidence Man.

But, contrary to most critics, when Melville mocks temperance and associated virtues by linking the regulatory power of the clock to Ahab's rootless desire, this is not simply Melville's response to the Enlightenment and liberalism; the process of turning the world into a machine predates official mechanical determinism. In "The Candles" Ahab's encounter with the divine is mediated by technological artifacts; the masts, boat and harpoon are electrified in sequence; a decision must be made to deploy or not deploy the lightning rods (which is related to his satire of Franklin in "The Lightning-Rod Man." When the corpusants (St. Elmo's fire) illuminate the ship Ahab admits their power, which is God's power, but also defies it, in perhaps the most regularly quoted passage in the novel

> But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou
> done with her? There lies my puzzle; but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how came
> ye, hence callest thyself unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest
> thyself unbegun. I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou
> omnipotent. There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all
> thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical. Through thee, thy flaming self,

my scorched eyes do dimly see it. Oh, thou foundling fire, thou hermit immemorial, thou too hast thy incommunicable riddle, thy unparticipated grief. Here again with haughty agony, I read my sire. Leap! leap up, and lick the sky! I leap with thee; I burn with thee; would fain be welded with thee; defyingly I worship thee!

In his interpretation of the gnostic element in Moby-Dick (following Dillingham, among others), Etsuko Taketani discusses the gnostic provenance of this passage.

> Ahab's Gnostic genealogy should give him a double parentage... The visible fire is the representation of Jehovah (the Demiurge) who made man. Beyond the fiery father, Ahab's Gnostic discourse invents the presence of another father, the Unknown God... [The] mechanical creativity of the Demiurge is represented by the 'carpenter' figure in Moby-Dick. (130)

Despite all of Ahab's defiance, his "Gnostic manipulation of discourse... seems impotent in altering the material history" (Taketani, 131). Ahab here attempts rebellion against teleology and Western historiography, invoking a divine mother (Sophia/wisdom, in Gnostic discourse) against the divine father, and a spiritual realm against the material realm which is the Demiurge's mechanical creation. But what Ahab himself seeks is also a telos; his obsession with the pure, secret and truthful origin which lies behind the Demiurge (i.e., the pasteboard mask) is also an obsession with destroying the Demiurge. Hence the significance of Fedallah, whose unflagging loyalty to Ahab's quest against the Demiurge is remarkable when understood in the full context of his "Parsee," that is, Parsi/Zoroastrian origins: one of the characteristics of the Zoroastrian religion is a belief, preceding Christianity, in a precise, precalculated duration to history, which becomes a demarcated and ordered battlefield between good and evil principles. Fedallah's faith

is as at least as eschatological as Ahab's Christian/enlightenment beliefs, and is arguably as linked to technology, even in a "real" historical sense: according to Arnold Pacey, Parsees were in the forefront of Indian shipbuilding and other forms of native capitalist industry (World, 67-9). Given Melville's awareness of the sophistication of Indian shipbuilding, which I discuss elsewhere, it seems probable that Fedallah has been deliberately associated with both technology and eschatology. Gnosticism, which owes its dualism and concept of history partially to Zoroastrianism, is the embrace of a secret, spiritual, truthful world behind this treacherous material one; it is at best a problematic rebellion against teleological history; if it rejects the pyramid (that is, Jehovah or the Demiurge, regarded as a wicked or ignorant god but also the world's creator), it still finds the only meaning of time in the pyramid and the pyramid's eventual destruction. In Ahab's Gnostic worldview, time can only be teleological and the world can only be mechanical, until world and time are destroyed. In attacking "salvation history," the half-mechanical and all-mechanizing Ahab seeks only salvation from (but never in) history: since Time is not a machine which he controls, he must destroy it, just as he destroys the quadrant in "The Quadrant."

As a mechanical man, dependent on a prosthesis, who mechanizes the world, who is a product of and rebel against both teleology and the war machine, who is the technological Faust to Fedallah's technological-Oriental devil, Ahab is a Cyborg, following Donna Haraway's definition, in which Cyborgs are creatures "simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and created" (Haraway, Simians 149. Haraway writes "Modern war is a cyborg orgy, coded by C³I, Command-control-communication intelligence."[34] Ahab, the

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[34] Haraway, Simians, 150. Also see Deleuze and especially De Landa on this subject.

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prosthetic man, does not control the crew through physical strength, but through C³I; recall the

captain in White-Jacket, who is the master of time itself; Ahab's domination is both subtler and

more thorough. Haraway writes:

> The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is
>
> oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. . . Unlike the hopes of
>
> Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a
>
> restoration of the garden. . . The main trouble with cyborgs. . . is that they are the
>
> illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state
>
> socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins
>
> (Simians 151).

Could there be a more perfect description of Ahab (or Fedallah), traitorous heir of capitalism and

the war machine (don't doubt this point; remember the complicity of the whaling industry with

war and imperialism in Typee, Omoo, and Mardi), a totalitarian desperate for freedom, as C.L.R.

James as well as others has argued, who pursues an irrational war regardless of consequences for

the crew, but loves Pip, the lowliest member of it, who follows in Victor Frankenstein's footsteps

but also, in some sense, in the footsteps of Frankenstein's monster?[35]

Haraway certainly doesn't intend for her category of the Cyborg to apply to nineteenth-

century figures like Captain Ahab. This makes it even more significant that Ahab does fit into

the category so well. Even as historians of technology like Lynn White urge us to reconsider the

history of technology, pushing the "industrial revolution" farther back into the "middle ages,"

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[35] See Mitchell, "Too much a Cripple" and Kris Lackey "More Spiritual Terrors," as well as
C.L.R. James' Mariners, Renegades and Castaways.

while acknowledging that America's conquest of the west was based on technology that was essentially medieval, it is important to acknowledge that the "cybernetic age" did not begin suddenly with, say, the invention of the computer (White, Religion and Technology 22, 109, 120). Daniel Headrick argues this point at considerable length in When Information Came of Age, pointing out that the "information revolution" has been under way for hundreds of years, for instance in the evolution of cataloging techniques and statistics, both foundational for and continuous with contemporary techniques and technologies. The cybernetic age is old and ongoing; it is exemplified in Ahab's desire, like that of any good totalitarian, to create a legion of mechanical men to serve his purposes. The ships's carpenter is shown to be an "unreasoning wheel;" Ahab calls the carpenter a "manmaker;" Ahab tells the carpenter to order the smith to make him a mechanical man: "... while Prometheus is about it, I'll order a complete man after a desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks... no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains" (470; ch. 108). The carpenter, being machine-like himself, hardly understands what Ahab is saying – but he has requested a mechanical man with immense computational abilities – precisely one dream of the Pentagon.[36]

In Moby-Dick (as prepared by the novels from Typee through Whitejacket), there is, on the one hand, a vision of technology and time which has become almost commonplace: physical but especially disciplinary technologies lead to the development of a mechanized war machine which necessitates the mechanization of the self, with the outer and inner mechanization of the world amounting to the telos of Western civilization and thought. This is the understanding of

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[36] I could refer again to De Landa at this point, but Stanley Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove and Orson Welles' The Trial, or even Isaac Asimov's robot stories are also important points of reference.

Melville which is compatible with most contemporary critics, who, willingly or not, embrace a kind of thought about technology and time which is well exemplified in Leo Marx's work. But there is also a countermovement or undertow of thought in Moby-Dick, which fully erupts in the late poetry and The Confidence Man, in which technology (both disciplinary and physical technologies), rather than rushing towards a telos, undergirds history itself. Traditional criticism has seen Queequeg as being involved in a kind of border war between nature, cyclic time, and aboriginal civilization against technology, linear time and Western civilization, but his war against the latter also makes him a traitor to the former, which opens up a vision of time and technology as pure flux – which is very much like the vision of The Confidence Man and the later poetry.

When Melville shifted from writing about the sea to writing about the land, the mechanical men he wrote about were no longer simply the disciplined components of a war machine; Ahab's dream of a literal mechanical man comes closer, and in at least one story is realized.

In The Confidence Man an herb-doctor accuses a cripple of being "... a demoniac unfortunate... [a] regular infernal machine" (940; ch. 19). Shortly thereafter the herb-doctor encounters a Missourian, who complains of being "embezzled" by nature, when the river washed away his farm, and remembers with loathing the last boy who worked on his farm, saying "I am now started to get me made some kind of machine to do the sort of work which boys are supposed to be fitted for" (955; ch. 21). The Missourian refuses to have either slaves or white servants. Later, he encounters a "Philosophical Intelligence Officer," (note the ambiguous title; is this man a philosopher or a component of the war machine/intelligence apparatus? Melville's

critique of Western thought is seldom more apparent) who offers to help the Missourian find a

boy; the Missourian refuses emphatically:

> I'm now on the road to get me made some sort of machine to do my work. Machines for
>
> me... cider-mill, mowing-machine, corn-husker — all faithfully attend to their business.
>
> Disinterested, too... shining examples that virtues is its own reward.... Start my soul-
>
> bolts, what a difference, in a moral point of view, between a corn-husker and a boy! Sir,
>
> a corn-husker, for its patient continuance in well-doing, might not unfitly go to heaven.
>
> Do you suppose a boy will? (963; ch. 22).

Note that the Missourian, in replacing the boys with machines, also makes himself into a

machine – "start my soul-bolts," he says (these words are also spoken by Stubb, the most

obviously mechanical of the major characters in <u>Moby-Dick</u>). As Radloff has pointed out, the

very concept of virtue in the "confidence world" rests entirely on virtue as "an automatism of

habit": "Confidence is faith in the rational transparency of a calculable agent – this is the very

basis of the commercial contract. If the money lenders of this world thought that their debtors

were [liable] to kill themselves, or kill them, or burn their assets... the calculating brain of the

Leviathan would burn out" (<u>Cosmopolis</u> 30, 32). Like a small-town Ahab or Frankenstein, the

Missourian has turned the world into a machine; he has yearned to replace his laborers with

machines, but has mechanized himself in the process. He has absorbed the Calvinist economic

virtues – thrift, temperance, etc. – and he has so thoroughly mechanized himself that efficiency

has become the only standard of virtue in his eyes.[37] A teleological history, one with heaven

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[37] David Noble, Lynn White and Lewis Mumford – the two former under the influence of the
latter – among others, write extensively on the conflation of moral virtue and technological progress.

looming at the end of it, is a history which can be endured only by machines. He continues by generalizing his findings and applying them to the whole world:

> ... boy or man, the human animal is ... a losing animal. Can't be trusted... Hence these thousand new inventions... all of which announce the era when that refractory animal, the working or serving man, shall be ... a superseded fossil... I rejoice to think that the day is at hand, when, prompted to it by law, I shall shoulder this gun and go out a boy-shooting. (964)

The "human animal" is a losing proposition: inefficient, disobedient, untrustworthy, and treacherous (a good description of both Ishmael and Ahab). As such, the human animal deserves to be both superseded and destroyed, under the authority of the law. The Missourian envisions a future of land owners ordering the standing-reserve of the machinery, with the lower classes being eliminated. He is an Ahab become nauseatingly ordinary, who envisions a humanity as endangered as it is any science-fiction story.[38] Eventually the Missourian is convinced by the Philosophical Intelligence Officer to try another boy, one who has been phrenologically examined: this boy, being thoroughly investigated and <u>known</u>, is sufficiently mechanized to do a machine's work.

In "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," Melville takes us on a winter journey to a paper mill. The factory operates under the control of a man and an impish boy, but the workers are "girls" – of all ages, but unmarried, and all infantilized: "We want nothing but steady workers: twelve hours to the day, day after day... And so, having no married women, what

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[38] One major science-fiction version of a vast array of machines/robots serving a tiny surviving ruling class is portrayed in Isaac Asimov's <u>The Naked Sun</u>.

females we have are rightly enough called girls." The "girls" never speak in the story; they all have "pallid faces," and are repeatedly described as being cold; clearly Melville is at some level satirizing novels and stories about mill girls, which generally focused on the struggle of maintaining all of one's agrarian virtues at the mill, while earning enough money to get married, put one's brother through school, etc. Looking at the machine, the narrator has a vision of the girls as a product of the machine:

> Something of awe now stole over me, as I gazed upon this inflexible iron animal... what made the thing I saw so specially terrible to me was the metallic necessity, the unbudging fatality which governed it... Before my eyes — there, passing in slow procession along the wheeling cylinders, I seemed to see, glued to the pallid incipience of the pulp, the yet more pallid faces of all the pallid girls I had eyed that heavy day. Slowly, mournfully, beseechingly, yet unresistingly, they gleamed along, their agony dimly outlined on the imperfect paper... (1277).

Klaus Benesch argues that Melville's "critique of the bleakness of a work routine dictated by the need of the machine" was unusual for his time, but Philip Young argues that the story is "an unapologetic testament of fruitless anger at the 'metallic necessity' that governs the reproduction of the species" – precisely the feeling that leads Victor Frankenstein into his own act of creation (Benesch 66; Young 224). The narrator of the story stands in dread and awe of the mechanical process of paper-making, and either sees the girls themselves as mechanical, or dreads the mechanical nature of human reproduction; either way, the mechanical woman walks among us, but still, for now, ordered as standing-reserve by "Old Bach" who controls the factory, partially in an allusion to the ongoing mechanization of music which Arnold Pacey details in Meaning in

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Technology, who is yet another little Ahab, and whose factory produces both paper and mechanized women; mechanized, they are referred to as "girls."

As if to underline his growing interest in technology and time, in another one of his short stories, the Hawthornian "The Bell-Tower," Melville deals with a literal, rather than metaphoric mechanical man, who is created in a clock-tower. The "mechanician" (mechanic and magician conflated) Bannadonna serves an Italian republic with the versatility of a Michelangelo. He is "reputed to be an architect," but he is building no ordinary building, but the highest Bell-Tower in Italy, which will include all the functions of a clock-tower as well (819). Thus, he is establishing an architectural edifice that will help regulate the population and show the power of church and state (Otto Mayr), while reminding the people of the virtues, especially the virtue of temperance (Lynn White). When Bannadonna casts the largest bell for the tower, one of his workers balks, and Bannadonna kills him, but no consequences fall upon him; as a representative of the authoritarian, time-mastering state, he can get away with murder. But he is not simply building an ordinary clock with ordinary automata: "It was not unknown that he was engaged upon something for the belfry, intended to complete it, and surpass all that had gone before... his seclusion failed not to invest his work with ... mystery pertaining to the forbidden" (821). Like Victor Frankenstein, he is utterly absorbed in his forbidden work, and is too much of a powerful, sovereign Prometheus (like Prometheus who serves Zeus but, in Prometheus Unbound aspires to replace him, he originally represents another power, but aspires to replace that power) to be punished for his crimes, save by his creation: cyborgs are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins (Haraway, Simians, 151). For he is creating a mechanical man, who the few visitors to the tower sometimes hear moving about. When the hour approaches for the bell to be first rung,

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there is only a muffled sound. Soldiers break into the tower to find an automaton standing over

Belladonna, having killed him with the mace that was supposed to strike the bell: Belladonna,

oblivious to the passage of time, was standing before the bell at the appointed time, and his

creation, as obedient as Spencer's Talus, strikes where and when it is supposed to strike, heedless

of consequences. The automaton which kills him was either to be the prototype for a more

complete mechanical man, or else that creation had already been made:

> ... it had indirectly occurred to Bannadonna to devise some metallic agent, which should
>
> strike the hour with its mechanic hand, with even greater precision than the vital one... as
>
> the vital watchman on the roof... walked to the bell with uplifted mace, to smite it,
>
> Bannadonna had resolved that his invention should likewise possess the power of
>
> locomotion... [and] the appearance, at least, of intelligence and will.... but they [those
>
> speculating about Bannadonna] stopped not here... He still bent his efforts upon the
>
> locomotive figure for the belfry, but only as a partial type of an ulterior creature, a sort of
>
> elephantine Helot, adapted to further... the universal conveniences and glories of
>
> humanity; supplying nothing less than a supplement to the Six Days' Work; stocking the
>
> earth with a new serf... Talus was to have been the all-accomplished Helot's name.
>
> Talus, iron slave to Bannadonna, and through him, to man (830).

This is precisely the dream of Ahab and of the Missourian: to have a perfectly obedient and

endlessly accomplished automaton, wiser, more capable and more obedient than man. We can

even hear echoes of Ahab's totalitarian power, and of the Missourian's desire to "hunt boys," for

Talus is, we see, not to directly serve humanity, but only to humanity's slave <u>through</u>

Bannadonna: humanity is to become at best beholden to, and at worst subjugated by, Bannadonna

and his mechanical man. Remember: Spencer's Talus is first and foremost a war machine! The

desire for efficiency and the threat of absolute, totalitarian power merge together; one might

connect this to the development of scientific management, as well as to slavery, as in Benito

Cereno.[39]

The mechanical nature of Bartleby's work and of Bartleby himself needs little additional

comment; much of the narrator's unease comes from the extremity of Bartleby's mechanical

attributes. Up to a point, a mechanized man is convenient to him, but beyond that point, he feels

himself and his world teetering:

> ...he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He
>
> ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been
>
> quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on
>
> silently, palely, mechanically (642).

Bartleby is a human copying-machine, as mechanized (or Enframed) as any man can be. Yet

Bartleby, against both the Megamachine and his own apparent interests, rebels, and begins to

refuse work. He will not do the efficient, mechanical job of verifying (with the other clerks, the

other components of the office machinery) the quadruplicate copies he has made. Other

characters are described mechanically: Turkey sat "glowing like a brass boiler," for instance

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[39] One way to make this argument would be to connect Moby-Dick and A Connecticut Yankee in
King Arthur's Court with the development of scientific management and the assembly line, using
Siegfried Giedeon's Mechanization Takes Command (1948) and David Noble's America By
Design (1977). Giedion argues that the assembly line as such was developed early in the nineteenth
century by the Cincinnati (later Chicago) meat-packing industry; although he doesn't mention whaling
specifically, that seems like a natural extension of his argument. Twain's engineer, of course, is equally
an inventor and a manager, who makes factories to produce goods but metaphorizes his project as a
whole as "a man factory." The complexity in Twain's work is that the engineer sees the manufactured
men as free and authentic men.

(647). The clerks are paid by the piece, like factory workers. Bartleby is so mechanized that he never leaves the place of his work, and never seems to move except when commanded or forced; yet this very refusal to depart is an act of rebellion. When the narrator finds him intolerable he is a "millstone" – even as a burden, he is mechanical (657). When Bartleby refuses to serve any more, he suffers the same fate as Pierre does in Pierre: he is delivered to the Tombs, the monument to death which is the telos of history and the product of all of the story's machinery.

Throughout his work, Melville dwells on the problem of the mechanization of man, although in his later work (the poetry and "Billy Budd") the focus on machinery as such as largely transformed to a focus on monumental architecture. On the one hand, there is the question of whether "modern" industry and economic practices is turning humanity into automatons. This issue has been widely addressed, although I have made some additional comments on it. But for Melville the question of mechanization isn't only or even mainly a problem of the modern, although the impact of modern industry is certainly involved in much of his work, nor is it a problem of the impact of the modern upon the primitive, although that is an important theme as well, especially in Typee and Omoo. Melville is more essentially concerned with mechanization as a way of thinking and being; Bartleby's mechanization is grounded in the pyramid as much as it is in the practices of Wall Street, and hence Ahab's mechanization (as both victim and victimizer) is grounded as much in the pyramid and in early Christian and pre-Christian eschatologies as it is in the immediate realities of the whaling industry. This tendency to focus on mechanization as a way of thinking and being is visible even in Typee, even if Melville's concern with a material war machine was foregrounded in that novel; over the course

of his career, though, the image of the pyramid as the soul of mechanization grows increasingly

important; fittingly, his career ends with this image in the closing poems of <u>Timoleon</u>.

III. LEWIS MUMFORD, HERMAN MELVILLE, AND MEGATECHNICS

A. THE MEGAMACHINE

At the end of his much-criticized <u>Herman Melville</u> (1929), the second book-length biography of

Melville (after Raymond Weaver's) to be published, Lewis Mumford struggles with questions

which are inevitable for someone who is trying to solidify Melville's new position in the canon:

why is Melville important at all, and why is he so much more important to us than he was to his

contemporaries? Although the research behind the book has often and legitimately been

criticized, Mumford's answer to these crucial questions anticipate the course taken by much of

Melville criticism ever since.

> Herman Melville's world is our world, magnificently bodied and dimensioned: our
>
> synthesis must include and sublimate that very quest of power which Melville portrayed
>
> with such unique skill, as a combination of science and adventure and spiritual
>
> hardihood... Melville's life warns us not to stop here: men must test their strength in
>
> surrender as well as in lonely conquest... (365).

Ahab's problem, as has probably been apparent to anyone who has every read <u>Moby-Dick</u>, is

power, its necessity and its impossibility. For Mumford, writing before depression and war, the

quest for power has its legitimate place, but only within a proper, life-oriented context. Valuing

power solely as an end, rather than as a component of life, leads to an appalling civilization, our

civilization, which has "shown us its lopsidedness, its aimlessness, its grand attempt to conceal

its emptiness by extending concrete roads and asphalted streets and vacuum cleaners to more and

more remote terrains" (364). Melville stands for organic values to be opposed to the purely

materialistic values of the larger culture. Both following the predilections of his own generation

of critics and anticipating those of generations to come, Mumford centers his discussion of

Melville's life and work around Moby-Dick, which in his eyes achieves a synthesis that opens a

door for all of "us."

> Whatever Melville's life was, his art in Moby-Dick exhibits that integration and synthesis
>
> which we seek. Through his art, he escaped the barren destiny of his living: he embraced
>
> Life, and we who now follow where his lonely courage led him embrace it, too. This
>
> embrace was a fertile one; and in each generation it will bring forth its own progeny. The
>
> day of Herman Melville's vision is now in the beginning. It hangs like a cloud over the
>
> horizon at dawn; and as the sun rises, it will become more radiant, and more a part of the
>
> living day (368).

Mumford's reading of Melville is forthrightly apocalyptic; the radiance of the sun is linked to

both Ahab's sun-worship and his sun-defiance, and the radiant cloud hints of the New Jerusalem,

a rebirth of the world, a synthesis which will be a turn towards Life. The problem of modernity

is that the modern self is "dissevered," into a "positive, practical, scientific, externalized self,

bent on conquest and knowledge" and an "imaginative, ideal half, bent on the transposition of

conflict into art, and power into humanity" (193). But in the apocalyptic moment the quest for

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power will be transformed, sublimated, the sins of a materialistic culture will be synthesized away, and a humanized power-quest will embrace the spirit of Ahab. "Some day the physical powers of man may be commensurate with his utmost spirit, and he will meet Leviathan on even terms" (190). Meaning and Life exist in the struggle with the Leviathan; Mumford's Melvillean apocalypse is the moment of the humanization of the power quest, but also the moment of the empowering and final rationalization of the power quest: the synthesized man who can finally turn the power of material culture towards proper ends will be capable of anything.

Interestingly, Mumford's argument contains the seed of its own ruin, and of his own future thought.

> Herman Melville portrayed a human purpose, concentrated to almost maniacal intensity, in Moby-Dick; and in Pierre and The Confidence Man, he showed the black aftermath, when the purpose was not sustained and carried out in art, and when he himself was deserted in his extremity by contemporaries. . . (363).

Mumford embraces an Ahabian world-view in his reading of Moby-Dick: history, or at any rate the narratives of individual lives, are the story of purpose, of a quest, and the unity of that drive with humanistic goals will lead to an eschatos. Mumford recognizes, though – he can hardly completely ignore it – the dark ruins of Pierre and The Confidence Man, anticipating books like Jonathan Cook's Satirical Apocalypse. But Mumford dismisses the dark ruins which follow the eschatos out of hand, arguing that these books display the consequences of an insufficiently humanized teleology, an improperly directed power-quest. Mumford attacks a teleology gone bad, but joyously embraces a new synthetic telos. The realities of material civilization are brutal and cruel, but a shining city is embedded in the artistic vision of that material civilization, in a

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repetition of the main idea of Mumford's The Golden Day (1926), and a major theme of The Brown Decades (1931). But nonetheless, even at this early point Mumford comes to the brink of admitting that Pierre and The Confidence Man pose an intractable problem, by positing a shattered world post-eschatos.

Even more than Melville himself, Mumford positions himself on the margins of the Romantic tradition: technology is in practice often dehumanizing, as it is for Carlyle or Blake, but if technology can be turned away from strictly materialistic ends, it holds out the possibility of a positive telos to history; Mumford blends Romanticism with a traditional American optimism in a manner that owes much to Walt Whitman, Thoreau and especially Emerson. Mumford attempts to reconcile Melville with Whitman and Emerson's teleology in The Golden Day, and in the process firmly established the line of thinking that would later be attributed primarily to Francis Matthiessen: Leo Marx, Matthiesen's most famous student, makes the case in his essay "Mumford and Organicism" that Matthiessen's debt to Mumford has been greatly understated. But while the dominant tradition of American Studies would continue, at least for a time, to reconcile Melville with Whitman and Emerson, Mumford himself moved in a rather different direction from the tradition which he did so much to establish.

Mumford published Herman Melville in 1929. His next book, entitled The Brown Decades (1931), was a short meditation on post-Civil War architecture, focusing on Chicago and skyscrapers. As far as Mumford was concerned, the decades following the civil war were a low point for written culture, but an important moment for architecture. In this volume he tamed his earlier assaults on the culture and architecture of the period, and tried to find some redeeming – that is, synthetic – value in that architecture, particularly in its modernity.

Before even The Brown Decades was published, though, Mumford published an article in Scribner's entitled "The Drama of the Machines" straight on the heels of Herman Melville. The purpose of this essay was, according to Mumford, to deal with psychological as well as the practical origins of the machine, and to judge it by ethical as well as practical standards (Mumford, Techics and Civilization, xi). It isn't difficult to make a connection: the problems of modernity that Melville raised, and the problem of the gap between Melville on the one hand and Whitman and Emerson on the other (a problem, that is, for anyone who needs a synthesis between these writers), demanded a more thorough investigation of the fundamental questions of modernity: that is, of industrialism and capitalism, as well as modern arts.

This article eventually led to Technics and Civilization (1934), by far Mumford's most carefully researched book up to that point. On the one hand it is a classic of the history of technology, still widely admired and cited, if indirectly, in the field. On the other hand, it is a critical document in the formation of a "humanist philosophy of technology," in Carl Mitcham's term from Thinking Through Technology – Mitcham, a philosopher of technology and a historian of the philosophy of technology, even partially credits Mumford with formalizing that tradition. But it is distinguished from most famous works in that tradition by not being only a general critique of a vague object named "technology" or "the machine," a tradition that runs from Carlyle through Langdon Winner's The Whale and the Reactor and beyond. It makes many general claims, but its theory is founded in broad and deep historical research.

Mumford begins Technics and Civilization with a discussion of time and its relationship to technology. For Mumford the invention and development of the clock is the foundation of modernity: "by its essential nature it dissociated time from human events and helped create the

belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences: the special world of science" (15). Operating under Bergson's influence, Mumford argues that modernity's time is a time of mathematical points, a spatialized time which can be viewed as a whole or analyzed at any particular point, as opposed to organic time, which is irreducibly cumulative (16). Mumford links the development of spatialized time to cartography, exploration and wars of exploration, and attributes developments in the technologies of war to the "itch to use space and time" (22). In moves which have become increasingly familiar, Mumford makes a three-way connection between the development of Technics, Protestantism and capitalism, with the trio helping to develop a "mechanical world-picture" (46). The development of machines, mechanical systems and a mechanical world-view is furthermore linked to militarism: industrialism and militarization form a continuum: "The regimentation of modern warfare carries much farther than the actual discipline of the army itself.... The spread of conscription and volunteer military forces throughout the Western World after the French Revolution made army and factory... almost interchangeable terms" (84). For Mumford, then, the development of a mechanical world-picture and spatialized time includes actual productive power machines only as a late and rather secondary development, which is preceded by the spatialization of time and the regimentation of the world and of humanity.

The source of the problem of modern life is clear: at every level, in every way, mechanical concepts and entities have replaced organic ones. Spatialized time has replaced organic time, mechanical relationships have replaced organic relationships, and actual machines have disruptively impinged on every aspect of life. Leo Marx, in fact, has described all of Mumford's thought as being about the conflict between the Organic and the Machine in

"Mumford and Organicism." The crisis of modernity is the crisis of a world, space, and most importantly a time which have been rendered mechanical. This crisis, although far from sudden, and having roots in the ancient world, is closely tied to the industrial, military and political developments of Europe and later the United States, starting mainly in the seventeenth century. "The regularization of time, the increase in mechanical power, the multiplication of goods, the contraction of time and space, the standardization of performance and product, the transfer of skill to automata, and the increase of collective interdependence... are the chief characteristics of our machine civilization" (Mumford, Technics and Civilization 281).

I will pass over the details of Mumford's argument, as well as the articulate history and theorization of particular technologies he offers in the process, worthy though these subjects are, and skip to his solution. How are we to deal with the problem of modernity, the leveling and deadening of time, space, and life itself? As in Herman Melville, the answer is synthesis, or assimilation. "Our capacity to go beyond the machine rests upon our power to assimilate the machine. Until we have absorbed the lessons of objectivity, impersonality, neutrality, the lessons of the mechanical realm, we cannot go further in our development toward the more richly organic, the more profoundly human" (Technics and Civilization 363). We must cope with the machine by learning it fully and then using it properly; the excesses of the machine age, like Ahab's excesses, form a necessary stage in human development. Existence is internally teleological, driven towards definite ends, but will be bound by no eschatos. Life progresses, and the conflict with the Machine is one stage in its progress: "Even the most rigorous scientific description of the physical basis of life indicates it to be internally teleological" (370). To be sure, Mumford refers here to a biological teleology, but his use of the term in a work of history is

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still telling. Mumford assaults most of the characteristics of contemporary mechanical

civilization, but still aspires to a "dynamic equilibrium," in which the nature of progress will

change, without being rejected: ". . . the notion of progress in a single line without goal or limit

seems perhaps the most parochial notion of a very parochial century. Limits in thought and

actions" (429). Mumford calls for an equilibrium to be achieved regionally, industrially,

agriculturally and communally, and admits to speaking in a "prophetic form" – that is, an

apocalyptic/eschatological form -– in order to advocate a turn towards the "rebuilding of the

individual personality and the collective group, and the reorientation of all forms of thought and

social activity towards life. . ." (433). The endless acceleration of the machine must be stopped

and suspended in a dynamic equilibrium, which is yet another secular version of the New

Jerusalem. History and life itself once again have a <u>telos</u>; as in Revelation, the end days are

preceded by accelerating errors and cruelties (the excesses and delusions of mechanization, the

urge to conquer space and time), but history will end in a luminous suspension which should

evoke both Emerson and Whitman, for instance, humanity's ascension of the staircase to

Godhead in "Song of Myself." One should note that Mumford's first book, crude but significant,

is <u>The</u> <u>Story</u> <u>of</u> <u>Utopias</u> (1922), which embraces the utopian/eschatological mode. As in his

readings of <u>Moby-Dick</u> and Melville's life, Mumford asserts confidently that history will be

justified, that the story of the West will have its proper ending as it has a proper origin: that

ending will be "And they all lived happily ever after."

  But then there was the War and the Bomb, and all the while Melville's venom still

circulated in Mumford's veins. The influence of Melville on such major works as <u>Technics</u> <u>and</u>

<u>Civilization</u> (1934) and <u>The</u> <u>Culture</u> <u>of</u> <u>Cities</u> (1938) is far from obvious. It is even less obvious

in his works of the 1940s and 1950s, such as The Condition of Man (1944) and The Conduct of Life (1951), works which even Mumford acknowledged as rushed and mediocre (Miller, 451). But Mumford came to analyze the Cold War through Melvillean lenses, and his early work in Melville criticism only fully blossomed in the 1960s and 70s.

An overarching argument of Mumford's two-volume The Myth of the Machine, made up of Technics and Human Development (1967) and The Pentagon of Power (1970), is that "our present over-commitment to Technics is in part due to a radical misinterpretation of the whole course of human development" (Techics and Human 4). This misinterpretation is the tendency of everyone from Marx to current anthropologists in "giving the material instruments of production the central place and directive function in human development." Man is, Mumford acknowledges, a tool-making animal – who could deny it? – but he is not principally a tool-making animal: "Tool-technics... is but a fragment of biotechnics: man's total equipment for life" (7). Mumford emphasizes the centrality of language, make-believe, and the unconscious mind in human existence. On this basis, he wants to examine Megatechnics: the organization of the primeval machine which is, according to him, the model for other machines: "... I found that what economists lately termed the Machine Age or the Power Age, had its origin, not in the so-called Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century, but at the very outset in the organization of an archetypal machine composed of human parts."[40] It was this machine, according to Mumford, which built the pyramids, this machine that in Egypt, Greece and Babylon created the Phalanx

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[40] Technics 11. Mumford is hardly alone in downplaying the role of the "industrial revolution" as it is conventionally known; Lynn White and others also emphasize the medieval origin of power machinery. The "industrial revolution" as we know it describes more of a change in management techniques (epitomized although not begun by Frederick Winslow Taylor and by the rise of the discipline of engineering) than a sudden shift in technologies.

out of human components; he reads the book of Exodus as the escape of the Jews from the Megamachine: recall the oppressive, endless brick-making which Pharaoh imposes upon them, a brick-making, incidentally, which Melville restages in London in his under-read novel Israel Potter.[41] To make a long and complex story short, the Megamachine was largely quiescent through most of human history, but the total regimentation of humanity, as supplemented by ever more machinery, has reappeared in our own era; in short, the socio-political machine upon which all other machines are modeled is the one which maximally mechanizes man. Mumford gives an account of medieval technics, familiar to any reader of Technics and Civilization, which emphasizes that the dark ages were anything but dark, arguing that our present lines of technical development originated in the medieval monastery;[42] these lines of development, originally benign, have lead to the return of Megatechnics, which has such symptoms as the American and Soviet Space programs (which he compares to the useless gigantism of the pyramids), totalitarianism, the national security state, and secret systems of quasi-mystical knowledge, Haraway's C^3I.

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[41] Technics and Human Development 229. Mumford anticipates De Landa and parallels Deleuze in some respects. See also Victor Hanson's The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Ancient Greece on this subject. Hanson – who has, incidentally, become a neo-conservative political commentator – emphasizes both the shocking, inhuman horror of phalanx warfare, and the near total lack of skill of Greek soldiers. The ability to be integrated into a unit, to submit to an inhuman discipline, was far more important than any particular combat skills.

[42] Without adding a ponderous amount of material to this chapter, I cannot detail this point, but it is very important. Mumford's story of the development of technics in The Myth of the Machine is rooted in his highly respectable Technics and Civilization, and his account of medieval history has many parallels to Lynn White's account (and Technics and Civilization draws guarded praise in White's introduction to his Medieval Religion and Technology, as it does in many histories of technology). Whether or not The Myth of the Machine is sound, it has its origins in sound scholarship; if it is mad, it's mad like Ahab, who is mad in his purpose but utterly sound in his method.

Throughout The Pentagon of Power Mumford draws parallels between our time and the "pyramid age." Like the ancient Egyptians, we have centered our universe around the sun, in our case literally: "The deity that presided over the new religion and the new mechanical world picture was no less than Atum-Re, the self-created sun... By giving the sun a central position, Copernicus was in effect a better Egyptian than Ptolemy" (29).

For Mumford the exploration of the "New World" involved two components, the European conquest of the world and the parallel European excavation of ancient history, beginning with Greek and Roman history. "As geographical exploration loosed the spatial bonds to a particular soil and culture, so these new temporal explorations loosed the bonds to the immediate present: for the first time the human mind began to move about freely in both past and future, picking and choosing, anticipating and projecting..." (13). This double movement was "an attempt to escape time and cumulative effects of time (tradition and history) by exchanging it for unoccupied space" (13-14). This exchange of time for space ultimately resulted in a reversion to the worst features of Egyptian and Babylonian civilization. Mumford's argument might encounter skepticism, of course, but one should remember that the relationship of American and European colonialism and racism to a particular understanding of Egyptian civilization has been well documented by Scott Trafton.[43] Mumford argues that the massive occupation of space and conquest of time achieved by the Pyramids has its modern equivalent in nuclear weapons and in space flight:

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[43] Although one should obviously acknowledge that Trafton's analysis of American Egyptomania is only part of a broader investigation into Orientalism (see Said's Orientalism, Culture and Imperialism, etc.).

> At the bottom of this whole effort lies a purpose that animates the entire Megamachine,
>
> figures as its only viable consummation: to reduce the human organism itself, its habitat,
>
> and its mode of existence, and its life-purpose to just those minimal dimensions that will
>
> bring it under total external control. (306)

With modest rephrasing, this sentence would fit into Heidegger's "The Question Concerning

Technology": humanity is reduced to clockwork (Mumford) or to Standing-Reserve (Heidegger).

The Megamachine presents humanity with two dangers. First, there is the straightforward

danger of nuclear annihilation: absolute control as total destruction. But,

> Something even worse may be in store. . . the universal imposition of the Megamachine. .
>
> . as the ultimate instrument of pure 'intelligence,' whereby every other manifestation of
>
> human potentialities will be suppressed or completely eliminated. Already the blueprints
>
> for that final structure are available: they have even been advertised as man's highest
>
> destiny. (Pentagon 303).

The end of history has been marketed and sold to us: Space, Cyberspace, an endlessly expanding

economy, the dictatorship of the proletariat, "striated space" in Deleuze's terminology, etc.[44] The

universal Megamachine is the instrument of an inhuman intelligence and the end of all human

concerns.[45] Mumford offers little in the way of specific solutions to the universalized

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[44] In Mumford's view, the U.S. and the Soviet Union are two rival megamachines, and Marx set the stage for the Soviet version by emphasizing production and the means of production over "human values." Eugene Rochberg-Halton summarizes Mumford's critique of Marx ably, writing: "although Mumford acknowledges Marx as a great social critic and historian, and resonates with many aspects of his critique of capitalism... he departs from Marx's historical materialism and its faith in inevitable and revolutionary progress." (134)

[45] Mumford senses the same inhuman potential in information systems that preoccupies Lyotard in Inhuman. There are many other parallels between Lyotard's thought and Mumford's, despite Mumford's focus on historical detail and Lyotard's on theoretical constructions.

Megamachine, but he does offer a hope: the original Pyramid Age in Egypt ended, according to

his account, in a popular uprising (Pentagon 303). The Megamachine may never end, it may be

consumed in nuclear fire, or it may end with a "rejuvenation of the human personality."

But on what basis does Mumford believe that the Megamachine, which is literally

although invisibly a machine, arose in Ancient Egypt, Sumer, and so forth? Leo Marx offers a

detailed critique of this belief, arguing that Mumford's belief in this Megamachine is intuitive,

and not based in sound history. This argument deserves to be quoted at length:

> What shall we make of Mumford's curious insistence on the literal, non-figurative
>
> character of the Megamachine? The answer lies... in his overall rhetorical strategy in The
>
> Myth of the Machine. After Hiroshima and the intensification of the nuclear arms race he
>
> had... become increasingly alarmed about the potentially catastrophic uses of America's
>
> technological power. He no longer could summon the hope he had attached to the latest
>
> technologies in the optimistic conclusion of Technics and Civilization. At about the time
>
> the United States was getting enmeshed in Vietnam, he evidently decided to focus his
>
> monumental two-volume survey of Western technology on the impending culmination of
>
> the ancient conflict between organic and mechanical technics. If, as he evidently
>
> believes, that conflict is the crux of modern history, the America's "pentagon of power" –
>
> an updated, nuclear-armed version of the Egyptian pyramid-building system – is its
>
> potentially cataclysmic end-product. Hence the importance he retrospectively attaches to
>
> the ancient megamachine, with its manifestly totalitarian, death-oriented character, as the
>
> precursor of the vast superpower technological systems that dominated global politics in
>
> the late twentieth century. . . Not only does he locate the megamachine in the

consciousness of the pyramid-builders, but he would have us believe (without presenting

any evidence to indicate how, or whether, it was transmitted from epoch to epoch, mind

to mind) that the same concept subsequently was present to the minds of the inventors of

all complex forms of machinery.[46]

Although Marx does ignore some limited support Mumford provides for this thesis, regarding the

contemporary megamachine's origins in Egypt, Sumer, etc., (and additional support which lies in

the study of American culture in relationship to Egyptology was hardly available to him) it is

critical to understand and accept that Mumford's evidence is limited. Whether we follow

Mumford's intuition or not, we must recognize it as an intuition that serves a rhetorical purpose:

to show that the conflict between the organic and the machine has been the heart of human

history.

Leo Marx locates the reason for Mumford's transformation from relative optimism to

what seems like intense negativity in Mumford's response to Hiroshima and the cold war, and

it's certainly fair to look for part of the explanation in Mumford's biography. But the intellectual

seeds had been planted far earlier, as is manifest in Herman Melville as well as Technics and

Civilization, and a great part of Mumford's transformation was a change in his understanding of

time. His analysis of modernity was always concerned with time, of course; following Bergson

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[46] Leo Marx, "Mumford and Organicism" 177-8. One thing that Marx fails to mention is that Mumford does claim that the megamachine was transmitted through the specific mechanism of the disciplined army, starting with the phalanx and continuing through Napoleon's army, etc. De Landa's War in the Age of Intelligent Machines makes similar arguments, and may in some ways follow from Mumford. An extended discussion of army-as-megamachine could begin by tracing De Landa's book to its origins in Deleuze and Guattari's chapter "Nomadology and the War Machine" in A Thousand Plateaus, which in turn is partially a critique of Grousset's A History of Central Asia. Grousset's history would be one possible place to investigate whether Mumford's claims (to say nothing of Deleuze's and De Landa's) have basis in history.

and laying the groundwork for various historians and philosophers of technology in the second half of the century, Mumford was always concerned with the spatialization and mechanization of time, and with the eschatological drive that he always connected to the drive for endless material/technological progress and to a split in the "self" of modern humanity. The modern problem was simultaneously and equally a problem of time, of technology, and of culture.

But up until The Myth of the Machine, Mumford's critique of the "modern" mechanical, teleological world-picture was itself deeply committed to teleology and to a spatialized time which could be analyzed and understood as a whole. The story of modernity was the story of a fall from wholeness of the medieval self and medieval technics, into a mechanical world concerned only with progress, which would ultimately result in a reintegration of the self, and a positive assimilation of the machine. Time had been organic before the fall; it became mechanical; it would be organic again after the restoration. After the restoration, having integrated the lesson of the machine, humanity would rise to a higher and more stable state than it was capable of before. Mumford was a fly caught in the web of teleology: no matter how he struggled against it, he found himself still enmeshed within it. The machine erupts into the tranquil garden, the machine struggles with the organic, and then a newer, better form of the organic is generated: when Leo Marx analyzes Mumford, the positive ending he sees in Technics and Civilization (and The Golden Day and The Brown Decades and Herman Melville, etc.) is also the potentially luminous eschatological ending of his own The Machine in the Garden.

Traces of this vision of history persist through The Myth of the Machine, which can sometimes seem like a teleological, eschatological assault on teleology and eschatology, but this account of history, moving from garden to fall to struggle to New Jerusalem, has been poisoned

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at its springs by Mumford's changing concept of time. For rather than being The Great Modern

Struggle, the very bones of history, the story of the Megamachine's ascendence and (hopefully)

defeat receives roots at the "beginning of history" in Mumford's later works. The mechanical

world-picture has become primordial and even mythical, not definitively modern, and we, as

cogs, have become not only interchangeable with the other cogs of our own world, but with the

cogs of Egypt and Sumer as well. Teleological time, monumental time, penetrates all of time;

the shadow of the pyramid, for Mumford as for Melville, has fallen across all of time, and if there

ever was on original time, an organic time, it seems impossibly distant, and the teleological time

impossibly strong. "But for no holy purpose was the pyramid founded," Melville wrote in his

journal (78). The lesson, even if it was belated, was no longer lost on Mumford: Time has

always been spatialized, mechanized, regimented; history has always belonged to power.

B. THE NECROPOLIS

Nearly all of Mumford's books touch on Melville: he plays an important role in Mumford's first

book, The Story of Utopias (1922); The Condition of Man (1944) refers to him at least seven

times, although not in any extraordinary way; he appears at least five times in The Conduct of

Life (1951); he even is mentioned in The City in History (1961) and The Culture of Cities

(1938), and is frequently discussed in Mumford's autobiography Sketches from Life (1982).

Melville was, in other words, always on Mumford's mind.   Even beyond the frequent critical

discussion of Melville in his correspondence with Van Wyck Brooks and David Liebovitz,

Mumford often related events in his life to events in Melville's life in those letters. It is trivially obvious to anyone who can read an index page that Melville was important throughout Mumford's life. What is less obvious (although this context strengthens the case), but more interesting, is that this ongoing reading and brooding over Melville was deeply formative to Mumford's The Myth of the Machine, which contained the final development of his vision of the world and history. In particular, the transcendental, teleological, time-mastering nature of Mumford's understanding of the megamachine is deeply indebted to his long engagement with Melville.

In The City in History (1961), Mumford compares the evils of ancient Roman cities with those of contemporary Western cities, focusing especially on technical and architectural – mainly but not exclusively monumental architecture – achievements which serve only a tiny elite, if anyone. For instance, he discusses the useless ingenuities of Roman indoor plumbing, which was more advanced than anything in Europe until deep in the nineteenth century, but only available to the powerful, while the masses died of cholera and typhus (216-17). He attacks the modern West for certain characteristics of Roman life which have returned: high rents, declining living conditions, high tenements, "mass contests and exhibitions... the multiplication of bathrooms and the over-expenditure on broadly paved motor roads... These are the symptoms of the end... When the signs multiply, Necropolis is near" (242). But, despite the fear of Necropolis looming in the future, in the book's introduction he writes:

> The city of the dead antedates the city of the living. In one sense, indeed, the city of the
>
> dead is the forerunner, almost the core, of every living city. Urban life spans the historic

space between the earliest burial ground for dawn man and the final cemetery, the

Necropolis, in which one civilization after another has met its end. (7)

The end is in the beginning, which is death. Writing in The Pentagon of Power, in the caption

under the image of an endless graveyard, with the city in the background squeezed against the

horizon, Mumford argues that there are three stages to the death of a city: it first becomes

Parasitopolis, the city of parasites and the elite, then Patholopolis, "the city of mental, moral, and

bodily disorders," and finally Necropolis (Pentagon Plate 24). The city which Mumford sees as

the heart of modern life is simultaneously and originally deeply flawed, and not flawed starting at

a particular historical moment. Rather, it is founded with the seeds of Necropolis planted in its

heart: in the fullness of time that death will blossom. Every city, every civilization, carries in its

founding its collapse: the origin of a city contains its telos, which is to become not merely dead

but a mighty, monumental celebration of death, like Rome and Egypt. The city's very being is

the spatialization of death-time: time and space are converted into a monument to death which

occupies both the past and the future: the Necropolis is not a heap of impotent ruins, but a polis

of death. In one age the monuments were Pyramids, great walls, useless highways; in another

they are spaceships, hydrogen bombs, skyscrapers and more useless highways.

In this vision of the Necropolis Mumford establishes the foundation for the vision of

megatechnics which follows in The Myth of the Machine. Leo Marx argues that Mumford

always embraced "organic values," a return to the "values of life," and organic time. But these

values have received a terrible bruising by the time of The City in History, because that book

undercuts the notion of a legitimate organic past which one can aspire to return to. This isn't a

simple matter of envisioning a cyclic history along the lines of Toynbee's, where each

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civilization must have its rise and its fall, because the <u>fall</u> isn't complete. Civilizations rise, but instead of falling completely, they leave a Necropolis behind them, which continues to dominate both the past and the future. Nor are we merely destined to travel the same road as Egypt and Rome. Mumford, like some nightmarish avatar of Bergson, has articulated a very dark vision of Bergson's "duration," in which the cumulative, irreducible nature of time is an accumulation of the power of death.

Now something of the genealogy of Mumford's thought becomes more clear. He began in <u>Herman</u> <u>Melville</u> by embracing Ahab as an exemplary character, who demonstrated the power of the human spirit: Ahab's teleological drive was vital, necessary, although it needed to be humanized; it was precisely an <u>antidote</u> to the mechanization of life. In <u>Technics</u> <u>and</u> <u>Civilization</u>, the threat becomes more clear; time itself is what is being mechanized, spatialized, and we need to return to an organic ideal of time. But over the following decades, clouded though they are by Mumford's numerous secondary and repetitive books (which essentially repeat the optimistic teleological vision of <u>Technics</u> <u>and</u> <u>Civilization</u> in the teeth of a darkening world), something else arose in Mumford's thought. The mechanization of all things, time most of all, the transformation of world into automaton, was not only a <u>modern</u> problem, nor was it fully susceptible to the antibodies of a new modern "synthesis," for the Necropolis was ancient, and grew only more insistent over time; the vision of the Necropolis as the city's womb and its <u>telos</u>, is a vision of a mechanistic tyranny which owns and supervises all of time: the Megamachine.

But even in <u>Herman</u> <u>Melville</u> Mumford was slowly moving towards the Necropolis, through he struggled against that movement, as he wrote about Melville's visit to Egypt on

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January 3rd, 1857. Mumford claims to be the first person to have made use of this journal, which he paraphrases at great length. Selections from Melville's text and Mumford's paraphrase follow.

Melville's Text	**Mumford's Text**
Nothing in Nature gives such an idea of vastness... Pain in chest. Exhaustion. Must hurry. Nothing but the phlegmatic go deliberately. Old man with the spirits of youth – long looked for this chance – tried the ascent, half way – fainted – brought down. Tried to go into the interior – fainted – brought out – leaned against the pyramid by the entrance – pale as death. Nothing so pathetic. Too much for him; oppressed by the massiveness & mystery of the pyramids. I myself too. A feeling of awe & terror came over me. Dread of the Arabs. Offering to lead me into a side-hole. The Dust. Long arched way, – then down as in a coal shaft... I shudder at idea of ancient Egyptians. It was in these pyramids that was	Well, it was almost too much for Melville: it was not the sense of height but the sense of immensity that was stirred: with all other architecture, however vast, the eye is gradually inured to the sense of magnitude by passing from part to part: but here there was no storey or stage: it was all or nothing, not height or breadth or length or depth but unspeakable vastness... The great Pyramid refused to be studied or adequately comprehended... A feeling of awe and terror gradually came over Melville: the Arabs were no longer angels, but seemed, in their soft, imperturbable way, somehow malign. Stooping and doubling in the interior, as in a coal shaft, Melville shuddered at the ancient Egyptians: they had a mixture of the cunning

conceived the idea of Jehovah. Terrible mixture of the cunning and awful. Moses learned in all the lore of the Egyptians. The idea of Jehovah was born here... Entrance of pyramids like a shoot for coal or timber. Horrible place for assassination... (Journals 46-7)

Second Melville Passage

It refuses to be studied or adequately comprehended. It still looms in my imagination, dim & indefinite... A dead calm of masonry... Man seems to have had as little to do with it as Nature. It was that supernatural creature, the priest. They must needs have been terrible inventors, those Egyptian wise men. And one seems to see that as out of the crude forms of the natural earth they could evoke by art the transcendent mass & symmetry & unity of the pyramid so out of the rude elements of the insignificant thoughts that are in all men, they could rear the transcendent conception and the awful. Moses learned his lore from the Egyptians: the awful idea of Jehovah was born there. They must needs have been terrible inventors, those ancient wise men**:** as out of the crude forms of the natural earth they could evoke by art the Pyramids, so, out of the dull elements of the insignificant thoughts that are in all men, they could by analogous art rear the transcendent conception of God. Indeed, the Egyptians had outwitted mortality. The Pyramids were conceived out of an energy as mighty as Nature's: nought but an earthquake or a geological revolution could smother it up. That was something like an answer to the White Whale – albeit such a distant answer. The pyramidical energy as well as the pyramidical scorn, were both lacking in Melville now, high though they had towered in Moby-Dick. (Herman Melville 272-3)

of a God. But for no holy purpose was the

pyramid founded. (Journals 78)

As was his habit in <u>Herman Melville</u>, Mumford tried to remain close to the source

material, even keeping Melville's wording in many cases, but he took two separate passages from

Melville's journal entry, merged them together and mixed his own interpretation in, forming a

text that expresses his understanding of Melville in a blend of his own words and Melville's. I

quoted at length both to demonstrate the degree to which Mumford attempts to be faithful to the

original and to show how far from it his earnest interpretation finally veers.

Five important things to note about Mumford's paraphrase of Melville's journal are, first,

that Mumford implicitly recognized what an extraordinary text it is by reproducing it so closely.

No other section of the biography remains so close to its source material for so long. Nor did

Mumford strictly copy it: he labored over it, transforming the material. Second, Mumford

preserves Melville's association between the dread of the pyramids and the dread of technology,

what Leo Marx or David Nye would call the technological sublime. Third, Mumford's

movement towards increasing gloom about the prospects of technological civilization are already

implicit: he brings together and compacts Melville's lines about the coal shaft, the creation of

Jehovah and the Egyptians as inventors: <u>The Myth of the Machine</u>, written almost forty years

later, will make the claim that the men who built the pyramids were the inventors of the

Megamachine, not to mention of the sun god. He has already derived a version of this claim

from Melville in this passage.   Fourth, Mumford rejects the extremity of Melville's horror at the

Egyptian wise men. Their raising of the pyramid and their invention of God, instead of being an abomination which is explicitly linked to murder and horror, becomes fundamentally admirable, whereas in Melville's text the rearing of the transcendent idea of God is unholy: it is dead masonry and a flattened sea. The pyramids transcend and conquer time: they are therefore unholy and appalling. In seeing this transcendental sublimity as unholy Melville takes a position on the Egyptian iconography of his own time: Egypt stood for both the power of the American state and the oppression of slavery. Melville's disgust at both the monumentalism of the American state and its slavery-enmeshed history is clear as early as Mardi, in which he describes a massive monument to a satirical version of America which has the dichotomy of freedom for most and slavery for the rest literally inscribed on the monument, and as late as Israel Potter, which is a sustained assault on American monuments ranging from the memory of Benjamin Franklin to the Bunker Hill Monument. Not coincidentally, Paul Rogin writes in Subversive Genealogy that in Daniel Webster's address at the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument, he explicitly compared both its might and silence to those of a pyramid (229). Israel Potter, despite being supposedly an American war hero, is abandoned to the equivalent of slavery in the Egypt of London; when he returns from his slavery he finds things essentially no different at home; he has become memorialized on a monument, but the monument is like a tomb, and its transcendence is that of death. Mumford, however, psychologizes Melville's dread: Melville has lost his pyramid-making ambition, and that loss is what horrifies him. Fifth and last, for Melville the pyramids seem vaster than anything in nature, a moment of the technological sublime that Mumford cannot abide.

Mumford transforms Melville's impression of the pyramid into a teleological narrative of

the triumph of the human will, in which man achieves transcendence. The pyramid is,

perversely, a triumph of the <u>organic</u>, that is, the human; while the story of Israel Potter's sojourn

in Egypt (but he also returns to Egypt, in another sense) is, in Rogin's words, a "biography of

failure" – America's failure as well as Israel's – Mumford's biography of Melville is triumphalist

(Rogin 228). For Melville, the teleological will of the pyramid-builders is monstrous: the

transcendence of the pyramid is murder and nightmare. Transcendence <u>is</u> the Necropolis.

But Mumford would also, over time, begin to see the pyramid as the achievement of an

<u>inhuman</u> will, the will of the Megamachine as founded in the Necropolis. Inevitably, as his

understanding of the pyramids changed he returned, subtly but explicitly, to writing about

Melville and about an Ahab who in his pyramid-building transcendent glory became terrible in

Mumford's eyes.

Mumford uses <u>Moby-Dick</u> to the analyze the Cold War in a 1959 article for <u>Atlantic</u>

<u>Monthly</u> in a way that might be familiar to William Spanos or C.L.R. James:[47]

> Those who believe that any country has the right to make such a decision [use a nuclear
>
> weapon] share the madness of Captain Ahab in 'Moby-Dick.' For them Russia is the
>
> White Whale that must be hunted down and grappled with. Like Ahab in that mad
>
> pursuit, they will listen to no reminders of love. . . in order to kill the object of their fear
>
> they . . . [will] throw away the sextant. . . and in the end they will sink their own ship and
>
> drown their crew. To such unbalanced men, to such demoralized efforts, to such

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[47] Spanos links Ahab's madness with the madness of the U.S. during Vietnam (although he is writing long after Vietnam has ending); Mumford makes the link between Ahab's madness and U.S. nuclear policy shortly after the Korean war.

dehumanized purposes, the Nuclear Powers have entrusted our lives. . . To accept their

plans. . . our own countrymen have deliberately anesthetized the normal feelings,

emotions, anxieties and hopes. (Works and Days, 460).

At this point Mumford has already ceased to read Moby-Dick as a single transcendental product;

it is no longer an artifact of the "golden day," but constitutive of America's being: Ahab

commands the ship of state now, and ordinary people have been subjected to his mad,

transcendental will. Pyramid-builders, masters of time and space, are heroes no more. In The

Pentagon of Power, Mumford continues to link Ahab with the madness of the American

state/megamachine, writing "In Ahab... Melville gave expression both to the megatechnic

'Khans' of the global Pentagon and to the counter-forces they had brought into being."[48] Ahab is

not merely like the megatechnic khans of the global pentagon; they are given expression through

him. Ahab is the heart of the Pentagon of Power, the telos of history. Consider the following

lines from The Pentagon of Power:

> No king could move safely or effectively without the support of such organized 'higher
>
> knowledge,' [astronomy, astrology, etc] any more than the Pentagon can move today
>
> without consulting its specialized scientists, technical experts, games theorists and
>
> computers – a new hierarchy supposedly less fallible than the entrail-diviners, but, to
>
> judge by their gross miscalculations, not notably so.[49]

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[48] Mumford, Pentagon, 376. Mumford's use of the word Khan is significant; like Deleuze and Guattari, Mumford links the war machine with the history of central Asia.

[49] Mumford, Pentagon 178. Both the dependence of the king/Pentagon/megamachine on higher knowledge and the idea that the "higher knowledge" is unable to do substantially better than entrail diviners are amply proven by the seeming inability of any branch of the U.S. government to get accurate information about the state of Iraq's alleged "weapons of mass destruction" without disassembling the

Captaining the Pentagon, Ahab needs a whole array of secret knowledge to maintain his power: he is the supreme scientist of whaling, the lone priestly controller of magnetism, etc. But a vital fact about Moby-Dick is that Ahab is not simply a "modern" man of the Pentagon, ordering science on his side; Melville also gives him a literal priesthood in the form of the Zoroastrian Fedallah. Ahab belongs to the old megatechnics and the new megatechnics both: he is the American general or captain of industry, but he is also Pharaoh, a living pyramid with his mighty "Egyptian" chest. The "modern" and the "ancient" are continually confused: Starbuck and Ahab, who should be thoroughly modern, frequently act on instinct or superstition, whereas Fedallah (as discussed earlier) may be part of a technocratic-capitalist elite in his own right.

Not only is Ahab attended by a sun-worshiper, not only is his reward for spying the whale a doubloon which symbolizes the sun (following Captain Claret of White-Jacket, who was the "lord and master of the sun"), but he believes that whales themselves are sun-worshipers: "He turns and turns him to it, – how slowly, but how steadfastly, his homage-rendering and invoking brow, with his last dying motions. He too worships fire; most faithful, broad, baronial vassal of the sun!" (497; ch. 116). Shortly after this Ahab destroys the quadrant, suppressing one technology in favor of another: he is more powerful as the sole master of magnetism than as one of many masters of the quadrant; the secrecy of the technology is more important than its practical usefulness.[50] As he destroys the quadrant he curses "all things that cast man's eyes aloft

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entire country, to say nothing of its problems acquiring usable information about nuclear arms programs in India, Pakistan, Iran or North Korea, despite an intelligence budget of tens of billions of dollars. An equally apt illustration of the entrail-diving character of megatechnic intelligence gathering was Saddam Hussein's apparent inability to comprehend that a U.S. attack really was imminent – or, according to some arguments, he may have believed that he did have "weapons of mass destruction" at his disposal.

[50] See also David Noble's The Religion of Technology on this subject.

to the heaven"; meanwhile the sun-worshiper Fedallah, displays "a sneering triumph" and a "fatalistic despair" inspired by Ahab's action (501; ch. 118). Ahab, surrounded by sun-worshipers, has cast aside the tools which exist to make use of the sun – has he defied the sun, or made greater use of it? Is he extending or rejecting the spatialization of time associated with astronomy and sun-gods? Fedallah's expression, triumphant on Ahab's behalf, indicates that from the point of view of the sun-worshiping priest, Ahab's power has grown; his relationship to the sun, to his crew, to the sun-worshiping Parsee and to whales, are all optimal (but still insufficient) for his monomaniac purpose, which is to array all things to obey his command. C.L.R. James reads this passage to mean that Ahab has elevated man above all things, a reading in accord with Mumford's earlier humanistic understanding of Ahab's voyage (55). But this is the elevation not of mankind, but of a mechanized mankind as arrayed under Ahab qua living pyramid. Ahab crosses boundaries and moves between worlds: now he commands sun-worshipers, now he uses science to his purposes, now he is a diabolical king to the "savage harpooners," now an object of fascination to an educated man like Ishmael.

Mumford does not explicitly comment on Ahab's complex relationship with the sun and sun-worship, but The Myth of the Machine owes much to Melville, and concerns itself greatly with the role of sun-worship in modern as well as ancient life. Kingship, the conversion of time into space and the Megamachine are inextricably connected to the sun: "Not the least affiliation of kingship with the worship of the sun was the fact that the king, like the sun, exerted force at a distance" (Human Development 199). The sun-worship which is associated with the king and the ancient Megamachine is equally bound up with the scientist (and general) and the new Megamachine:

Within a century or two [of Leonardo and Agricola] the ideological fabric that supported the ancient megamachine had been reconstructed... Power, speed, motion, standardization, mass production, quantification, regimentation, precision, uniformity, astronomical regularity, control, above all control — these became the passwords of modern society in the new Western style.... Only one thing was needed to assemble and polarize all the new components of the megamachine: the birth of the Sun God. And in the sixteenth century, with Kepler, Tycho Brahe, and Copernicus officiating as accoucheurs, the new Sun God was born. (Human Development 294)

The power of the modern Megamachine is rooted in the two-fold exploration of "that which can be brought under human domination. One exploration focused mainly on the sky [and phenomena in the sky and the laws learned from them]. . . the other boldly traversed the seas" (Pentagon 5). Ahab the sea-captain is an explorer of the earth and of the heavens, although he tries to deny the later by smashing the quadrant. And he himself is a site of the Megamachine's reconstruction. Like the city which begins and ends with the Necropolis, he embodies both the urge for the Megamachine's power and its inevitable telos, as well as the urge to resist this power, at least when it threatens him. Ahab represents the Megamachine's movement towards an apocalyptic ending, its primordial roots and the too-human desire to be free of it, to live free of linear time, all at once: its dominion is eternal and yet always threatened with an apocalyptic end. Ahab's age and primitivism is as much a part of his megatechnic, megalomaniac ambition as his knowledge of technology and his modernity. The ancient and the modern come together in his person; this interest in the confluence of the ancient and the modern is a particular fascination of Mumford's.

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One of Mumford's more astute claims is that the unearthing of the past in the Renaissance had much more to do with human development or progress than any particular technical invention:

> Though other cultures – like the Sumerian, the Mayan, and the Indic – coupled human destiny with long vistas of abstract calendar time, the essential contribution of the Renascence was to relate the cumulated results of history to the variety of cultural achievements that had marked the successive generations. By unburying statues, monuments, buildings, cities, by reading old books and inscriptions, by re-entering a long-abandoned world of ideas, these new explorers in time became aware of fresh potentialities in their own existence. (Pentagon 13)

We go forward by going back; the megamachine is not a new megamachine, but a recreated one. The priest is displaced by the scientist, the soldier by. . . well, the soldier. By bringing Fedallah, a "primitive aboriginal who worships fire for fire's sake," in C.L.R. James' words (although, as I have argued elsewhere, Fedallah himself incarnates the same jumble of primitivism and modernity as Ahab himself) into his inner sanctum, Ahab asserts control over mankind and its future; he unearths and masters the past, just as he would master the secrets of the deep (James 55).

Through several chapters Mumford develops the perhaps unexceptional argument that the institution of kingship, and hence of sun-worship, arose from paleolithic hunters finding that paleolithic farmers were helpless before their onslaught. He explicitly connects the paleolithic hunter to Moby-Dick:

Probably the nearest modern equivalent to the slaying of big game in paleolithic times was the hunting of another big mammal, the sperm whale, a century and more ago. . . one can find in the pages of Melville's 'Moby-Dick' the psychal and social parallels of the paleolithic hunt. In both cases, fortitude in pursuit, unflinching courage, and the ability on the part of the leader to give commands and exact obedience were necessary to the success of the venture. . . Leadership and loyalty, those keys to military success and large-scale organization, flourished in this milieu. Both were at a later period to have technological consequences. . . It was from this cultural complex that a commanding personage, the hunting chief, finally walks onto the stage of civilized history. . . that combination of docile ritualistic conformity. . . with exhilarating self-confidence, venturesome command, and, not least, a certain savage readiness to take life, were the essential prerequisites for the greatest early achievement in technics: the collective human machine. (Human Development 117)

Moby-Dick and the whale-hunt in general unite the ancient requirements for the Megamachine with the innovations of advanced technics. The crew even contains members from "aboriginal" cultures, mighty hunters suitable for absorption into either the paleolithic or modern megamachine: Queequeg, Tashtego and Dagoo as well as Ahab could admirably fill the shoes of the chieftain whom Mumford describes above. The voyage of the Pequod is also the hypothetical primordial conquest of Egypt or Sumer, which is one part of the significance of the fact that it is named after a tribe destroyed by genocidal warfare. Ahab is both a paleolithic hunting chief ("cannibal old me") and a scientifically-minded whaler; the modern totalitarian state which is created or foreshadowed in Moby-Dick is also Egypt, Sumer, or the Incan Empire (544; ch. 132).

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We see the potential for the Megamachine even in Queequeg, who recalls how among his people the rich use the poor as couches: if we don't simply treat it as a joke, what a level of control and domination that implies! The Pequod, for all its modern technology, also depends on Indian-invented "druggs," devices which slow down a harpooned whale so it can be butchered later, for the megamachine can be built using old or new technologies, and since it spatializes and dominates time, it can freely draw upon the new and the old (386; ch. 87). One of the last images in the novel is of Tashtego driving, in accordance with Ahab's last command, a banner into the mast – even as he sinks under the waves. Ahab's will, like the will of the sun-god himself, so dominates Tashtego that it operates on him even in his "death-grasp" (572; ch. 135). The cannibal hunters are not less vulnerable to becoming automatons than the more "civilized" of the crew; if anything, they are more vulnerable, because the Megamachine has more to offer them.

Mumford reveals how deeply rooted his concept of the Megamachine is in Moby-Dick conclusively at the end of Technics and Human Development:

> At last a megamachine had become possible that needed, once organized, a minimum of detailed human participation and coordination. From the sixteenth century on the secret of the megamachine was slowly re-discovered. In a series of empirical fumblings and improvisations, with little sense of the ultimate end toward which society was moving, that great mechanical Leviathan was fished up out of the depths of history. The expansion of the megamachine – its kingdom, its power, its glory – became progressively the chief end, or at least the fixed obsession, of Western Man. (294)

The mechanical men in Melville's fiction are both symptom and prophecy. They are the human cogs of the megamachine: Ahab can afford to jest about building mechanical men because he

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already has a working megamachine, constructed from the Pequod's entire crew. In Ahab we have the mechanizing man, the sun king, priest or Pharaoh; in the Pequod's crew we have the mechanized men who have been appearing in Melville's fiction since Typee. What was once Mumford's story of mechanization and modernity has become the inevitable narrative of all (transcendental) history. Not coincidentally, this unity (despite all differences) between the distant past and the hyper-modern is a central concern of Melville's The Confidence Man, in which modernity becomes a collection of con games.

C. THE TRAITOR

The last chapter of Melville's The Confidence Man begins with the image of an old man studying the Bible beneath the lone "solar lamp" still burning late at night in the men's cabin of the steamboat Fidèle. A "perverse man" had wanted to extinguish the light, but the steward had forbidden him to do so, and loudly reminded him that "in a place full of strangers, to show one's self anxious to produce darkness... [was] not becoming" (1099; ch. 45). The chapter is dedicated to a conversation between the old man and the Cosmopolitan, one of the many incarnations of the Confidence Man which Melville conjures. They discuss the Bible as "good news" – but the passages which the Bible which they focus upon are taken not from the gospels, but from the apocryphal book of Sirach; Melville the Hebraist is at work again in the flickering light of the "solar lamp," which is like a weak image of Apollo or a fallen Ahab. The passages in Sirach are warnings against trust and "fair words," which are understood by someone who speaks out of the

darkness, interrupting the conversation, as a description of a confidence-man. Then the

Cosmopolitan and the old man discuss the fact that Sirach is part of the apocrypha: "all this to the

right is certain truth, and all this to the left is certain truth, but all I hold in my hand here is

apocrypha." The old man urges the Cosmopolitan to "think no more" of the warnings of Sirach,

"for it's apocrypha." At that moment the voice calls of the darkness for the third time: "What's

that about the Apocalypse?" (1102; ch. 45)

In Satirical Apocalypse, Jonathan Cook traces a web of Biblical typology used in The

Confidence-Man "on three typological levels relative to the Bible as a whole, the New Testament

alone, and the Book of Revelation"; the novel traces a movement from Mosaic "law" to Christian

"grace," from "Christ's first advent in the first chapter to his Second Advent in the Last," and it

is an "enactment of the Apocalypse, with the Confidence Man conflating true messiah and false

prophet, Christ and Antichrist, Second Coming and Last Loosening of Satan" (58).

Analyzing the scene with the old man reading the Bible under the solar lamp, Cook

argues that "This opposition between those illuminated with faith and those asleep in the dark

appears... as the contrast between the old man ... and the potentially damned sleepers who

surround him, some of whom rudely advise him to go to bed." Cook goes on to note that the old

man's obsession with various security devices being peddled by a boy later in the chapter "makes

a mockery of such protection" (75). In the chapter and novel's last scene, the Cosmopolitan

extinguishes the lamp.

> The next moment, the waning light expired, and with it the waning flames of the horned
>
> altar, and the waning halo round the robed man's brow; while in the darkness which

ensued, the cosmopolitan kindly led the old man away. Something further may follow of

this masquerade. (1112; ch. 45)

Cook argues that, while this last scene is "no doubt meant to symbolize the completion of a

fictive Apocalypse" it also suggests the "continued existence of the world" into a "post-

apocalyptic world [which] is also post-Christian" (80). Decades earlier, Mumford similarly saw

the story of The Confidence-Man as being about the movement towards a world which had

ceased to have a human purpose; its post-Christian nature is assumed.

Later in his book, Cook locates The Confidence-Man qua apocalypse, as a predecessor to

Henry Adam's vision in The Education of Henry Adams of "an apocalyptic finale to the

progressive-minded, outwardly prosperous nineteenth century," (215) and, following R.W.B.

Lewis, he calls it an ancestor to "apocalyptic framework narratives" by West, Ellison, Barth, and

Pynchon (215).

In reading the Confidence-Man as an apocalyptic narrative, one should remember that the

vessel is a modern steamboat, in a novel written in 1857; steamboats had already utterly

revolutionized war in Asia and Africa, by enabling Western nations to project into the African

and Asian interiors the same power which they had long possessed at sea, a power which

Melville is greatly interested in Typee and Omoo (Headrick, Tools 18). This same ability to

project mechanized power was about to transform the interior of America as well, effectively

enabling the North to win the Civil War. The mechanization of war at sea is the subject of

Melville's Civil War poem "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight": "Yet this was battle, and

intense – / Beyond the strife of fleets heroic ;/ Deadlier, closer, calm `mid storm; / No passion; all

went on by crank, / Pivot, and screw, / And calculations of caloric" (Poems 81). War is shifting

in the direction of calculation and certainty and is driven by knowledge, not by passion.

Certainty is the very subject of Melville's apocalyptic narrative. When the voice cries out

of the darkness "What's that about the Apocalypse?" it is in immediate response to the old man's

assertion that the Old and New Testament contain certain truth, and that the apocrypha can be

dismissed. The voice speaking out of the darkness welds the concepts of Apocalypse and

epistemological certainty into one unit: certainty and truth, to say nothing of confidence in the

truth and faith in certainty, are eschatology. But if truth and certainty, confidence and faith,

created only a doomed time, a time-towards-death, what remains? "Something further may

follow of this masquerade," The Confidence-Man ends. The only time which does not cease at

the end is based on the masquerade, on betrayal and darkness: the darkness of Pierre's betrayal

of his mother and fiancé, the darkness of the Tombs in which he and his shadowy sister kill

themselves with a bottle of poison that drops "as if it had been an run-out sand-glass"; the

darkness of Ishmael's betrayal of his people and their way of understanding the world (and

Ishmael's presumed preceding betrayal by his family); the darkness of Queequeg's betrayal of

his people and their way of understanding the world; the darkness of Israel Potter's literal

blindness at the end of his "biography of failure"; the darkness of Bartleby buried in the heart of

the pyramid; the darkness of Babo's rebellion in "Benito Cereno" – Babo, who writes a script

and plays a role worthy of Shakespeare, violently overthrowing all truth and certainty in the

process.

Out of Melville's renegade heroes, only two live to continue their treachery: Ishmael and

the Confidence Man. Melville himself, in Rogin's words, "wrote as an Ishmael while living as

an Isaac" for most of his life, and hence was a kind of traitor no matter how one looks at it (51). One after another, his traitor-heroes are slated for death. Those who rebel most openly against the megamachine or the pyramid system, as Mumford would call it (Melville gave no name to the system), sometimes to the extent of taking up arms against it, are those who must die: Babo, Bartleby, Pierre, Queequeg. For it is not the rebels who survive, but the traitors, who are ultimately unfaithful to all powers above them. "Owning no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him," Ishmael describes himself (270; ch. 57). The treachery of the Confidence Man is clearly even deeper.

What Ishmael and the Confidence Man realize, traitors and wanderers that they are, is that there is no original time to return to, no garden, no organic principle. There is the Pyramid, spatialized time which generates truth, certainty, God, and apocalypse, organizing all things and holding all power, and the Masquerade, the deceptions and lies which trick and betray the pyramid. Time is known to the Pyramid; time, like Ahab, is a locomotive with a destination. As for the Masquerade? What it promises – the only thing it promises – is that "something further may follow." The Pyramid looms over history; the Masquerade mocks history. Both embrace and use technology: Ishmael is obsessed with the tools and techniques of the whaling industry, and the Confidence Man finds himself at home on board the Fidelé, not in an agricultural village. But the Pyramid is concerned with the destination of technology: the finished Pyramid, the completed cathedral, the full ship (Starbuck). The Masquerade, on the other hand, is concerned with process: the gutting of a whale becomes sexual ecstasy in "A Squeeze of the Hand"; the convolutions of modern (patent) medicine are an intimate part of the Masquerade in The Confidence Man.

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There have been a number of essays and books on Melville, as I discussed much earlier in this chapter, which understand Melville to be a critic not only of Western imperialism and Western metaphysics, but of the relation between them. I will take one as a an example: William Spanos' article "Pierre's Silence," a compact and coherent sequel to his sprawling Errant Art of Moby-Dick. As I discussed earlier, Pierre assails monuments and a monumentalizing idea of history both directly and indirectly. Spanos touches on Melville's mockery of the tradition of Western thought, from Plato to Goethe ("Silence" 371). Later, he extends his argument

> For Melville. . . the "mapping" and "colonization" of America inaugurated by the
> Puritans' "founding" of the "unmapped" "New World" wilderness had been implicitly. . .
> accomplished by the middle of the nineteenth century. . . I put these affiliated key terms –
> "founding," "mapping," "colonization" – in quotation marks not to indicate that they are
> simply metaphors drawn from the discourse of Western imperialism proper. Rather, in
> keeping with Melville's remarkably proleptic intention, I do it in order to suggest that
> they refer literally both to geographical space and to thinking itself, that is, to a Western
> thinking that, at least since the Romans and increasingly thereafter, is informed by a
> spatial metaphorics that represents the truth of being (knowledge) as a "territory" or
> "province" or "domain," or "field" or "region" to be won and dominated. ("Silence" 375)

By elevating or praising a kind of "nomadic thought" which Spanos (and I) links with the thinking of Deleuze, among others, Melville "anticipates the postmodernist diagnosis of modernity as the 'end' of philosophy" ("Silence" 378).

Although I agree with much of what Spanos says, there is a critical way in which he doesn't go far enough, for Spanos' reading is itself a product of teleological history, according to

which there was a moment, somewhere around the time of the Romans, when Western thought "fell" to spatializing thought. Since that moment, thought has become more and more spatialized; time and space have been dominated; an organic grasp of "being in itself" has been increasingly lost; but now, at the postmodern moment, we paradoxically have both the opportunity and the need to rethink thinking: "he anticipates the de-centered and errant thought of the new Europeans and thus becomes a truly American exceptionalist" ("Silence" 380). Despite their many differences, Spanos' reading of Melville (which I take to representative of a certain school of thought) is fundamentally like Mumford's early reading of him:

> Through his art, he escaped the barren destiny of his living: he embraced Life, and we who now follow where his lonely courage led him embrace it, too. . . The day of Herman Melville's vision is now in the beginning. It hangs like a cloud over the horizon at dawn; and as the sun rises, it will become more radiant, and more a part of the living day.
>
> (Herman Melville 368).

But (contra Spanos and Mumford) the man who stood appalled at the foot of the pyramid, had escaped from nothing, for that which was abhorrent to him in his America dated back not to Rome, but to Egypt. And Egypt's monumentalism is not necessarily preceded by anything at all; in Typee it seems to precede that idyllic tribe, much as the resurrected Mummy in Edgar Allan Poe's "A Few Words with a Mummy", declares the American obsession with origins to be baseless: there was nothing at all before Egypt.

My central position is that, contrary to what various contemporary critics have argued, Melville did not see, or did not only see, a problem with Western metaphysics or "thinking," but with power (and yet, power is inevitable), and power is so old that Melville can't name anything

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older than it, and doesn't try: the end of thinking and the end of history are as old as history, that is, as old as the pyramids. Technology, technological progress, and the mechanization of humanity are neither the cause nor the symptom of the Western metaphysics which drives towards the end of history: humanity has always been under the mechanizing hand of the pyramid. Thus, there is an essential unity, despite apparent technological differences, between Queequeg's cannibal kingdom and Ahab's ship. There is nothing, pre-modern or post-modern, no "organic" or "being in itself" which can oppose the pyramid in history, for the pyramid owns history. Knowing that, as Melville knows it in his later works, the Confidence Man has a piece of useful, at-hand knowledge, as empirical and versatile as Ishmael's knowledge of whaling and of the sea: teleological thought is something to be used, a machine, if you will, for leading an old man into the darkness. The Confidence Man is in no danger of suddenly coming to hold power, for he does not exist at the top of the system but at or under its margins, but he can certainly survive it and manipulate it.

The earlier Mumford, for all of his lack of sophistication, understands the relationship between technology, modernity and Melville in a teleological/apocalyptic mode that has much in common with the way contemporary critics understand this same three-way relationship. The later Mumford, although not primarily a literary critic, developed a much different understanding of Melville in conjunction with his increasingly sophisticated, complex and dark understanding of technology, modernity and history.

My lingering question is this: what, finally, will a more technologically sophisticated understanding of Melville – that is, an understanding of Melville which understands the

relationship between technology and teleology in his work, which is partially rooted in Mumford – be able to <u>do</u>, and why has this potential branch of Melville studies not been pursued?

D. APPROACHING BYZANTIUM

The broad failure of literary critics to see Mumford's reading of Melville as an ongoing project, rather than one that ended with the publication of <u>Herman Melville</u>, has left its mark on both studies of Melville and American Studies as a whole. Because there is a tendency to see Mumford's literary criticism as both beginning and ending with <u>The Golden Day</u> and <u>Herman Melville</u>, most critics tend both to downplay his importance and to misunderstand his relationship to Melville and Melville studies.

Mumford has, not without reason, often been regarded as principally an Emersonian. This understandable categorization has, I believe, deflected the attention of literary criticism away from Mumford's later work; he is often remembered only for what seem now to be the eager pieties of <u>The Golden Day</u>:

> The sunlight had in Emerson and Whitman penetrated to every spot, and in its presence, the dark corners became more intense. If one explored the white summits of the glacier with Emerson, one might also fall into the abyss with Melville. One climbed high; and when one fell, the fall was deep. (142)

But there is something of a consensus that the relative optimism of Mumford's early career fell into pessimism and darkness in his later works.[51] This darkness is certainly linked to his changing understanding of the world, particularly the struggle between the organic and the machine, but it also chronicles an ongoing shift in his work from Emerson to Melville, or from a brighter to a darker Melville; the darkness which Mumford once pushed into Pierre and The Confidence Man alone later became characteristic of Melville's work as a whole, for him.

This is not to say that Mumford's reading of Melville has received no critical attention, but that this ongoing relationship has mainly been understood biographically, in relation to Melville's impact on Mumford's life, rather than for its impact upon his work. In "Tragedy, Responsibility and the Intellectual," for example, Richard Fox argues that Mumford's "tragic sense of life" emerges partially from his reading of Melville, while Rosalind Williams sees Mumford as justifying an affair through his reading of Melville: "as Melville had, Mumford felt he had to break free from past habits and received rules, and to endure a period of disequilibrium in order to achieve a new and finer synthesis."[52] Most importantly, Casey Blake sees Mumford as deliberately basing his ethics on Melville:

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[51] Michael Zuckerman details both the reasoning behind this and his own argument against this view in "Faith, Hope, Not Much Charity: The Optimistic Epistemology of Lewis Mumford" in Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual. Zuckerman wisely reminds us that there is a powerful element of hope in Mumford's late works, but these works are still, I submit, fundamentally pessimistic because they envision a humanity that has fallen into a kind of post-human servitude, even if that servitude is still not inescapable.

[52] Fox 326-6; Williams 46. For my purposes it is of particular importance to note that Melville was personally and psychologically important to Mumford when he was writing a book that seems, on the surface, to have almost nothing to do with Melville. This "seems" is not wholly correct: Melville should have some importance in a discussion of the history of technology, if for no other reason than that he documented a whole set of technologies, mainly in Moby-Dick. Furthermore, this is the beginning of a pattern: Melville is always present in Mumford's works, or during their composition, whether that presence is apparent or not.

By choosing Melville as his source for a personal ethics, as opposed to Emerson or

Whitman (the culture heroes of choice for his friends Brooks and Frank), Mumford made

clear the importance of a recognition of human limits, of "the tragic sense of life," for his

own vision of community. Melville's life and work brought Mumford face to face with

the problems of evil, tragedy, and the inescapable sense of loss that plagued Melville as

he confronted an indifferent world. Mumford's encounter with Melville left him

convinced of the moral shabbiness of American liberalism, and of the need to find a

secular equivalent to the insights into human nature once provided by religion. (291)

I have already demonstrated in some detail what Mumford's concept of megatechnics owes to

Melville; that is, Melville gave Mumford the central idea and image of his late work, the vision

of the technology-generated and generating Pyramid looming over history, as well as the ethical

orientation which Blake points out. Melville is central to Mumford's understanding of

technology and time as well as his understanding of ethics.

Those few Melville critics who work with Mumford tend also to focus solely on The

Golden Day and Herman Melville. Take William Spanos once more:

Building on the theme of American society's neglect of Melville or Melville's self-

imposed withdrawal from a materialist society incapable of appreciating the life of the

spirit. . . the biographical critics of the 1920s – Raymond Weaver, Lewis Mumford [etc]. .

. represented Melville's time . . . from the elitist. . . perspective that attributed the vulgar

materialism of the age to. . . Puritanism. (Errant 16)

Spanos also criticizes Mumford, among others, for "impositions [upon Moby-Dick] of larger,

spatial categories to justify a preconceived ideological agenda," and for reading the novel "from

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the end" (Errant 58, 73). These criticisms have some merit when levied against the early

Mumford (although, as I have already argued, Spanos by no means escapes from the trap of

obsession with ends), but they are startling when one thinks of the later Mumford, who explicitly

made use of Melville against the spatializing tyranny of the megamachine.

Clare Spark's account of Mumford's role in Melville studies in Hunting Captain Ahab

warrants discussion:

Disillusion with the idea of progress supposedly explains Melville's sudden acceptability

in the twentieth century; it was Melville's all-too-graphic disintegration, though, that

frightened his critics. His apparent corrective flights to corporatism were promoted by

Nietzchean radicals such as Van Wyck Brooks or Lewis Mumford, defining themselves

against a mechanistic and alien mass culture.[53]

Setting aside the absurdity of calling Brooks and Mumford "Nietzchean radicals" – Sparks

evidently confuses Brooks and Mumford with Raymond Weaver in this passage[54] – her reading

of Mumford's understanding of Melville's "disintegration" is essentially correct, if we only pay

attention to The Golden Day and Herman Melville: Mumford praises the human power of Moby-

Dick, nearly reviles Pierre and The Confidence-Man, and then praises Melville's return to the

"values of life" – what Spark would call corporatism. But Mumford's later works treat Melville

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[53] There are many problems with Spark's book, but it involves a prodigious amount of research
on the early history of Melville studies, and cannot, therefore, be totally ignored.

[54] Raymond Weaver, was, of course, a Nietzchean reader of Melville. He quotes Nietzsche in
discussing the length of Melville's life (16), and when discussing the failure of the public to recognize
Melville's greatness he writes "The herd must always be intolerant of all who violate its sacred and
painfully reared traditions" (18). Weaver uses Nietzsche to discuss the humor in Moby-Dick (332). To
Weaver, Melville is both a tablet-smasher, as idealized in Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and an
advocate of the "gay science." Weaver's biography has been badly mistreated, beginning with
Mumford's attack on it, but that's a subject for another time.

far differently, as she herself should have realized, when she quoted a letter from Mumford to Henry A. Murray, acknowledging his dissatisfaction with his own <u>Herman Melville</u>.[55] But in a section of this letter which she does not quote, after acknowledging the superficiality of <u>Herman Melville</u>, and acknowledging the value of Murray's work (his introduction and notes to <u>Pierre</u>), Mumford writes

> So much in Stubb-like defense of my 'superficiality': for which, like Stubb, I probably deserve a kick in the rump from Ahab! But you couldn't have written anything more appropriately stimulating to my own thought. . . when I am dealing with the Nature of Man and with what, under heaven, may be done about it. (<u>Works and Days</u> 293)

Mumford did not simply withdraw in terror from Melville's disintegration, as Spark would have it: he put it to work, and it was relevant to his <u>ongoing</u> project. Again: his reading of Melville (a flexible, changing reading) was an important ongoing part of his work, as is clearly stated in the passage. Spark, like others, points to real flaws in Mumford's early literary criticism, and uses those problems with the early work to implicitly justify writing Mumford off after that point.

Both literary critics who are mainly concerned with Melville and those who are mainly concerned with Mumford naturally tend to focus overwhelmingly on Mumford's <u>The Golden Day</u> and <u>Herman Melville</u> when writing about the relationship between the two. But whether they argue that Mumford's work belongs in a certain way to a particular movement in literary criticism – call it "the Melville revival" – or whether they are interested in the way that his work was impacted by his work on Melville, or whether they ignore the connection entirely (this being most common), there is no sense that his ongoing work was continuously formed by a

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[55] Sparks, 258. The letter she quotes is printed in Lewis Mumford, <u>Works and Days</u> 292-93.

continually shifting response to Melville, or (more importantly for this project) that his ongoing

work could have any new impact on Melville studies.

Mumford draws on Morris and Ruskin, among others, in his critique of technology, but

he is more directly situated as a descendent of Patrick Geddes, under whose influence he wrote

Technics and Civilization, which, as discussed earlier, was concerned with an earlier, more

optimistic version of the Megamachine which had not yet been connected to the Pyramid Age; at

this time Mumford had argued that the mechanical world picture was dissolving. Technology

itself, specifically the decentralized usage of electronic technology, would lead to the dissolution

of the mechanical world picture (366). Technology would be transcended technologically.

Current views, both right and left wing, of the positive decentralizing power of the Internet and

the chimerical idea of fuel cell automobiles decentralizing the power industry,[56] are later, less

articulate versions of this argument. But in The Myth of the Machine, in which, following

Melville, Mumford asserts the essential continuity of the contemporary megamachine with the

Megamachine of the Pyramid Age, Mumford abandons the idea of evolving out of the machine

through technology itself. Instead, the Megamachine, through which "the ideal of mechanical

regularity and mechanical perfection entered into every human activity, from the observation of

the heavens to the winding of clocks, from the drilling of soldiers to the drilling of seeds in the

fields" must be defied, against what seem like impossible odds "in favor of the power system and

against the human personality," possibly physically or violently but most of all within the human

mind (Pentagon 430, 431, 428):

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[56] This notion is so powerful and appealing that publications from The Nation to The New York
Times have published wistful articles about this chimera – articles that should raise the ire of anyone who
has ever passed a college physics or chemistry class.

Each one of us, as long as life stirs in him, may play a part in extricating himself from the

power system by asserting his primacy as a person in quiet acts of mental or physical

withdrawal – in gestures of non-conformity, in abstentions, restrictions, inhibitions,

which will liberate him from the domination of the pentagon of power. (<u>Pentagon</u> 433)

Statements like this are frustrating for most readers of Mumford; after hundreds of pages of

describing the problem of megatechnics he offers a non-specific, individual version of Thoreau's

passive resistance as an antidote to all of our problems. He should have remembered the late

Melville better: Bartleby and Pierre, after all, are the ones who resist the megamachine, and

perish. But Ishmael betrays it and the Confidence Man undermines and ridicules it, most of all

by drily and continually asserting an endless faith <u>in</u> it: they are the ones who are at least partially

successful. Moreover, Mumford fails to address an obvious question: if we can just wish our

way out of the Megamachine, why hasn't it ever happened before? His eschatology has become

an eschatology of the individual, Emersonian will after all.

A similar frustrating moment arises at a similar moment in Heidegger's "The Question

Concerning Technology":

The frenziedness of technology may entrench itself everywhere to such an extent

that someday, throughout everything technological, the essence of technology may come

to presence in the coming-to-pass of truth.

Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection

upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the

one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different

from it.

Such a realm is art. (35)

Heidegger offers art as the answer to technology, without even specifying what form that art must take, while Mumford only offers the even more generic idea of the "regenerated human personality." The Pentagon of Power, after spending hundreds of pages detailing the endless power and eternal history of the megamachine, closes on the notion that we need only will our own freedom to be free: "But for those of us who have thrown off the myth of the machine, the next move is ours: for the gates of the technocratic prison will open automatically, despite their rusty ancient hinges, as soon as we choose to walk out" (435). Behold the Pyramid, looming over all things, converting Time into space and conquering space! But don't worry about it! Are you surrounded by a Necropolis? Tap your heels together three times, and you'll be home! Michel Foucault, perhaps more wisely if less courageously, does not even attempt to close Discipline and Punish with a general solution to the problem of mechanized humanity, instead ending on what seems a vague note of sorrow. Mumford's solution to the problem of the Megamachine, despite its overt silliness, is not essentially different from a dream of achieving a new world by rethinking thinking. It is just another eschatology, which at least has the merit of not denying its own silliness.

In the final pages of The Pentagon of Power, though, Mumford does not quite leap straight from the dangers of the megamachine into the belief that we can simply walk out of it, with the gates opening automatically. First, he toys with the idea of Byzantinizing the megamachine:

The Roman Empire in the East won a new lease on life for a thousand years by coming to terms with Christianity. If the Power System is to continue in existence as a working

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partner in a more organic complex dedicated to the renewal of life, it will only be if its

leaders, and those larger groups that they influence, have undergone a profound change of

heart and mind, of ideal and purpose, as great as that which for so long arrested the decay

of the Eastern empire established in Byzantium. But it must be remembered that this

intermixture of Roman and Christian institutions was achieved at the expense of

creativity. (432)

He first toys with but then deprecates the idea of a Byzantinized megamachine, which would be a

fusion of organic and mechanical values, of the human and the inhuman; having already

accepted, following Melville, that the megamachine is transcendence itself, he now toys with the

treachery, the chaotic interpenetrations and blurred categories of The Confidence-Man,

Melville's journals and Clarel. What a confidence game, to imagine Ahab or the President or a

CEO being unfaithful to the megamachine! Had Mumford closed The Pentagon of Power with

an extended version of this thought, he would have been envisioning a Cyborg-megamachine,

betrayed from within. When Melville lets all categories slip, blend and interpenetrate he

envisions a cyborg world, even as he had previously envisioned the cyborgs aboard the Pequod

and the Fidelé, anticipating Donna Haraway's Cyborg.

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are chimeras, theorized and

fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs... In the traditions

of 'Western' science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the

tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the

productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the

other _– the relation between organism and machine has been a border war_ [my emphasis].

(Simians 151)

Mumford, despite what his critics would claim, was never truly either an optimist or a luddite about the technological future. He could sound like either one, but his oscillation between the two positions, from The Golden Day to Technics and Civilization to The Myth of the Machine, indicates that he was struggling to find another position, which he nearly achieved but doesn't fully embrace at the end of The Pentagon of Power. In nearly calling for the Byzantinization of the megamachine, by following through on Melville's thinking about the mechanization of humanity and the pyramids, Mumford almost but not quite leapfrogs Haraway, by envisioning not a cyborg individual, but a cyborg world, and giving it a long history – something which Haraway dodges, by eschatologically placing the cyborg squarely in our own time, instead of, at the latest, in Melville's. Haraway's great error – and it is the greatest error of all – following in a long line of critics of Western thought, is to be, after all, a Western exceptionalist: the real struggle, the apocalyptic struggle between Michael and the Dragon, is ours, with the moment of the eschatos just around the corner. In Melville's lesson, which Mumford comes achingly close to learning, it is otherwise: the battle has always been already lost, and that defeat is the condition of our being – and yet, the victor has always been tricked and betrayed. Far back in Herman Melville, Mumford praised Melville for being able to understand that sometimes it was greater to surrender than to conquer. This is another lesson that he might have learned better. Where else but in defeat and destruction, of the failure to progress, is there an answer to teleology?

E. QUEEQUEG'S OBSTETRICS

As many, if not most, readers have noted, there is something deeply nihilistic about <u>Moby-Dick</u> and Melville's corpus as a whole: it is a novel that, despite the love between Ishmael and Queequeg, despite the powerful homosocial bonds which form among the crew, despite the potency of Ishmael's hands-on, "spiralizing" way of grasping the world, still continually proclaims "the universal cannibalism of the sea." When the cook, Fleece, is forced by Stubb to preach to the sharks, he begins by addressing them as "belubbed fellow-critturs," then calls them "fellow-critturs" and then, finally, gives them this benediction: "Cussed fellow-critturs! Kick up de damndest row as every you can; fill your dam' bellies `till dey bust – and den die" (295; ch 64). This movement from a hollow blessing to a heartfelt curse seems natural, even inevitable. Man and shark are alike, when carving into the whale: "were you to turn the whole affair upside down, it would still be pretty much the same thing... a shocking sharkish business enough for all parties" (293; ch. 64). The salvation of shark and man are equally improbable. The promises of Christian eschatology are finally reduced by Stubb to a cooking lesson: "You must go home and be born over again; you don't know how to cook a whale-steak yet" (296; ch. 64).

Several chapters later, Tashtego, one of Queequeg's fellow-harpooners and a "Gay-head Indian," is baling oil out of the massive head of a whale, when he plummets into the head. Shortly, as Tashtego struggles deep inside the whale's head, the head comes loose of the giant hooks which hold it. Even as the head falls into the ocean, "my brave Queequeg" dives after it, naked, with a boarding-sword in hand. After a short time, Queequeg emerges, dragging Tashtego behind him. Queequeg cut a hole in the bottom of the head, and dragged Tashtego out.

He averred, that upon first thrusting in for him, a leg was presented; but well knowing

that that was not as it ought to be and might occasion great trouble; – he had thrust back

the leg, and by a dexterous heave and toss, had wrought a somerset upon the Indian; so

that with the next trial, he came forth in the good old way – head foremost. . . . And thus,

through the courage and great skill in obstetrics of Queequeg, the deliverance, or rather,

delivery of Tashtego, was successfully accomplished. . . (344; ch. 78).

Delivery replaces deliverance; the endless complexities of biological birth are substituted for the

certain truth of the apocalyptic moment. In one idiom, the Western logos has been decentered.

Later in the same section, Melville writes that Tashtego's death would have been a "precious

smothering. . . coffined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber and sanctum santorum

of the whale." Only one sweeter death is imaginable, according to Melville: to perish embalmed

in honey. "How many, think ye, have likewise fallen into Plato's honey head, and sweetly

perished there" (344; ch 78). Tashtego's delivery rescues him from a death which would be like

the death which is metaphysics. One might be tempted to say that the Organic has transcended or

replaced the Mechanical, in the kind of transformative moment envisioned by the early

Mumford, by Wilson, Spanos, etc. But the text is complex: Tashtego's death in the whale's head

and the bee-hunter's death in the honey-tree would both have been Organic deaths, in a sense, but

when Tashtego is delivered, he is delivered into a rather different fate, as literally the last hand of

the Pequod to sink. Ahab's last command, at the beginning of his last monologue, at the end of

which he strikes Moby-Dick for the last time, is to Tashtego. "What ho, Tashtego! let me hear

thy hammer" (571; ch 135). So Tashtego hammers a flag to the mast, not only as the ship sinks,

but even after his head goes under:

. . . at that instant, a red arm and a hammer hovered backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar. A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that etherial thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-gasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship. . . (572; ch. 135)

The "savage" Tashtego, a "natural" man, is delivered by Queequeg in what seems to be a return to organic processes, away from an industrial process which – given the language of the tomb which describes the inside of the whale's head – is aligned with monumentalism and Western metaphysics. But Tashtego, although he has been thus delivered, becomes at the end the most mechanical of all of Ahab's machines, continuing on the path Ahab has ordained for him even as he drowns, while in that drowning wreaking another act of destruction of the machine upon the organic, by pulling the hawk down into the abyss with them. And yet, the hawk in all his pride and useless power, "imperial beak thrust upwards" also echoes Ahab's insane drive for power. Queequeg's delivery has brought no deliverance; it was a messy affair, in which Queequeg is feminized as a midwife and yet hacks his way with a sword into a metaphorical female body; sex, violence and delivery are tangled together, while the inside of the whale's head and the honey-tree, organic objects both, stand in for the death which is abstract metaphysics. The "savages"

Tashtego and Queequeg are by no means liberated from the machine, from the problem of living technologically, nor are Plato or metaphysics "liberated" from the sweetness of organic death.

To return to Haraway's definition of the cyborg, which she intends to apply to the contemporary, "postmodern" moment: Tashtego, Queequeg, Plato and the builders of the pyramids are already cyborgs, already theorized under the sway of power, which is more primordial than metaphysics; they are already spatialized, already known-in-advance, already partly machines. Queequeg's war, which is a war within himself as much as in the outer world, is Haraway's border war between organism and machine, with the two being, at the end, indistinguishable or interchangeable. Queequeg, the son of a king who has claimed to use his subjects as furniture, who is trying to be the Czar Peter of the South Pacific, who emerges out of a world (according to Typee and Mardi) which is already half-devoured by monuments and teleological time, who is a naturalist among a superstitious lot and a violent midwife, is anything but an innocent: he is Bartleby and the Pyramid, the power system and resistance to it, eschatological time and organic, cyclic time. He is the living union of what we typically conceptualize as ways of living rendered irreconcilable by difference, especially technological difference – a seemingly absolute breach which, when examined by contemporary historians of technology, turns out to be as porous as the seemingly solid barrier between Queequeg and Ishmael.

In Technology in World Civilization, which is principally a history of technological exchange between cultures, Arnold Pacey, who makes little use of literary works, discusses how Melville's novel Redburn accurately portrays the complexity of the relationship between European and Indian technologies. In Redburn, the narrator encounters an Indian ship and crew

in Liverpool; the crew member he talks to argues that Indian ships are of better manufacture than European ships, although in Northern climates their rigging, made of coconut-husk rope, proved to be a disadvantage: in fact, in the novel the ship is being re-rigged in Liverpool for that very reason. Confirming and extending the claim of Indian superiority being made in <u>Redburn</u>, Pacey notes

> it is impossible not to be struck by the achievements of the [Indian] shipbuilding industry, which produced skilled carpenters and a model of large-scale organization. . . Given an independent and more prosperous India, it is difficult not to believe that a response to British industrialization might well have taken the form of the spread of skill and innovation from the shipyards into other industries. (<u>World</u> 130)

Pacey argues in considerable detail that Indian shipbuilding techniques, even in the nineteenth century, were every bit as "advanced" as English ones, and that the transfer of tools and techniques was thoroughly two-sided. At least for the early years of the European "age of exploration," Pacey argues that Europeans are best seen as "Mongols of the Sea" – sophisticated in the tools and especially the techniques of making war, but otherwise dependent on "native" technologies (<u>World</u> 68). One of the central arguments of his book is that the fundamental European advantage was not physical technologies as such, but the <u>organizational</u> side of technology. Indian firearms, for instance, were often of better quality than European firearms, but the European variety was more standardized, and their management was standardized as well (131). Victor Hanson makes a similar argument in <u>The Western Way of War</u>, arguing that the Greek phalanx was an overwhelming weapon neither because of strategy or the skill of the hoplites, but primarily because of the thorough subordination of the individual to the whole.

Especially when trying to understand the West and Western Imperialism, the role of physical machines and tools, whether the ones used in industry or those used in war, has been greatly exaggerated, as Mumford argued. True, by the time that the interior of Africa was invaded, the West had achieved, in D.R. Headrick's words, the "unleashing of overwhelming force at minimal costs," but the organizational advantage was earlier and more critical (Tools 10).[57] As in the body of Melville's writings and in Mumford's The Myth of the Machine, Pacey argues that, at most, the advantage in physical technologies followed the critical importance of organization: the Pyramid system or the megamachine. In fact, many of the characteristics of Western and U.S. imperialism emerge from a combination of Western organizational techniques and "primitive" physical technologies, with the rice plantations of South Carolina serving as a perfect example (World 101).[58]

In fact, once we recognize that both tools and techniques are part of technology, with the former being the machine in the world and the latter being the machine in the self, evaluating one technological system relative to another becomes very difficult, as Mumford began to recognize in Technics and Human Development, wherein he argues that technology has been persistently misunderstood as being a matter of tools, when containers were really more important (4). Analyzing one form of technology-as-technique which is intensely relevant to both Melville and Mumford, Pacey writes:

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[57] Michael Adas' Machines as the Measure of Man explores this subject in great depth.

[58] See Judith Carney's article "Landscapes of Technology Transfer" for an in-depth examination of this subject, which will be relevant to my chapter on Ralph Ellison.

Another kind of technology related to landscape in which Non-Western people were often

highly skilled was navigation in trackless deserts, in snowy wastes, or at sea. On the

Pacific Ocean, for instance, people could travel by canoe. . . undertaking voyages lasting

several days out of sight of land. . . . People of the Caroline Islands have continued to

practice traditional navigation and have intrigued and puzzled mathematicians with their

skills. (World 114)

Elsewhere Pacey argues that the relative technological development of the Mayas has been

terribly misunderstood, because their farming techniques were immensely complex and

successful, but involved few physical tools (59). In his great book The Evolution of Technology,

George Basilla argues, carefully and in great detail that "far from fulfilling universal needs,

[technologies] derive their importance within a specific cultural context or value system" (12).

Technology changes continuously, incrementally, and in response to the perceived needs of a

specific time and place. For instance, the use of the wheel, which was well-known in the ancient

Middle East, was abandoned in the Middle East at a later stage. Current analysis, according to

Basilla, suggests that this was not a result of any kind of primitivism or failure, but because given

the dominant conditions of the Middle East for several centuries, pack camels were more suited

(and economical) for most transportation than any kind of wheeled vehicle (11). An amusing

example of the totemic power of the concept of teleological progress, along with the rarity of

knowledge of the history of technology, can be found in Bernard Lewis' What Went Wrong, an

analysis of all the things which went wrong in the Middle East, to make it inferior to the West

(Lewis doesn't put it quite so bluntly). "Some have sought the causes of this painful asymmetry

... [in] the disuse of wheeled vehicles in the pre-modern Middle East, variously explained as a

cause or a symptom of what went wrong" (157). What happens is clear: if we define the "right"

as including the use of wheeled vehicles, then proper human progress must include wheeled

vehicles. If a culture doesn't use them, or abandons them, it "went wrong." Historians of

technology have documented that the wheel was "abandoned" in the Mid-East because it was not

adapted to local conditions at that time; to ask why it was "abandoned" for a time is like asking

why the U.S. Army has "abandoned" the use of horses (which is by no means a permanent

abandonment; horses could serve a military role again, if petroleum and its substitutes grew

scarce enough). But in teleological time, when all time is already known and mastered, there is

no room for such talk.

To speak of "progress" in technology is problematic at best, for, contrary to the dominant

teleological model of history, shared by both those who embrace the West and those who would

see it destroyed or "re-thought," both physical and organizational technologies emerge in

response to particular sets of physical and social conditions. Technology is constitutive of Being,

and power technology or machine technology is <u>continuous</u> with other forms of technology. To

unthink or rethink Western metaphysics, teleology, "The End of History," and the technological

or spiritual <u>eschatos</u>, requires a movement from progress to change, to a concept of evolution

stripped of the stairway which Walt Whitman uses to imagine it in <u>Song</u> of <u>Myself</u>:

> I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of things to be. / My feet strike an
>
> apex of apices of the stairs, / On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between
>
> the steps, / and still I mount and mount / .... Before I was born out of my mother
>
> generations guided me, / ... Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and
>
> deposited it with care. (46-7; sec. 44)

This is teleological evolution, coming from a definite origin and proceeding towards a definite end. But such an idea of evolution is fundamentally ideological, and by no means absolutely necessary, as the Marxist geneticist R.C. Lewontin has argued in <u>Biology</u> as <u>Ideology</u>, in which he attacks, among other things, the "ideology of Biological determinism," and the notion that there is a fundamental separation between organisms and their environments: he argues, rather, that "Organisms do not experience environments. They create them" (109). To take the notion one step farther (I anticipate my closing chapter), one might say that all life is technological; <u>bios</u>, by definition, engages in <u>technē</u>. We are all demiurges.

In "On Replacing the Idea of Progress with an Operational Notion of Directionality," Stephen Jay Gould claims that, in general usage, 'evolution' <u>means</u> progress, and that progress has been tacked on to the concept of evolution for transparent psychological reasons.

> Our geological confinement to a moment at the very end of recorded time must engender suspicions that we are a lucky accident, an afterthought, rather than the goal of all creation. Progress is the doctrine that dispels this chilling thought – for if life moves inexorably forward, however fitfully, towards its ultimate embodiment in human consciousness, then the restriction of <u>Home</u> <u>sapiens</u> to a final moment poses no challenge to the general hope; for all that came before may now be interpreted as part of a process scheduled to yield our form from the start. We may then continue to pervade time through a long chain of imperfect surrogates, mounting their steady course towards our exalted state. (650)

Driven by this desire to discover progress, biologists and geologists make a logical error, according to Gould, by equating "progress" with increasing variance; that is, the diversity of life

and the complexity of some forms of life certainly increases over time, but seeing this movement

as logically the same as "forward" movement is an error:

> we usually seek the link of progress with adaptation in a subset of morphological
>
> novelties qualifying as 'general adaptations' or biomechanical improvements in overall
>
> function. I believe a logical error underlies this standard view. . . . If we understand
>
> adaptation aright, then even these general improvements arise for particular reasons in
>
> definite environments. . . They do not usually evolve 'for' the general use that underlies
>
> their role. . . (661)

In the process of evolution, as life grows more complex, particular developments in response to

particular conditions may <u>seem</u> to be "general" improvements, linear progress. But complexity is

not exaltedness nor survivability. As with biology, so with technology, and so also with power.

Skyscrapers are a particular adaptation to a particular set of conditions, but their mechanical

complexity vs. other forms of architecture does not make them any "better" in an absolute sense.

Contemporary farming with bio-engineered seeds is certainly more complex in a certain sense

than Mayan agriculture, and is certainly better adapted to contemporary perceived needs. There

has been change, and the change has been directional, as Gould would say, but "better"? That

would be to assume that a specific adaptation is really a general adaptation, which is where

Gould exposes the error of much of biological thought. Similarly, the "pyramid system" of

ancient Egypt, although obviously less complex than "the pyramid system" of the contemporary

U.S., is not necessarily inferior in a general sense (with both being adapted to their own specific

conditions, not general ones), although there has been directional change from the former to the

later.

"Something further may follow of this masquerade," Melville writes at the end of The Confidence-Man, a novel of a man/men/God(s) who is/are supremely and fluidly adapted to the precise conditions in which he/they finds them/himself. Ishmael and the Confidence Man have come to an understanding of time which is neither "mechanical" nor "organic," neither based on progress nor on cycles. Time is change, not progress, delivery, or deliverance; technology changes, but has neither origin nor telos; we are creatures who use tools and techniques, which (we) happen to adapt and complicate. And so, too, with the megamachine: it is an adaptation, or a set of adaptations, the turn of instrumentality upon humanity itself. Lewis Mumford's great success, developing out of his reading of Melville, was to rebel thoroughly against "progress" as constitutive of humanity, by understanding the adaptive nature and essential continuity of thought. His error was to insist on the possibility of progress, of a saving telos, even while denying it.

IV. DEAD TIME AND THE SOUTHERN MACHINE

"What's wrong with this world is, it's not finished yet. It is not completed to that

point where man can put his final signature to the job and say, 'It is finished. We

made it, and it works."

- from William Faulkner's Address to the Graduating Class of Pine Manor

Junior College (Speeches 135).

A. MODERNITY AND MODERNISM

The field of Faulkner criticism contains considerable diversity: critics maintain that the

Faulkner's work is concerned principally with race (Eric Sundquist is one representative figure),

or with the nature of time and the meaning of Being (Jean-Paul Sartre), or with the fine details of

human psychology, usually seen as being in line with the thought of Freud or Lacan (John Irwin

and Doreen Fowler), or with the history of the American South and its historical defeat. Faulkner

is read fiercely politically (Sundquist again) and fiercely apolitically (Cleanth Brooks), as an

optimist and a pessimist, as a reactionary and a radical. Doubtless much of Faulkner's

importance derives from the plausible arguments which have been constructed for this wealth of

contradictory positions. Many rich fields have been planted in Faulkner criticism; I intend to

reap no harvest from most of these fields, but by way of introduction I will glean from them all in

passing, to make a simple statement, at the risk of belaboring the obvious.

 For all that Faulkner was once often dismissed as a regionalist and a nostalgic romantic,

the wave upon wave of critics who have pushed Faulkner to the very peaks of the canon focus on

Faulkner's relationship with modernity.

 That is to say, it is a given, if sometimes only implicitly, of Faulkner criticism that

Faulkner's work is concerned with those things <u>we</u> care about most, and that we care about in an

intensely contemporary way. This is, of course, almost a tautology – of course criticism concerns

itself with those writers who speak to the concerns of the moment. What else could we do?

 But my point is not merely tautological. Certainly, Faulkner speaks to contemporary

concerns. Otherwise Faulkner criticism would not flow in such an unmanageable volume. What

is distinctive about Faulkner is that he seemingly speaks to <u>every</u> contemporary concern.

Reading Doreen Fowler's closely argued <u>The Return of the Repressed</u> (1997), one can hardly

come away without the eerie impression that Faulkner had not only clairvoyantly mastered

Lacan, but that he had proleptically mastered Lacanian criticism. Reading Noel Polk's <u>Children

of the Dark House</u> (1996), we might easily be convinced that Faulkner was a better Freud than

Freud, even though there is little direct evidence that Faulkner was even intimately familiar with

Freud's work (Polk 32). Faulkner's primary and highly political concern with racial issues is

clear in Sundquist's <u>A House Divided</u> (1983), just as his primary focus on gender issues is

transparent in <u>Children</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Dark</u> <u>House</u>. In R. Rio-Jelliffe's <u>Obscurity's</u> <u>Myriad</u> <u>Components</u> (2001), a future-oriented, ultimately optimistic Faulkner deeply influenced by Henri Bergson's equally hard-won optimism emerges as clearly as the doom-obsessed Faulkner, for whom time is "decapitated" and empty, of Sartre's classic essay "On <u>The</u> <u>Sound</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Fury</u>: Time in the Work of Faulkner." In Philip Weinstein's <u>Faulkner's</u> <u>Subject</u> (1992) Faulkner's work is roughly equally concerned with many of the current obsessions of criticism: the very sections of the book are subtitled "Race," "Gender," "Subjectivity," and "Culture."

More so than any other American author, certainly more than the other authors who dominate the headings of <u>American</u> <u>Literary</u> <u>Scholarship</u> (Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry James, etc.), Faulkner's work has shown the ability to be and to remain all things to all people – or, rather, to be and to remain an object of all kinds of critical inquiry to all varieties of critic. Authors who become embedded in the canon must have a degree of plasticity, but Faulkner's plasticity is Protean, worthy of commentary and meta-commentary.

One can chalk the flexibility of Faulkner's work up to the convolutions of the style of his best-known and best-loved works, and many have certainly done so. But Faulkner's language is not simply playfully obscure: it is not postmodern, or at least not <u>merely</u> postmodern. His is a language which, being skeptical of language, always tries to push over and through language. Rio-Jelliffe documents in detail Faulkner's "profound distrust" of language, which honeycombs his essays, speeches and interviews (26-7). Although attributing a character's wisdom to an author is always a treacherous business, Addie Bundren's chthonic, enraged, tightly worded – in short, rhetorically brilliant – dismissal of language in <u>As</u> <u>I</u> <u>Lay</u> <u>Dying</u> is of a piece with

Faulkner's own personal statements. The word, for all of Faulkner's mastery of the word, is to

be distrusted, and is secondary to the act:

> I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty
>
> and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the
>
> other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in people's lacks, coming down like
>
> the cries of geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds
>
> like orphans... (117)

In Faulkner, the word insistently condemns the word. Krister Friday, following Eric Sundquist,

argues in "Miscegenated Time: The Spectral Body, Race and Temporality in Light in August"

that the real danger of miscegenation in Faulkner (another obsession which honeycombs his

work) is that it threatens to erase whiteness itself, by rendering the difference between whiteness

and blackness unclear; miscegenation not only challenges "the genealogical and ideological

ambitions of white patriarchs" but also their very identities (51, 41). Faulkner's language, in

fact, is miscegenated, both literally (given the range of his influences) and metaphorically. When

the sado-masochist Addie Bundren gets pleasure from whipping children, she finds true meaning:

> When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it as my
>
> blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of
>
> me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood
>
> with my own for ever and ever. (114)

Only in the kind of language which produces damaged flesh, only in the "dark voicelessness in

which the words are the deeds," only in the language which hurts and destroys and is no

language, is there meaning. We might think of the brutal words recorded in Go Down, Moses,

where the "words that are deeds," the history of McCaslin incest and miscegenation, is spelled out in a financial ledger (200). When Ike McCaslin reads this section of the ledger, after pages of shattered grammar and syntax, a semblance of an ordinary sentence emerges: "The old frail pages seemed to turn of their own accord even while he thought <u>His</u> <u>own</u> <u>daughter</u>" (200). At the moment of crisis, when language (for instance) utters an unforgivable deed, an automatism – in Ike? In the pages? In language itself? – is uncovered. "The pages seemed to turn of their own accord." So it also is with Addie Bundren; after she has established the unspeakable bloody connection between herself and the children, the next sentence reads: "And so I took Anse" (114). She flees from the unspeakable deed into Anse's empty words, without a clear motivation: the bloody meaning is replaced with automatism. Automatism haunts Faulkner's work. Language is darkened and confused by the deed, and the deed is darkened and confused by language.

This helplessness or inadequacy of language in the face of the modern world is a stereotypical subject for modernism; this is T.S. Eliot's wasteland. In "<u>As</u> <u>I</u> <u>Lay</u> <u>Dying</u> in the Machine Age," John T. Matthews argues that a major source of <u>As</u> <u>I</u> <u>Lay</u> <u>Dying</u> is the background of the "dynamic relation between modernization and modernism" in the South. The modernism of the Fugitives, the authors of <u>I'll</u> <u>Take</u> <u>My</u> <u>Stand</u> (1930), who included Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, was, by Matthews' reading (and I know of no critic who disagrees), a <u>modernist</u> reaction, rooted in Eliot and Pound, to commercial and industrial <u>modernization</u> (69-70). But despite modernism's tendency towards "autonomous texts," Matthews argues, bits and pieces of social reality creep into Faulkner's novel, which ultimately becomes a turning point in his career, at which point Faulkner "reequips" by abandoning "idle metafiction" and "radically

interrogating and finally exorcising the effete poeticisim of Quentin Compson and Darl Bundren"

and "prepares for an experimentalism deeply implicated in the search for truth about the South..."

(93). Faulkner's fiction is not simply a meditation on the helplessness of language, and the

endless confusion (or miscegenation) between word and deed. Faulkner, in Matthews' words,

keeps "the dialectic between modernization and modernism critically charged [by resisting] with

the force of decomposition the impulse toward reintegration and commodification" (93).

Faulkner does not utterly eschew modernism, mechanization, or even the commodification of art;

after all, he willingly made his living for years writing in Hollywood. He does not utterly or

merely abandon hope because word and deed are confused and darkened. He keeps tension

between modernism and modernization, instead – not unlike the tension Gavin Stevens sees

between Joe Christmas' "white blood" and "black blood" in <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u> (731).

This returns me to the question of why Faulkner's work seems to be uniquely plastic,

uniquely able to become all things to all critics. This very tension between modernization and

modernism which Matthews discusses is one explanation. Many have argued that Faulkner

fundamentally opposed modernization; a few have argued that he embraced it. Similarly, there is

some diversity of opinion about his exact relationship with modernism. This diversity of

readings resonates well with Matthews' argument: modernism and modernity are <u>at</u> <u>stake</u> for

Faulkner, in constant tension, as surely as race and gender are at stake and in continual tension in

his work. This dynamic tension at the heart of Faulkner's <u>form</u> cascades through those issues we

associate with modernity – at least with <u>our</u> modernity: race, gender, subjectivity, to choose some

of Weinstein's categories.

This is not to say that I embrace all sides of all questions in Faulkner criticism – to the contrary. In fact, I side with those (like Sundquist) who argue for the relative importance of race and politics in Faulkner, and with those (like Rio-Jelliffe) who see Bergson as being of central rather than tangential importance when trying to understand Faulkner. Bergson, in particular, plays a part in my argument, which is that Faulkner sees the danger of automatism not in modernization as such, but in structures of thinking and being that underlie both modernization and modernism. In Faulkner's work, the danger of automatism, the mechanization of the self, ambiguously precedes and anticipates actual mechanization in the physical sense.

To make this argument in detail, I will return first to Sartre's essay on <u>The</u> <u>Sound</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Fury</u>, and to a discussion of Bergson's ideas on automatism, before proceeding to readings of Faulkner's novels in relationship to modernization and mechanization.

B. CONSTRUCTING FAULKNER'S MODERNITY

Several of the foundational moments and figures in Faulkner criticism are in significant agreement on the notion that Faulkner responds powerfully, even appallingly, to modernity, rejecting or attacking it.

In <u>William</u> <u>Faulkner:</u> <u>The</u> <u>Yoknapatawpha</u> <u>Country</u> (1963), Cleanth Brooks begins by contextualizing Faulkner as a regionalist, whom readers will associate with the South

> quite as automatically as they associate. . . Frost with northern New England, and William
>
> Butler Yeats with Ireland. . . They have in common a basically agricultural economy, a

life of farms, villages, and small towns, an old-fashioned set of values, and a still vital

religion with its cult, creed, and basic norms of conduct. (1)

Brooks spends a number of pages drawing out his comparison between Faulkner, Yeats, and

Frost, all of whom become morally and artistically better, rather than merely sociologically wiser,

because they write about provincials (1-9). The very title of this first chapter, in a book which is

first and foremost a celebration of Faulkner's artistic power, is "Faulkner the Provincial." There

are several reasons why Brooks believes it is better to write about and from the provinces than

about the metropolis, but the main reason, predictably, is moral:

> It is a grave injustice to regard Frost as a local colorist, explicating the attraction that the
>
> quaint and the folksy hold for a metropolitan audience. He can be, and has been, so
>
> misunderstood, but Frost is making a serious criticism of twentieth-century man. . . . So
>
> it is with Yeats. . . Like Yeats again, Faulkner's sense of history and his sense of
>
> participation in a living tradition have been of the utmost importance. Faulkner's work. .
>
> . embodies a criticism of the prevailing commercial and urban culture, a criticism made
>
> from the standpoint of a provincial and traditional culture (1-2).

Although Brooks is hardly blind to all of the flaws of traditional cultures, he sees the great art of

Faulkner, Yeats and Frost as rooted in the superior morality and culture of the provinces. The

implicit hope is that the capacity to rebuild something in the moral and cultural wasteland of

modernity will emanate from the good, true and traditional people of Northern Mississippi.

Faulkner's great art, then, according to Brooks, is great pastoral art. Brooks says as much

when discussing Light in August (1932) at length, arguing that Joe Christmas (the "negro"

murderer), Joanna Bundren (the victim), and Hightower (the minister fallen from grace) are

destroyed by isolation, and that Lena (the pregnant woman who opens and closes the novel) "leads a charmed life" because of her affiliation with the community (54-5):

> The plight of the isolated individual cut off from any community of values is of course a dominant theme of contemporary literature. But by developing this theme in a rural setting in which a powerful sense of community still exists, Faulkner has given us a kind of pastoral – that is, he has let us see our modern and complex problems mirrored in a simpler and more primitive world. (55)

Light in August is a pastoral vision because it sets the agony of modernity against the soft luminance of the comic story of Lena and Byron Bunch, who seems destined to eventually win her: Lena's story shows what modernity has lost, and what Mississippi has kept, while the story of Joe Christmas illustrates the horrors of the modern condition; I will return at length to the question of the place of modernity in Light in August. Similarly, the story of The Hamlet is "a transparent allegory of modernity," and a "sardonic Horatio Alger story," in which the rise of the Snopes family is like the social and economic changes of modernization (172, 4). Thomas Sutpen's "innocence and failure to learn" in Absalom, Absalom is characteristic of modernity; Sutpen, although a Virginian who has been a slave foreman or slave owner since his teens, can be characterized as a "rationalist" and a "Yankee" (306). The character Shreve, who narrates/invents much of the latter half of the novel, becomes a stand-in for the hypothetical "modern" reader, who is "pretty well emancipated from the ties of family, race, or section" (313). It is hardly an exaggeration to say that for Brooks, Faulkner's main importance is that he conducts a frontal assault (one might think of the cavalry charge of Reverend Hightower's grandfather) on the false gods of modernity.

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Malcolm Cowley's introduction to The Portable Faulkner (1946), which did so much to bring Faulkner to prominence, makes a similar case, although more compactly and subtly. According to Cowley's account, the young Faulkner "brooded" on the South; his fiction served as a "parable or legend of all of the Deep South" (vii-viii). The story of the rise of the Snopes family, and their victory over the Sartoris family, is a parable of modernity: "In this struggle. . . the Sartorises were defeated in advance by a traditional code that kept them from using the weapons of the enemy. As a price of victory, however, the Snopeses had to serve the mechanized civilization of the North, which was morally impotent in itself, but which, with the aid of its Southern retainers, ended by corrupting the Southern nation" (xxi). The Snopes family – who are, for all the bile which critics have spilled about them, little more than petty usurers, with the exception of the race-baiting Clarence Snopes – serve the mechanical evil of the North: that is their great sin. The vicious rapist and murderer Popeye of Sanctuary, who assaults Temple Drake and kills many, is "one of several characters in Faulkner's novels who represent the mechanical civilization that has invaded and conquered the South. He is always described in mechanical terms. . ." (xxii). The most noteworthy fact here is that because Popeye is consistently described with mechanical language, he must therefore represent the North; as with Brooks, the reality of the South as the site of an authentic pastoral reality is an unquestioned given.

It is unsurprising that two major Southern critics doing early work on Faulkner would discuss his work in such terms; Faulkner's concern with modernity becomes another way of saying that he was concerned with Northern crimes against the South. But earlier than either Cowley or Brooks, Sartre's position was similar.

Sartre's 1939 essay "On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner," is an analysis of the novel, but not one that tries to take it as an "autonomous" text, but rather one which assumes that it belongs to the world, and responds to it. After noting that The Sound and the Fury does not, like the classical novel, have a central complication, and thus doesn't have an orderly plot, Sartre claims that the first duty of the critic is to define "the novelist's metaphysics," which in Faulkner's case are a "metaphysics of time" (84-5). In Faulkner's metaphysics, according to Sartre, the present "is essentially catastrophic. It is the event which creeps upon us like a thief, huge, unthinkable – which creeps up on us and then disappears. Beyond this present time there is nothing, since the future does not exist" (85). In his earlier (1938) essay "William Faulkner's Sartoris" Sartre makes a similar complaint: "Suddenly, from the depths of this drama, like a bolt form the blue, appears the Act. At least, an act! something happening, a message! But Faulkner disappoints us again; he rarely describes acts..." (80). Faulkner's world, according to Sartre, is one where the action has already happened, where time (as in Proust) is "decapitated. . . deprived [of] its future, that is, its dimension of deeds and freedom" (90).

So far, this seems very little like the thought of Brooks and Cowley. But at the end of his second essay, Sartre diagnoses the reason behind Faulkner's metaphysics:

I think we should have to look for the reason in the social conditions of our present life. Faulkner's despair seems to me to precede his metaphysics. For him, as for all of us, the future is closed. Everything we see and experience impels us to say, 'This can't last.' And yet change is not even conceivable, except in the form of a cataclysm. We are living in a time of impossible revolutions, and Faulkner uses his extraordinary art to describe our suffocation and a world dying of old age. (93)

Sartre is in deep agreement with Cowley and Brooks: Faulkner's art is essentially a response to the contemporary scene. But whereas for Cowley and Brooks Faulkner contrasts the pastoral scene to the wasteland of modernity, for Sartre he draws only the wasteland, since only the wasteland properly exists, and a future outside the wasteland is almost, but not quite, impossible to conceive.

Once again, I skirt the edges of tautology: it is no surprise that an anti-fascist French philosopher writing in 1939 would see a different kind of response to modernity in Faulkner's art than two Southern "liberals" would see in 1946 and 1963. Brooks objects to Sartre's reading of The Sound and the Fury, making the understandable claim that Sartre has confused Quentin's understanding of time with Faulkner's (329).

My claim is that Sartre, despite being geographically and intellectually rather distant from Faulkner, is essentially correct: Faulkner's pastoral vision is also a vision of a wasteland, of decapitated time; the Cowley/Brooks understanding of a pastoral south contrasted to an expanding, invading industrial North is pierced by a flaw which Faulkner (perhaps unwittingly) repeatedly exposes: the South was itself always already modern, always already technological, always already industrial. The narrative of the southern idyll disturbed by the arrival of northern industry – a variation on the narrative which Leo Marx describes, primarily with reference to Northern authors, as the machine's sudden entry into the garden – is false. Faulkner's wasteland is not merely a product of actual industry, although it certainly has an ambiguous relationship to it, nor is it, as Sartre implies, a product of impending war and prolonged depression: it is a more enduring metaphysical condition, one which is tightly coupled to the thought of Henri Bergson. My argument will next move to a discussion of Bergson, adding my thoughts to the voluminous

literature on the relationship between Bergson's thought and Faulkner's art; I will return from Bergson to specific texts, beginning with the key Light in August, which is in the background of both of Sartre's essays, and is also absolutely critical to Brooks and Cowley, as well as practically every critic since then.

C. FAULKNER'S BERGSON, BERGSON'S FAULKNER

Critics have disagreed about how much of a part Henri Bergson's philosophy played in Faulkner's work. On the one hand, Faulkner expressed an interest in Bergson's work throughout his life. Most famously and importantly, Faulkner urged his young lover Joan Williams to read Bergson's Creative Evolution (1907), saying that "it helped me" (Blotner 511). In an interview with Loïc Bouvard, he endorsed both Bergson's concept of God and Bergson's "theory of the fluidity of time" (Blotner 563). In "Epiphany, Eternity, and Time" (1997) Peter Puchek argues that Faulkner's use of epiphanies, like that of other modernists, was deeply rooted in his reading of Bergson, arguing that "To Faulkner as to Bergson, an epiphany involves recognizing the cycle or some aspect either of it or of one's place in it. Whether the person undergoing it realizes it or not, the experience devolves from the interconnectedness of past, present, and future, of all time and life" (33) – although it is noteworthy that Puchek bases his reading of Bergson only on the early Time and Free Will (1889). This is a pervasive problem in criticism which applies Bergson's thought to literature, usually literature which clearly has had some Bergsonian influence; despite the shorthand concept of "Bergson's fluidity of time" to which critics

habitually refer, Bergson's thought, argues John Mullarkey in Bergson and Philosophy, was "non-systematic" and continually changing (4-5); Bergson's thinking on time in Time and Free Will is not the same as it is in Creative Evolution, the work which Faulkner explicitly endorses. In "The Later Faulkner, Bergson, and God" Mick Gidley, after having noted Faulkner's non-specific endorsement of Bergson's concept of God, evaluates the different concepts of God which Faulkner might have meant (Bergson's thought on this, too, changed considerably). On the one hand, there is the mystical God of Bergson's last book, Two Sources of Morality and Religion (1932); on the other hand, there is a brief discussion of God in Creative Evolution (which, again, Faulkner specifically endorsed), which Gadley argues might better fit Faulkner's thought: "God, thus defined, has nothing of the already made; He is unceasing life, action, freedom. Creation, so conceived, is not a mystery; we experience it ourselves when we act freely" (261). After this quote, Gidley argues that this is a "vision of God as activity, as force, as the original source of the [Bergsonian] élan vital "which passes through all creatures, from one generation of living beings to another by way of developed individual organisms" (Gidley 381). If Faulkner did, in fact, endorse such a notion of God, it certainly seems to be in radical disagreement with the "decapitation" of time and lack of freedom which Sartre, among many other critics, find in Faulkner's fiction – but a more detailed discussion of Creative Evolution will make the fundamental compatibility between Faulkner's Bergson and Sartre's Faulkner more clear.

There are many critics who deny that Bergson had a substantial influence upon Faulkner, starting with Cleanth Brooks: Sarah Bell lists a number of other skeptics of the degree of Bergson's influence upon Faulkner in her 1989 dissertation William Faulkner's Creative

Evolution, including Dale Parker, Paul Douglass, and Michel Gresset (7-8). An important source

of the skepticism is the thinness of the evidence: Bell, among many others, refers to the same

statements which Faulkner made about Bergson as I do, because he made so few. Furthermore,

despite his endorsement of Bergson's thought, he didn't own any of Bergson's books at the time

of his death (Douglass 119). There is, in short, no direct evidence that Faulkner had read

Bergson extensively, although Douglass argues that the influence of Bergson on Faulkner could

have been partially transmitted via the works of T.S. Eliot (120).

I admit that the evidence is thin, but at the least (again, following Bell) I submit that

Bergson's thought, "articulated for Faulkner something he had within him all along" (5). Bell

also points out that discussions of Bergson and Faulkner have focused too much on time as an

isolated issue, arguing that "Bergson's main concerns, especially in Creative Evolution, stem

from his concept that motion is life and stasis is death – a concept pervasive in the Faulkner

canon" (8). Bell oversimplifies Bergson terribly in this passage, but in an illuminating way:

especially in Creative Evolution, freedom, time, and the nature of evolution and life itself are

intermingled, and it is impossible to discuss time without discussing the others – which brings

me to a part of Bergson's thought very closely related to Faulkner, which helps to illuminate

some of the difficulties of evaluating Faulkner's ideas about time and freedom: Bergson's

concept of automatism.

A commonplace comment on Bergson's thought, which is habitually repeated in Faulkner

criticism, is that Bergson opposes or attacks "clock time" or "mechanical time"; we are told that

Bergson advocates his concept of duration, duree, in opposition to clock time. This is, at best, a

simplification. In fact, the nuances and reality of "clock time" were intensely important to

Bergson: the purpose of his Duration and Simultaneity (1921) was to qualify Einstein's relativity, by claiming that the relativity of time, as opposed to that of space, was only apparent, not real. In other words, Bergson argues in detail (and, interestingly, has received sporadic support from a few physicists) that, under his interpretation of Einstein's equations, a scientist with a clock on a spaceship traveling near lightspeed would, upon his return, have recorded the same amount of time that someone remaining on the earth would have recorded, whereas in relativity as normally understood, the scientist in the spaceship would record far less time elapsed. The unity of time was intensely important to Bergson, to the extent that he had to argue, counter-intuitively, that relativity strengthened that unity (Simultaneity 96). Bergson does not oppose or deny measured or mechanical time; in fact, he asserts its inevitability. Bergson's essential argument, detailed in Creative Evolution, is that reason operates – must operate – with mechanical, spatialized time:

> Our intellect has been cast in the mold of action. Speculation is a luxury, while action is a necessity. Now, in order to act, we begin by proposing an end; we make a plan, then we go on to the detail of the mechanism which will bring it to pass. This latter operation is possible only if we know what we can reckon on. We must therefore have managed to extract resemblances from nature, which enable us to anticipate the future. Thus we must, consciously or unconsciously, have made use of the law of causality. Moreover, the more sharply the idea of efficient causality is defined in our mind, the more it takes the form of a mechanical causality. . . The human intellect, inasmuch as it is fashioned for the needs of human action, is an intellect which proceeds at the same time by intention and by calculation, by adapting means to ends and by thinking out mechanisms of more and more geometrical form (44-5).

The human mind is built for action; it exists to impose a plan and vision on the universe. "Life is, more than anything else, a tendency to act on inert matter," argues Bergson (96). Life builds, shapes, acts. In order to do so effectively it must calculate, it must assume that it acts upon an essentially supine universe. "Life is mobility itself," but that mobility is a mobility that shapes (128). Bergson's analysis of mechanical time views it as necessary to an intellect which exists to act, rather than to speculate. The problem (and Bergson's dualism, for which he has often been criticized) lies in the fact that he regards mechanical time as a vital and necessary illusion. Science should, according to Bergson, treat the universe as a machine; philosophy must not (93). In mathematical reasoning, which is the active intellect itself

> ...certain aspects of the present are calculable as functions of the immediate past. Nothing
> of the sort in the domain of life... As for the idea that the living body might be treated by
> some superhuman calculator in the same mathematical way as our solar system, this has
> gradually arisen for a metaphysic which has taken a more precise form since the physical
> discoveries of Galileo, but which ... was always the natural metaphysic of the human
> mind (20) [emphasis mine].

Inert systems can be fully calculated, fully known in their past and their future from a set of instants: life is otherwise, but life must also treat life as inert matter in order to be able to act upon it. There is nothing wrong with the spatializing, mechanizing metaphysic within its proper domain, but philosophy must push for an understanding of real duration; that is, an understanding of time as unfolding continuously, in such a way that any given instant is not merely a result of the instant before it, and in which repetition is impossible. "Real duration is that duration which gnaws on things, and leaves on them the mark of its tooth. If everything is in time, everything

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changes inwardly, and the same concrete reality never recurs. Repetition is possible only in the abstract... We do not <u>think</u> real time. But we <u>live</u> it" (46).

We think and act as if we live in a mechanical universe (and it is both useful and necessary that we do so), but the nature of life – in particular, <u>our</u> life – is not mechanical. Life is structured to treat the world around it as a dead thing, an automaton; the task of philosophy is to "do violence to the mind, go counter to the natural bent of the intellect," to assert the counter-intuitive – that is, counter-mathematical – nature of lived time.

Philosophy should work to show that we are not automatons, though we are inevitably structured to treat all things as automatons. In fact, this is precisely what is at stake in Bergson's understanding of time and life.

[In the evolution of life] the disproportion is striking between the work and the result. From the bottom to the top of the organized world we do indeed find one great effort; but most often this effort turns short, sometimes paralyzed by contrary forces, sometimes diverted from what it should do by what it does, absorbed by the form it is engaged in taking, hypnotized by it as by a mirror. Even in its most perfect works. . . it is at the mercy of the materiality which it has had to assume. It is what each of us may experience in himself. Our freedom, in the very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort: it is dogged by automatism. The most living thought becomes frigid in the formula that expresses it. The word turns against the idea. (127)

The next paragraph begins "the letter kills the spirit." St. Paul's suspicion of the literal word is linked to Bergson's suspicion of the automatism which haunts life, which threatens to overcome

it at every turn. Even though our very being urges towards action as an expression of freedom, "We are at ease only in the discontinuous, in the immobile, in the dead" (165). The purpose of life, the impetus behind it, is paradoxical:

> ... to create with matter, which is necessity itself, an instrument of freedom, to make a machine which should triumph over mechanism, and to use the determinism of nature to pass through the meshes of the net which this determinism had spread. But, everywhere except in man, consciousness has let itself be caught in the net whose meshes it tried to pass through; it has remained the captive of the mechanisms it had set up... But man not only maintains his machine, he succeeds in using it as he pleases (264).

The paradox of life, especially of human life, is that its very being is a rebellion against automatism, death, and disorder, but that in order to create or impose its order upon the world, it treats it as an automaton in turn, while its own ways and habits, language and reason, generate an inner tendency towards automatism. Bergson has typically been viewed as an optimist and a believer in progress. This categorization is ultimately true, for Bergson does believe in the reality of evolutionary change as progress – but how contingently, and hemmed by how many qualifications! The evolutionary force of life, despite its inner and upward drive towards freedom, is dogged and hemmed by automatism at every turn, inside and out: it is a contingent freedom created out of mechanical materials, which thinks mechanically out of necessity, which tries to impose a mechanical vision on the world, while being inwardly devoured by a tendency towards mechanization. And although life endures in one kind of time, it thinks in another kind of time – a mechanized, spatialized time which inevitably views the world as an automaton.

The complexity and interrelationship between Bergson's ideas about evolution, time, and automatism, as discussed in <u>Creative Evolution</u>, Bergson's only book which Faulkner explicitly endorsed (and must therefore have read) is deeply relevant to a proper discussion of Faulkner's time, as I will show, beginning with a reading of <u>Light in August</u>.

D. <u>LIGHT IN AUGUST</u> AS SHATTERED PASTORAL

<u>Light in August</u> begins with Lena Grove sitting beside a road, watching a wagon make its slow way down the road towards her "like something moving forever and without progress across an urn", in an obvious reference to Keats. Most of the novel is taken up by the story of Joe Christmas, whose father may be mixed race, who lives among whites and among blacks without feeling at home anywhere, who lives, works, has an affair with Joanna Burden, kills her, and is finally hunted, castrated and killed for his crime. But this story is set against the story of Lena, who is pregnant at the beginning of the novel and has a child near the end, who has been abandoned by Lucas Burch and is searching for him, alone at first, and then by the end of the novel with Byron Bunch, who loves her, in tow. Lena comes from a simple rural background, a "log house of three rooms and a hall, without screens... the naked floor worn smooth as old silver by naked feet" (401). Throughout the novel she speaks placidly, gently, in an uneducated country idiom. Delivering her child seems to be the spiritual deliverance of Gail Hightower, the fallen minister; her quiet life exists in radical contrast to the deadly uproar of Christmas's.

It is no surprise that generations of critics have seen Lena's story as being essentially pastoral, and Lena as representing some combination of Nature, femininity and traditional life. Her name is Grove, she is associated with Greek urn, she is an earthly, tranquil and determined mother. Cleanth Brooks, to briefly repeat myself from earlier, sees <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u> as a "bloody pastoral," in which Lena represents integration into a traditional culture which remains close to nature, and Joe Christmas represents the alienation of modernity (54). Alfred Kazin's even earlier essay "The Stillness of <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u>" argues that Lena provides the "provincial foundations" for Christmas's story.[59] The "stillness" of the essay's title is "rooted in the peaceful and timeless world which Lena Grove personifies and in which she has her being. It is the stillness of the personal darkness inside which Joe Christmas lives" (154). Kazin's position is far from being merely sentimental: he may see Lena as belonging to a peaceful and timeless world, but he acknowledges that the relationship between that world and the murderous world of Joe Christmas is not strictly oppositional; there is also an inner connection the two. Nonetheless, the premise is revealing: Lena belongs to the timeless, the rural, the peaceful, presumably to the endless cycle of nature; Christmas belongs to violence, to the city, to modernity, to the mechanical civilization which has violated nature – or, implicitly, the "natural order" of the garden and traditional hierarchies.

Nor did this line of thinking about the novel end with Kazin and Brooks; Stephen Hahn's essay "What Leaf-Fring'd Legend Haunts about Thy Shape? <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u> and Southern Pastoral" takes it as a given that Lena is an "emanation of the landscape and a synechdote for it"

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[59] Incidentally, this essay is collected in a collection edited by Robert Penn Warren, so it is hardly a surprise that it is compatible with a pastoral/traditionalist understanding of Faulkner's work, given Robert Penn Warren's early association with the Fugitives.

(31), while Harold Hungerford in "Past and Present in <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u>" comments on Lena's "timelessness," which is inevitably related to the timelessness of the urn (185, 198). Peter Puchek, too, following Judith Sensibar, argues that Lena presents an alternative (presumably to modernity) of "simple faith and delight in the world." Starting with Brooks' belief that Lena "is nature," Puchek argues that Lena, as a kind of pagan goddess, generates epiphanies in those around her (29, 32).

Lena becomes a synechdote for a whole world of values and possibilities outside of modernity: cyclic time rather than linear time, paganism rather than Calvinism, nature rather than the machine, etc. There is no question that Lena plays a vital role in the novel, nor that this role has <u>something</u> to do with nature and traditional culture – but nearly all the criticism has missed some harsh countersignals in the first pages of the novel.

In the first paragraph of the novel, Lena is thinking about home, and about how far she has come. "<u>I</u> <u>am</u> <u>now</u> <u>further</u> <u>from</u> <u>Doane's</u> <u>Mill</u> <u>than</u> <u>I</u> <u>have</u> <u>been</u> <u>since</u> <u>I</u> <u>was</u> <u>twelve</u> <u>years</u> <u>old</u>" (401). Lena has spent all of her life in the shadow of a timber town, a presence which is anything but timeless:

> The brother worked in the mill. All the men in the village worked in the mill or for it. It was cutting pine. It had been there seven years and in seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and existed because of it and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away. But some of the machinery would be left, since new pieces could always be bought on the installment plan – gaunt, staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their

rusting and unsmoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and bemused upon a

stumpocked scene of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, untilled, gutting

slowly into red and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumn and the

galloping fury of vernal equinoxes (402).

The mill from under which Lena emerges is not timeless, but rather the very essence of

temporality: its presence is measured, delimited; a clock runs on it, and a clock also runs on the

time still left on the installment plan which pays for the machinery. With timber and people both

gone, the soil washes into the sea and the remaining machinery mutely rusts: Lena emerges not

out of a timeless traditional culture, but out of an industrial wasteland, apocalyptic in its

overtones (note the biblical seven years and seven years). The first wheels described in the novel

are the motionless wheels arising from the wreckage of the sawmill. The second set of wheels

are the generic and varied wheels evoked by the wheels of the wagon which slowly makes its

way towards her: "a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared avatars, like something moving

forever and without progress across an urn" (404). When Henry Armstid encounters Lena and

offers her a ride, he has just given up haggling for a used cultivator – a farm implement which

was an eighteenth century replacement for the harrow, which is to say, a tool which is

"traditional" or "timeless" only from a very limited perspective. The "creakwheels," which

although in motion seem motionless, evoke the truly motionless wheels in the ruins of the

sawmill. Later in the chapter Lena buys a tin of sardines, a mechanically produced food (418).

At the end of the chapter, before Lena sees the smoke from Joanna Burden's burning house, we

get another description of the wagon: "The wagon goes on, slow, timeless. The red and

unhurried miles unroll beneath the steady feet of the mules, beneath the creaking and clanking

wheels" (420). The "timeless" wagon is beginning to seem ironic, for it exists in a world where agriculture is being gradually mechanized, and in which the whole economy of Lena's "natural" upbringing and surroundings is based upon a destructive and profoundly temporary (not to mention dangerous) extractive industry, which has a totalitarian, regimenting power over its workers, who exist "for it."

In "Faulkner and the Claims of the Natural World," Lawrence Buell writes that his reading of Light in August was profoundly changed by trying to read it as an eco-critic. Buell glosses the passage about Doane's mill as:

> a concise history of the cut-and-get-out phase of the timber industry in the Deep South: a half-century of intensive exploitation and chronic wastefulness... that Faulkner probably was well aware was nearly played out... the very moment of Light in August's publication [was when] Mississippi's first forest finally ran out and lumber production hit a fifty-year low (2).

And, in fact, Faulkner portrays the danger and destructiveness of the timber industry in some detail in Go Down, Moses (1942). Although this element of the story looms larger in this later novel, it is already present in the first pages of Light in August, in a manner which effects our understanding of Light in August profoundly. If Lena is a synechdote for nature, she is a synechdote for an endangered and half-broken nature – a nature already half-broken before the "New South" threatened to displace the old, and had to be resisted (by Brooks and kindred spirits, of course) with pastoral values and art. The timelessness of the roads and the wagons, which so many critics have used to evoke a timelessness in Lena, has a hollow ring in the context of the timber industry, which is so fleeting, and which certainly has provided part of the

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justification for the roads and part of the cash for the wagons and cultivators.[60] Almost the entire

cast of the novel changes once we recognize the presence of the timber industry and its ticking

clock, as Buell argues: the placelessness of Lucas Bunch, for instance, belongs at least partially

to the timber industry (3). The timber industry required a highly mobile workforce, willing to

work dangerous, demanding jobs in return for wages – there is no easy way in which the timber

industry can be distinguished from the industries of the "mechanized civilization" of the North,

to which Brooks and Cowley are so hostile. "Industrialization" and "modernity" have long since

arrived in the "old South," albeit in a slightly different form than the critics might expect.

What, one might ask, does this have to do with Bergson? Reading Faulkner with both

technology and Bergson in mind exposes the <u>illusion</u> of timelessness in his work. The real issue,

where there is an appearance of timelessness, or, following Sartre, "decapitated time," is

automatism, a failure to see the universe non-mechanically, a failure to step outside of set habits:

a failure which pervades Faulkner's universe.

Lena emerges out of a timbering community, along the roads of a Mississippi which is

economically dominated by the destructive, extractive cotton and timber industries: the very

roads are built, directly or indirectly, to serve these businesses, and will inevitably deteriorate or

disappear as the industries themselves shift. The very landscapes of Mississippi are being

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[60] <u>Light in August</u> is not as directly concerned with cotton as with timber (with the latter sometimes being more important in Mississippi than the former), but one should note that the cotton industry, also existed on a relatively short clock because of the way it exhausted the soil. The fundamentally temporary nature of cotton farming is one reason behind the Westward spread of the United States. This theme is taken up in <u>Absalom, Absalom</u> and the <u>Snopes</u> trilogy.

The timber industry of the deep South, in fact, drew some of my lumberjack/mechanic ancestors into the Carolinas, away from the desolation of central Pennsylvania (upon which they had descended, like locusts, after ravaging Maine), where their descendants presumably still live.

changed around her: the trees are stripped and the soil washes down to the sea, a point which is greatly elaborated in <u>Go Down, Moses</u>, especially in "The Bear" and "Delta Autumn," in which Isaac Macaslin famously must travel by automobile for hours to hunt (nearly as a tourist, now) the remaining shreds of Mississippi wilderness. The people who populate Faulkner's fiction may deny change, or persist in resisting it, but when the land itself is becoming "nothing but change itself," as Bergson might say, the appearance of timelessness is an impossible dream: Lena's timelessness, if it exists, is perhaps not so different from the self-devouring backward-looking obsessions of the Compsons and Sartorises. Which is not to say that Lena herself believes in her fixedness or timelessness. Lena, after all, enters the novel with the comic thought "I have come from Alabama: a fur piece" (401). She is amazed at the swiftness of her movement; she relishes her tinned sardines. As the furniture salesmen at the end of the novel realizes, when she resumes her wandering she seems indifferent to the possibility of actually catching up with Lucas Birch. The furniture salesman, when relaying his journeys to his wife, says:

> I reckon this was the first time she had ever been further away from home than she could walk back before sundown in her life. And that she had got along all right this far, with folks taking good care of her. And so I think she had made up her mind to travel a little further and see as much as she could, since I reckon she knew that when she settled down this time, it would likely be for the rest of her life (774).

Lena is in motion, encountering something (relatively) different every day, and thriving on the experience. But, according to the furniture salesman, she anticipates that once she stops moving she'll never move again: automatism threatens, and she wants to avoid it while she can. Lena is far less of an earth-goddess and far more a hobo queen than criticism has so far recognized: the

ending of the novel, in fact, with Byron and Lena, their love still unconsummated and indefinite, gladly facing the apparently endless road, resonates with the ending of Charlie Chaplain's Modern Times (1936).

But reading Faulkner with Bergson in mind, there is another revealing complication to the ending. The furniture salesman describes the baby breastfeeding in the back of the truck: "That had been eating breakfast now for about ten miles" (774). Lena's final sentence, which closes the novel, is "Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee" (774). Both the furniture dealer and Lena (comically) intermingle time with space, effectively replacing time with space, the inevitable hallmark of instrumental, rational thought according to Bergson. It's funny and charming, but it doesn't bode well for their ability to resist automatism.

This threat is a light-hearted shadow, not unlike the image of Charlie Chaplain being processed, unharmed, all the way through the assembly line – it's funny, but it, like Bergson's time, has teeth. We dare not forget that Lena and Byron have moved to the very edges of their world, without means or protection, just the same as we know that Chaplain and his teenage companion are forever at the brink of starvation. The only way they can find to keep automatism at bay is to be nomads. In Light in August, as in Chaplain's film, the individual's victory is temporary, contingent on good health and youth, and does nothing against the forces of mechanization and automatism. In Lena and Byron's case, we know that industrial life and automatism must come sooner rather than later, for they have a baby to provide for. Lena and Byron's story is the twilight surrounding Faulkner's "Heart of Darkness" (Light in August has

often been compared to Conrad); the automatism which threatens them is bigger and more terrible in the story of Joe Christmas and Joanna Bundren.

Christmas sees his body as a manufactured thing – as indeed it is, for he has been sculpted by his grandfather Hines and by McEachern, Christmas's stepfather; its artificiality is related to his racial ambiguity. "He watched his body grow white out of the darkness like a kodak print emerging from the liquid" (478). The book is punctuated by the refrain: "Something is going to happen to me" (486). Things are done to him, and through him, but not precisely by him (by way of parody, I am reminded of Heidegger's "it thinks in me"). As the five-year old Christmas witnesses the orphanage dietician and doctor having sex, he compulsively squeezes toothpaste into his mouth: "By taste and not seeing he contemplated the cool invisible worm as it coiled onto his finger and smeared sharp, automatonlike and sweet, into his mouth" (488). When approached by Hines (Christmas's diabolical grandfather) the dietician experiences herself as "a puppet in some burlesque of rapine and despair. Leaning, downlooking, immobile, she appeared to be in deepest thought, as if the puppet in the midst of the scene had gone astray within itself" (495).[61] Confronted by Hines' insane bigotry and rage, everyone collapses into automatism. When McEachern comes to adopt him, he examines Christmas "like a secondhand plow" (503), searching for flaws. Much later, when Christmas begins slipping out the window to meet the prostitute Bobby, her eyes are like "button eyes of a toy animal: a quality beyond hardness,

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[61] One irony of this scenario, which has not, as far as I know, been discussed by any critic, is that it is the racially "pure" Hines who plays the part of the "bad nigger" in the dietician's "burlesque of rapine and despair." One could argue that the "bad nigger" behavior of Christmas is associated with Hines' white blood, not the allegedly black blood of Christmas's father.

without being hard" (526). When she tells Christmas about menstruation, he kills a sheep in a ritual that seems somehow unwilled (535).

In Light in August human action can be fully known, fully calculated: when McEachern tries to hunt down Joe at a dance, he immediately finds him, as if by chance; after striking and possibly killing his adoptive father, Joe immediately finds his father's horse in the darkness, without having any reason to know where it is (547, 551). Automatic knowledge is pervasive in the novel. As Joe gallops away "the horse and rider – had a strange, dreamy effect, like a moving picture in slow motion"; Joe has been reduced to a sequence of images, and a sequence of images delineating or sketching a movement is precisely what describes mechanical time for Bergson, who argues that "the mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of the cinematographical kind" (Creative 306).[62] When Bobby finally rejects Christmas and he flees permanently, "he entered the street which was to run for fifteen years." Time is spatialized: Joe's route and destination are always already known; the street has a known terminus, or telos. The metaphysics of the novel (to refer to Sartre) is precisely the dark side of Bergson's metaphysics, the automatism which destroys freedom.

Religion, too, is an automatic process in Light in August. After having already been in an affair with Christmas for some time, the aging Joanna Bundren feels the stirrings of religious faith, which she fights.

It was something out of the darkness, the earth, the dying summer itself: something threatful and terrible to her because instinct assured her that it would not harm her; that it

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[62] This moment in Faulkner seems to be related to that aspect of Bergson which is most fascinating to Deleuze, and most hyper-modern.

would overtake and betray her completely, but she would not be harmed: that on the contrary, she would be saved. . . What was terrible was that she did not want to be saved. "I'm not ready to pray yet," she said aloud, quietly, rigid, soundless, her eyes wide open, while the moon poured and poured into the window, filling the room with something cold and irrevocable and wild with regret. "Dont make me have to pray yet. Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while." She seemed to see her whole past life, the starved years, like a gray tunnel, at the far and irrevocable end of which, as unfading as a reproach, her naked breast of three short years ago ached as though in agony. . . (594)

Salvation in <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u> is a mechanical process, one which can be observed and regretted but not truly resisted. The moonlight "poured and poured"; it cannot be halted. There is a terrible conflation between the Joanna of three years ago and the Joanna of now, as if the later was the inevitable result of the former. At a minimum, the structure of Joanna's heritage and faith constrains her into an automatism which she cannot fight. She mechanically commands Christmas to pray with her, and he kills her as mechanically, as inevitably. As he prepares to enter her room for the last time:

The dark was filled with the voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern. And going on: tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on. . . going on, familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be. . . then it was time. (606)

Time is flattened, annihilated, "decapitated" as Sartre argues. It is fully mechanized, with no hope of "lived time," a <u>duree</u> behind it. In Faulkner as in Melville, the danger of industry is not

something new, but something old, belonging no more to the evils of northern modernity than to the southern past.

No present telos threatens in Faulkner's work; the telos of history, the perfect spatialization of time, has already arrived once and for all. Later in the book, when we move into Hightower's story, we are told that, living without clocks and watches, Hightower is "dissociated from mechanical time. Yet for that reason he had never lost it. It is as though out of his subconscious he produces without volition the few crystallizations of stated instances by which his dead life in the actual world had been governed and ordered once" (666). Mechanical time, contra many of Faulkner's critics, does not in any sense exist in the clocks and watches themselves, nor is it generated by them: it precedes them. The distillation of life into instants, from which all other parts of a life can be calculated, is the essence of Bergson's mechanical time, and the darkest aspect of it. Hines has been an automaton all his life, led as if by chance to find and kill Christmas's father, taking "the only short cut he could possibly have taken, choosing it in the dark, out of a half a dozen of them, that would ever have caught up with them" (676). His wife's voice is like a phonograph, as is his own; their words exist ready-to-hand, long before they are spoken (674, 676). When the narrative is briefly attached to Lucas Birch near the end of the story, he begins to understand the world around him as "shapes like chessmen," moved by an unseen player (722). Percy Grimm and Hightower, too, feel the player, as Percy kills Christmas, who does not resist him. As Hightower thinks and daydreams after Christmas has been murdered, his thought is compared to a wheel running in sand. "The wheel turns on. It spins now, fading, without progress, as though turned by that final flood... so that it can be now Now" (760). Hightower needs for now to be Now; he struggles towards something like Bergson's

duration or living time, but it doesn't seem like a hopeful process: the wheel of his thought, implicitly connected to the rusted wheel in the abandoned sawmill at the beginning of the novel, does not actually move.

To make a long and complex story short: automatism does not arrive with "modernity," with mechanization as such, which in any event has already arrived. It arrives, as in Bergson, when time is turned into space and all things are, known and predicted, when the reality of change (for instance, the changing, eroding landscape) is overwhelmed by a sense of all things already being known or foreseen. In that sense, Lena's brief rise out of automatism – that automatism which is the product of a way of thinking, is inevitable and inwardly related to technology – is the bright contrast to Christmas' uninterrupted road.

Douglass discusses many of these same issues and scenes in his <u>Bergson</u>, <u>Eliot</u>, <u>and</u> <u>American</u> <u>Literature</u>, arguing, for instance, "that the key to this madness [which belongs to the Hineses, to Christmas, to Joanna, etc] is its tunnel-vision. . . Joanna is preparing for a foregone conclusion, the natural outcome of her bigoted background. For McEachern, too, "bigotry and clairvoyance were practically one. . ." (161). The issue, according to Douglass, following an interpretation one could easily imagine Bergson making, is that Joe and Hightower have "given up free choice" (163). This is true enough, but also too easy: what I have tried to emphasize is the extreme difficulty – presuming, as Bergson does, the absolute necessity of spatialized time and instrumental reasoning – of choosing other than they do. Lena's rise out of automatism is contingent, incomplete and temporary; its contingency and temporality make it even more admirable.

Light in August presents a vision of the South which implicit rejects the reading of

Faulkner, rooted in Brooks and Cowley, which sees him as essentially a modernist who rejects

modernity in favor of the culture of the old South, despite the incidental criticisms which he

makes of the latter. The modernism of Light in August, to the contrary, continually exposes the

always already mechanically compromised and always already temporally mechanized nature of

the South. The South was no more innocent than the North in its transformation of the world

into raw materials, and less innocent than the North in the transformation of people into raw

materials. The pastoral is always a lie, which makes Light in August the greatest American

pastoral: it reveals that the machine never arrives in the garden, despite all of our ideological

training to the contrary, for it was always already there.

E. THE SOUTHERN CYBORG: ABSALOM, ABSALOM! AND PYLON

Faulkner wrote Pylon, almost universally regarded as one of his worst novels, essentially in a

lengthy lull during the long process of writing Absalom, Absalom!, which is regarded by at least

a plurality of critics as his best work. While writing these two novels, his life was chaos, marked

by his daughter's birth in June of 1933, heavy drinking, increasing and increasingly unnecessary

financial commitments, an attempt to establish a hunting club for partially conservationist

purposes, a bad relationship with his wife and an affair, sporadic and much-loathed work in

Hollywood, and an obsession with flying which indirectly led to his brother's death. While

beginning the first draft of Absalom, which was then entitled Dark House (also, significantly, the

original title of <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u>) in December of 1933, he earned his own pilot's license, and spent a great deal of time both around other pilots and flying himself. His brother Dean also became a pilot, and intended to make his living as a pilot; William and Dean even performed in air shows together. But in November of 1935, Dean died in the plane he had been in the process of purchasing from Faulkner. Faulkner finished <u>Absalom,</u> <u>Absalom</u> in January 1936; <u>Pylon</u> had been written mostly in November of 1934, a caesura almost exactly in the middle of the composition of <u>Absalom</u> (Blotner 322-376).

Many judge Pylon to be a failure in its own right, as do I, but it is an invaluable document to anyone interested in Faulkner's development as an artist, or in <u>Absalom,</u> <u>Absalom</u>! Pylon is an abrupt novel, populated by underdeveloped characters who seem to belong as much to the world of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler as they do to Faulkner's world. <u>Pylon</u> is filled with strange neologisms, but dominated by a remarkable setting: an otherworldly version of New Orleans, glittering and dank, antediluvian and ultra-modern. It is ostensibly the story of a nameless reporter's obsession with an unconventional family of barnstormers: the husband is named Shumann, his wife Laverne, her lover Jiggs, and Laverne's son. Laverne is the object of the reporter's desire, and seems to inspire lust in every man who sees her. Her husband and lover exist in a kind of erotic suspension of their own. At the end of the novel the strange family scatters: the husband wrecks the plane, Laverne gives up the boy to her husband's father, and she continues on her adventures with Jiggs.

Those who have been interested in <u>Pylon</u> tend to speak in one voice about it. It is about T.S. Eliot's wasteland, the wreckage of modernity, and includes many clear references to Eliot's poem. Blotner writes:

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Faulkner's anti-modernist sentiments, so clear in his description of the Bauhaus-style

airport with its inhuman voices, were now further generalized. . . Here, where airplanes

are "trim vicious fragile" machines, there is a kind of unresolved ambivalence, for he had

been a hero worshipper since childhood, where his imagination was stirred by the very

names of airmen. In his artistic development he had placed a higher and higher valuation

on the best of the past and on harmony with organic nature. (340)

Cleanth Brooks avoids talking about Pylon altogether. On the surface this can be explained by

the fact that he focuses on the novels set in Yoknapatwapha county, but this only begs the

question – why does he only attend to these novels? One obvious answer is because he is deeply

invested in Faulkner as a regionalist and anti-modernizer; even the ambivalence which Blotner

finds in Pylon is too much for Brooks to swallow.

Very few critics have been tempted to write about Pylon at any length. Those who do

tend to provide an extended version of Blotner's argument. William Brevda argues that Pylon is

an attack upon the futurist movement, and that "machines in Pylon portend a dangerous evolution

of man into machine and machine into man" (218). That is, machines and human beings

interpenetrate dangerously. In "Pylon: Faulkner's Waste Land" (1985), Susie Johnson notes that

most critics have seen the wasteland imagery of the novel as being only so much rehashed Eliot

(287). She, however, argues that Faulkner extends Eliot in Pylon: the kinship between New

Orleans and New Valois makes the cruelty and emptiness of the latter all the more shocking;

more significantly, she focuses on the imagery of the novel, pointing out that New Valois is a city

erected "in defiance of nature," and that the novel utterly strips the city of the greenery which is

associated with New Orleans (289-90). The modernist airport is contrasted by the mountains of

junk which it necessitates (292). Planes become instruments of exploitation in the novel, drawing crowds at the expense, ultimately, of human life (292). Exploitation is a universal fact; Johnson argues that by the end of the novel, the reporter, too, has demonstrated himself to be "a violator," like all the other inhabitants of the city; the violators have "inherited the earth," much like they do in Light in August (294). Her analysis is unobjectionable, and yet also incomplete: the universality of treachery and exploitation in Pylon, like in the crime novels it struggles to emulate – Pylon could almost be seen, in its indictment of an entire city instead of a scattered few within it, as an echo of Dashiell Hammett's brutal masterpiece Red Harvest (1929), or a vague foreshadowing of Chester Himes' equally brilliant Blind Man with a Pistol (1969) – implies a question: what other world than this is possible? One brief answer, to return again to Bergson's theory of the necessity of the wasteland, that is, the necessity of instrumental reasoning, which can always only treat the world as a dead thing, is that the world itself is not a wasteland, nor are the people who inhabit only violators, but that their violation and their orientation towards the world as wasteland, or as standing-reserve, is inevitable and often dominant – a fact to which art and philosophy must both accommodate themselves, and work around. Automatism and the world-as-standing-reserve will always haunt us, because they are intrinsic to instrumental reasoning, which can no more be abandoned than, say, the use of hands.

Michael Zeitlin discusses Pylon using Leo Marx and Walter Benjamin, arguing that we must see Pylon in the context of Faulkner's overall movement towards savage criticism of "contemporary reality" (230). This is a variation on Brooks and Cowley, who argue that Faulkner criticizes the modern from the point of view of the old South, or on Sartre's argument that Faulkner had to write about decapitated time, to be true to the social reality of the time.

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Zeitlin argues that the strange and obsessive descriptions and neologisms are the primary importance of the novel: "Pylon's story or plot is therefore secondary to its more important function, which is to record, transcribe, interpret, and so manage successfully the phenomena of a radically transfigured reality" (233). The novel describes an utterly alien and strangely dead city, in which electricity is figured as a dead thing, so unlike the way it is usually described in American literature, according to David Nye's American Technological Sublime (152, 192, etc.). Zeitlin ends by quoting Leo Marx's argument that the violent entry of the machine into the garden is the defining moment in American literature. The ending of Zeitlin's essay is rather extraordinary; he argues that Faulkner needed Pylon to exorcise Absalom, Absalom of the corruption of modernity and mechanization:

> As the narrative absorbs and transfigures the city's myriad "garblement"... it acts out a loss of imaginative control over it, alien aspects of reality freely penetrating and finally overwhelming the mind.

> Of course, Pylon only dramatizes the failure Faulkner himself avoided: he emerged, as we know, from the nightmare of the contemporary scene – his estrangement having generated a powerful renewal of language – to bring Absalom, Absalom! (the nightmare of history) to a decisive completion (237).

In Zeitlin's remarkable reading, Pylon is important precisely because of its obsessive, ambivalent embrace of modernity and of the city: it becomes a violent purgative, which purifies Faulkner's endangered aesthetic; Pylon frees and sanctifies Absalom. The greatest virtue of Zeitlin's reading is that it beautifully articulates why Faulkner had to write Pylon in the midst of Absalom, and why the latter is so much better than and different from the former. Its great weaknesses are

that it aims to restore tranquility to the view of Faulkner as brilliant anti-modernizer which <u>Pylon</u>

threatens to destabilize, and that it neglects the unavoidable relevance of Faulkner's biography.

<u>Pylon</u> was written in the midst of a genuine obsession with airplanes and pilots, which continued

after its publication: Faulkner had been in an airshow with his brother shortly before the

publication of <u>Absalom</u>, not just before the publication of <u>Pylon</u>. Surely <u>Pylon</u> answers some

problem raised by the composition of <u>Absalom</u>, but Zeitlin's answers are too easy, too

tranquilizing: in his version of the story, Faulkner must deal with Leo Marx's story of the

machine's entry into the garden, but then, by writing <u>Pylon</u>, simply <u>transcends</u> it.

In my version of the story of <u>Pylon</u> and <u>Absalom</u>, on the other hand, Faulkner becomes

enmeshed in the enduring, rather than sudden, intermingling of machine and organism. For there

is another side of <u>Pylon</u> which critics have noticed, even if they haven't integrated the

observation into a reading of Faulkner's other works.

Vivian Wagner, following John Duvall and John Matthews, demonstrates in detail that in

Faulkner's airplane stories, including <u>Pylon</u> and the related short story "Honor," "the bodies of

barnstormers are technologized and roboticized to the point of being interchangeable with the

bodies of the airplanes" (79). These cyborg bodies, both that of the machine and that of the man

(or woman), in turn, become highly eroticized and fluidly gendered. Wagner especially

emphasizes that it is only in and around planes that the boundaries of gender become loosened:

on the ground, Laverne is the object of every man's sometimes violent desire, but in the air she

becomes partially masculinized and intensely powerful – someone who fucks, rather than

someone who is fucked, in Wagner's memorable phrasing (93). It is around the airplane that an

alternative family is able to form, and it is the machine which sustains it: when they fall from the

sky, the fall is from "a technological utopia, in which men and women can desire each other equally, freely, and without social constraint, into a world in which gender distinctions signify violence, pain, and degradation" (93).

In Pylon, the machine-obsessed Faulkner has an unnamed voice argue that pilots don't fly for money. "It's because they have got to do it, like some women have got to be whores. They cant help themselves" (975). There is an automatism in the wild, liberated life in the air: after all, the pilots are seemingly half machine themselves. The pilots are both farther from mechanical life and deeper in it than the world around them, a fact which is one source of the reporter's fascination:

> It was not the sun that waked him. . . he just waked, regardless of the fact that during the past forty-eight hours he had slept but little more than he had eaten, like so many people who, living always on the outside of the mechanical regimentation of hours, seem able at need to coincide with a given moment with a sort of unflagging instinctive facility. But the train would be ordered by mechanical postulation though, and there would be no watch or clock in the building yet. . . [he] turned in this side of the window and the immemorial grapefruit halves which apparently each morning at the same moment at which the street lamps went out would be set, age- and timeproved for intactness and imperviousness like the peasant vases exhumed from Greek and Roman ruins. . . (919).

Like the pilots, he has been removed from mechanical time, but is still subject to it; the automatism of the daily grapefruit (despite the brief life of an actual cut grapefruit) is elided into a Keatsian reference to a Greek vase, in which the link made in Light in August between automatism and eternity (especially in the person of Lena) is further clarified. Automatism owns

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the city and threatens the pilots, who resist it precisely through their eroticized intermingling with their machines, in contrast to the simultaneous embrace/resistance of the Mumfordian megamachine we find in the characters of Queequeg and Ahab in <u>Moby-Dick</u>, as I detailed in the previous two chapters.

My concern has never been with <u>Pylon</u> in itself, but with <u>Pylon</u> embedded in the heart of <u>Absalom</u>, the question to which I turn now; one reason Faulkner wrote <u>Pylon</u> in the midst of <u>Absalom</u> was that he needed to wrestle with the larger problems of mechanization, automatism, modernity and the wasteland before completing <u>Absalom</u>. In contrast to Zeitlin's reading, though, <u>Pylon</u> demonstrates that we cannot regard Faulkner, including the Faulkner of <u>Absalom</u>, as <u>rejecting</u> modernity and mechanization, but as struggling with their ambiguously utopian and dystopian possibilities.

<u>Absalom, Absalom!</u> begins memorably, with the outraged voice of Rosa Coldfield, speaking in a dark, suffocating room, driving Quentin Compson deeper and deeper into boredom, for he has always known the story she tells of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen. The story has a false air of sentimentality and lost paradise about it:

> Out of a quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful
>
> and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and
>
> beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk
>
> upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacled among them the French
>
> architect with his air grim, haggard, and tatter-ran (4).

In this story, myths and lies are piled atop one another until they cannot help but collapse into dust. The "wild niggers," whose image is always a mixture of man and beast, are from Haiti, as

we find out latter in the novel; Thomas Sutpen went to Haiti as a teenager, where he worked for a planter, suppressed a slave rebellion, received the planter's daughter in marriage in gratitude, had a son, then abandoned wife, son and newfound wealth when he learned that his wife wasn't purely white. From there he went to Mississippi, where he and his slaves seem unutterably barbarous to the planters and citizens of Jackson, which has only recently been carved out of the wilderness, though he and the slaves have come from an older and more powerful colony.

One of the many distortions and lies of Absalom is that with the dates we are given, there is no way Thomas Sutpen could have actually suppressed a slave rebellion in Haiti, for Haiti was already independent, after a successful slave rebellion. Richard Godden argues that this "mistake" is far too blatant to be an error:

> Given that Faulkner wishes to foreground the continuous potential for revolution within
>
> the institution of slavery, he needs Haiti, the only successful black revolution. Given that
>
> he wishes to characterize the plantocracy as a class that suppresses revolution, he requires
>
> that his ur-planter suppress the Haitian revolution and go on doing so. (53)

Thus, Godden argues, the slaves in Absalom must be continuously figured (at least in the eyes of the characters within the novel) as being both a terrible threat and also somehow volitionless: the "good nigger"/"bad nigger" dichotomy is one with the dichotomy between the obedient robot and the rampaging robot that is so prevalent in science fiction.[63] The black (or more properly, miscegenated) characters of the novel are automatons who are forever on the brink of becoming destroyers. Charles Bon, Thomas Sutpen's lost son who seems to want to marry his legitimate

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[63] This dichotomy, for instance, is an ongoing concern of Isaac Asimov through his Robot novels, as well as the various essays circulating around them.

daughter, offers no resistance when Henry, the legitimate son, murders him. Charles' own son by his octoroon wife/mistress, Charles Etinne Saint-Valery Bon, who is raised by Judith and Clytie, Thomas's legitimate and illegitimate/mixed-race daughters, leaves them for a time, but returns with a "coal black and ape-like woman" who "even a year later and after their son was born, still existed in that aghast and automaton-like state in which she had arrived" (166). This woman is wife and mother, ape and automaton all in one: she is also, like the biblical Sarah, the improbable mother of the future, the source of the only survivors of Sutpen's lineage. Her son is the "idiot" Jim Bond, the only survivor of the destruction of Sutpen's house, who howls and skulks about the ruins, and of whom Shreve, Quentin's roommate and the co-creator of the latter half of the novel, famously says: "I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it wont quite be in our time. . . But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings" (302).

Thus, the ambiguity of which Godden speaks, which is both the revelation and the suppression of what he calls the "labor trauma" of the south, "the simple and debilitating truth of slave production, that the master's body is made by the slave's work: a fact that casts ethnic interdependency as white dependency" (72), is preserved throughout the novel. Jim Bond and his mother are both automatons and conquerors, rendered idiotic and powerful by their inability to speak: they evade the treachery of language and linguistic reasoning which swallows and destroys so many other characters in the novel, from Thomas Sutpen with his inability to reason out with General Compson where he had gone astray, to Quentin's father, who knows how tenuous language is but doesn't know what to use in its stead. Godden asserts that the moment at

which the young Thomas Sutpen is turned away from a planter's door is a monad in Walter

Benjamin's sense, a crystallization of time. "Sutpen and Rosa lead lives more or less committed

to the plantocracy, yet each remains internally divided by a single moment in which recognition

of the laboring presence of the slave 'shatters the continuum of [their] language.' That moment

is forbidden and repercussive" (100). The monad perpetually reveals the structures of oppression

in the South; it must be continually repressed, yet cannot ever be repressed. Godden, myopically,

focuses much of his argument on Charles Bon, who himself owned slaves and never did a day's

work before the war, as a manifestation of slave labor, instead of looking more to the silent,

automaton-like presence of his descendants.

And yet, there is always both the danger and desire for differences to disappear, through

Faulkner's work and especially in Absalom, Absalom! Miscegenation, both literal and

metaphoric, is desired, and there is always a movement towards unity, counteracting the social

and intellectual pressures towards division, as critics from Dorreen Fowler to James Snead argue.

The end of the novel forcefully locates automatism (which is, as always, a form of Sartre's

"decapitated time") in the safely black and beast-like bodies of Jim Bond and his mother. But

this automatism is triumphant; it is, in part, both a perpetual reference to and denial of the

Haitian revolution. In Pylon, the pilots are both wholly conquered by mechanization and

automatization, and yet also more authentically struggling to be free from them than anyone else.

Similarly, Jim Bond is both the foreclosure of every possible future and the only true authentic

future: his howl the only surviving language, his automatism the only surviving response to

automatism. This ambiguity is captured perfectly in Rosa's remembered response to Clytie as

she tries to ascend the stairs to see Bon's body: "hurling myself into that inscrutable coffee-

colored face, that cold implacable mindless (no, not mindless: anything but mindless: his own clairvoyant will tempered to amoral evil's undeviating absolute by the black willing blood with which he had crossed it" (110). Is Clytie terrible because she is mindless, and therefore a pure automaton, a servant of Sutpen's will? Or is she terrible because she does have a volition of her own, which is willingly allied to Sutpen's will? Either way, all of time and history seem threatened by automatism, by being overwhelmed by mindlessness or by Sutpen's evil and now-miscegenated will.

Rosa Compson herself, who wants to see Sutpen's appearance upon the scene as a violation of a water-color, is continually shifting and overflowing, desiring to become those who she is divided from, even as she pushes them away. She desires and almost attains Sutpen, for all of her aunt's attempts to impress upon her the unbridgeable, quasi-racial abyss between her and the "ogre" Sutpen. Given the emphasis which is placed upon his otherness, her desire for him becomes a variation on that miscegenation which, according to Eric Sundquist, is for Faulkner the curse of slavery and the reason why the south deserved to lose the war (123). But this miscegenation is only part of her desire. Godden argues that Rosa's overwhelming desire is for her sister's house and her sister's bed, a desire which is tangled up with her ambiguous gender and sexuality – her desire for Bon and the house is also her desire for Judith (92-6). "I became all of polymath loves androgynous advocate," asserts Rosa, when she talks about her obsession with Bon and Judith's relationship: her desire is to be male, to be female, to be Bon and with Bon, to be Judith and with Judith, to be and to emanate love itself (117). But this is not all: the overflowing force of Rosa's polymath desire flows even across the barrier of race, for all of her

bigoted language: her rage at Clytie is also a desire for Clytie. After Bon's death and Henry's

departure, Rosa stayed at the plantation. She asserts her utter difference from Judith and Clytie:

> one woman whom, for all she was blood kin to me, I did not understand and, if what my
>
> observation warranted me to believe was true, I did not wish to understand, and another
>
> who was so foreign to me and to all that I was that we might have been not only of
>
> different races (which we were), not only of different sexes (which we were not), but of
>
> different species, speaking no language which the other understood, the very simple
>
> words with which we were forced to adjust our days to one another being even less
>
> inferential of thought and intention than the sounds which a beast and bird might make to
>
> each other (123-4).

The differences between not only herself and Clytie but herself and Judith is absolute,

unbridgeable, and the language between them has no hope of bridging the abyss. Rosa frames

this time together as an evolution, in which the three women are no longer even women, "in

whom sex was some forgotten atrophy like the rudimentary gills we call the tonsils or the still-

opposable thumbs for old climbing" (125). Curiously, their voicelessness, lack of volition and

lack of pleasure is figured as an evolution, prefiguring the evolutionary figure of Jim Bond: the

future is the end of time.[64] Only two pages after Rosa had asserted the utter difference between

them, she changes: "It was as though we were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate,

which kept that garden growing, spun thread and wove the cloth we wore..." (125). In their

difference which has become oneness, they talk only of Sutpens's return, while the memory of

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[64] In this emphasis on the speechlessness of the future, Faulkner and other modernists are
anticipated by H.G. Wells' The Time Machine, in which language, among other aspects of life, has been
split between the Eloi and the Morlocks, to the ruination of both peoples' languages.

Bon's death seems to fall into nothingness: "a retroactive severance of the stream of event: a forever crystallized instant in imponderable time accomplished by three weak yet indomitable women" (127). Their difference and their oneness blend together, their desire and their automatism are one, the future becomes the crystallization and the destruction of time; evolution is the destruction of will and the destruction of language – as, in Bergson, evolution is the <u>struggle</u> against automatism.

Rosa desires Sutpen, she desires the land and the house, she desires Judith, she desires Bon, she desires Clytie. This impossible web of desires becomes indistinguishable from the utter lack of desire, this chaotic time indistinguishable from a spatialized time in which every event is already crystallized, forever known.

And, like the barnstormers in <u>Pylon</u>, Rosa's desire is for the machine. The first phrase of the novel reads:

> From a little after two oclock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that – a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler. . . (3)

The opening image of the novel is a contrast between two o'clock, which is measured, mechanical time, the time of the clock and of the city, and sundown, which is natural time, agricultural time, organic time. One would presume that our Rosa, who resists and detests the innovation and eruption which Sutpen represents, and who sees his arrival as the destruction of a watercolor, is nostalgic for the time which is gone, the cyclic agricultural time which allegedly

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prevailed before the arrival of the clock. The fact that she has seemingly been stuck for forty-three years in the same moment seems to both confirm that she mourns for this "lost time" – for Sartre, Faulkner's metaphysics is the natural development of Proust's – and that her mourning for this lost world is pointless, effectless (Sartre, "Time" 90). And yet, the time-stranded Rosa is almost alone in the novel in being able to take effective action.

When Rosa is physically described, she is "sitting so bolt upright in the straight hard chair that was so tall for her that her legs hung straight and rigid as if she had iron shinbones and ankles" (3). Rosa is characterized by a mechanical stiffness which clearly alludes to her stubborn retention of the "lost time," organic time, and yet also the illusory nature of that organic time, for it is the very advocate for organic time and the old south who is most mechanical, and who has a deep desire for the mechanical. Rosa speaks about Bon's face, which she never saw except in a photograph:

> But I never saw it. I do not even know of my own knowledge that Ellen ever saw it, that Judith ever loved it, that Henry slew it: so who will dispute me when I say, Why did I not invent, create it? – And I know this: if I were God I would invent out of this seething turmoil we call progress something (a machine perhaps) which would adorn the barren mirror altars of every plain girl who breathes with such as this – which is so little since we want so little – this pictured face. It would not even need a skull behind it; almost anonymous, it would only need vague inference of some walking flesh and blood desired by someone else even if only in some shadow-realm of make-believe. (118)

Rosa's desire for Bon, whom she has never seen, becomes the desire for desire, but not for <u>just</u> any desire: it becomes the desire for a simulated, mechanized desire. But even that isn't all; she

doesn't simply want Bon, or the image of Bon or someone like him, or for every plain girl to have the image of Bon or someone like him: she wants to be the God who makes the machine which abstractly and mechanically fulfills the desire for desire. This is a desire which is, like the abstracted desire of Pylon, a desire for a union of human and machine. Rosa desires not reproduction (with Sutpen) but mechanical reproduction. In perhaps her most transgressive moment, Rosa envisions every young woman (or at least every plain young woman) going through a kind of mechanized puberty, and an automatized love: the very image of the good, the natural, and the organic (that is, the virginal white woman) is violated, not merely by human miscegenation, but by mechanical miscegenation.

This seems utterly at odds with Rosa's ostensible detestation of Sutpen and Clytie's otherness. But Rosa's desire is always unexpected, always bridging an unbridgeable gap, as it does with Judith, Clytie and Sutpen: her desire for the machine originates in her seeming rejection of "progress" (which she refuses to accept as progress) and mechanical time.

Rosa has, in essence, taken her father's mechanizing Calvinism and eroticized it. Where her father tries to disentangle himself from difference, for instance by freeing the two slaves he is given and then charging them their market value against wages he then gives them, Rosa becomes enmeshed in the dialectic of her difference from and oneness with Clytie and Judith; where her father uses the church "exactly as he would have used a cotton gin in which he considered himself to have incurred either interest or responsibility" (38), taking exactly what he is entitled to, Rosa always takes either far less or far more than she has earned, as with the supplies she collects over the years for the ostensible value of her father's store.

At the end of the novel, Rosa shoves Clytie aside as she goes upstairs, towards Henry. Upstairs, though, she sees Jim Bond, and stumbles:

"You, nigger! What's your name?"

"Calls me Jim Bond."

"Help me up! You aint any Sutpen! You dont have to leave me lying in the dirt!"

(297)

Then, unannounced, the novel slips through time, past Quentin's actual encounter with Henry (which he remembers in his room after the fact), and goes immediately, without even white space or italics, to Quentin and Rosa's arrival back at her house:

When he stopped the buggy at her gate she did not offer to get out alone this time. She still sat there, clutching the umbrella in one hand and the hatchet in the other, until he spoke her name. Then she stirred; he helped, lifted her down; she was almost as light as Clytie had been; when she moved it was like a mechanical doll, so that he supported and led her through the gate and up the short walk and into the doll-sized house and turned on the light for her and looked at the fixed sleep-walking face (297).

What might seem like the most radical difference in the novel, between the actively intelligent, bitter, past-obsessed Rosa and the idiotic, inactive, near-mute Jim Bond, who does not anticipate the future but rather embodies it, has been erased. Seeing Jim Bond and his idiocy/automatism, Rosa falls; having fallen, she appeals to a kind of kinship with him – at least he isn't a Sutpen. Then the novel skips the "important" part, the actual encounter with Henry, and cuts to Rosa's return home as a mechanical doll with a sleep-walking face, living in a doll's house. The difference between Jim Bond and Rosa has been erased, as surely as the earlier difference

between her on the one hand and Clytie and Judith on the other had been erased: the automatism of the future is revealed as always having been implicit in the past. Jim Bond still has his grandfather's knack, which made him so hated and so potent in his early years in Mississippi: he has the capacity to uncover the truth, even if he doesn't understand it himself. Just as Sutpen's fights with his slaves (and Judith's observation of these fights) obliterate the romanticism built around slavery and the cult of white womanhood, and as Sutpen's relationship with Clytie (who never once called herself a slave) destabilizes the same barriers which he tries to erect by denying his son, Charles Bon, Jim Bond exposes to Rosa the continuity between his automatism and her own.

That same automatism is in Sutpen, the man who seems so free. As soon as he stops moving it appears:

> For two years it [the town] had watched him as with that grim and unflagging fury he had erected that shell of a house and laid out his fields, then for three years he had remained completely static, as if he were run by electricity and someone had come along and removed, dismantled the wiring or the dynamo (32).

What many critics see in Pylon – the condemnation of modernity's drift into emptiness and automatism – is placed into Mississippi's mythical past in Absalom, and among the deadly secrets which come into the light at the end of the novel is the fact that the same awful volitionlessness and automatism which pervade Jim Bond's howl are already in his grandfather's violent creation of a plantation, and were already there in those men who preceded Sutpen into Mississippi (their rage is always at the fact that he is an honest version of themselves), and are there in the automatism of young white men, too, who "while young and supple and strong

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reacted to a single simple Yes and a single simple No as instantaneous and complete and unthinking as the snapping on and off of electricity" (218). This is both historically and philosophically significant. Historically, it's a response to the lie that an American pastoral scene was violated by the machine's appearance: the machine was already there, at least in the form of the industrial organization of the plantation system;[65] the role that industry played in the defeat of the South (satirically detailed in Bon's letter to Judith, which is written in Union-made stove polish) becomes, perhaps, the difference between the North's acknowledgement of what it was and the South's denial of what it was. Philosophically, it is a kind of Bergsonian apocalypse, a vision of the struggle between mechanical and living time which never sees a possibility for the true victory of the later, but only for the continuation of the struggle.

To put it succinctly: Absalom is not a triumphant recovery from the automatism and modernity which threatens in Pylon: it is the recognition that this modernity and automatism stretch back into the distant past and forward into the intolerable future.

F. SNOPES PASTORAL, SNOPES MODERNISM

Another familiar truism of Faulkner criticism is that the Snopes family, and in particular Flem Snopes, who is, more than a main character, the void around which the world of The Hamlet

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[65] Not to mention in the form of actual machinery. A focus on U.S. slavery obscures this point somewhat, but the heart of the plantation system, the sugar-growing areas of the Caribbean and Brazil, involved sugar mills, mechanical systems which were very complicated and expensive. See Philip Curtin's The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History for details.

(1940), The Town (1957), and The Mansion (1959) revolves, represents industrialism, commercialization and mechanization, the alleged values of the North. I quoted a passage to that effect from Malcolm Cowley's introduction to The Portable Faulkner at the beginning of this chapter, but an even more important representative of this thinking is, unsurprisingly, Cleanth Brooks. Part of Brooks' harshest statement about Flem Snopes, in fact, still serves as a blurb on the back of the Modern Library edition of the Snopes trilogy. Brooks writes:

> the insidious horror of Snopesism is its lack of any kind of integrity – its pliability, its parasitic vitality as of some low-grade, thoroughly stubborn organism – and its almost selfless ability to keep up pressure as if it were a kind of elemental force. These are Flem's special qualities. The difficulty of fighting Flem and Snopesism in general is that it is like fighting a kind of gangrene or some sort of loathsome mold... It is because he lacks honor that Flem is really invulnerable. . . Like finance-capitalism itself, Flem works inside the law (222).

Brooks goes on, though, to assert that we can't read the Snopes novels as a "kind of allegory in which finance-capitalism invades and destroys the old order of the South," because Faulkner is constructing an extraordinarily loose set of novels, which do not permit any kind of sustained argument. But Brooks continues by claiming that "Snopesism is the enemy not only of the old aristocratic order but also of the old folk society" (222). Snopesism is so grave a peril that it demands resistance from both the white aristocracy and the implicitly white folk society.

But what is the story of the Snopes family? In "Barn Burning" (1938), young Sarty Snopes, named after colonel Sartoris, is aware that his father burns the barns of their landlords, and is torn apart by that knowledge, and by his conflicting duties to his father and to the

landlords. When the Snopes family, headed by Ab, the barn-burning father, arrives in the hamlet of Frenchman's Bend, another son (Sarty having disappeared), Flem, uses his father's barn-burning habit to blackmail Will Varner, their landlord, into giving him a job at his store. Who is Will Varner? He is the owner of the old Frenchman's mansion, and thus what passes for aristocracy in this isolated corner of the county. He is:

> the chief man of the country. He was the largest landholder... a farmer, a usurer, a veterinarian; Judge Benbow of Jefferson once said of him that a milder-mannered man never bled a mule or stuffed a ballot box. He owned most of the good land in the country and held mortgages on the rest. He owned the store and the cotton gin and the combined grist mill and blacksmith shop and it was considered, to put it mildly, bad luck for a man of the neighborhood to do his trading or gin his cotton or grind his meal or shoe his stock elsewhere. (9)

Varner is a political boss but also a monopolist who controls all of the local industries and the local supply network (which connects to a global system of distribution) which make cotton farming in this "natural," "pastoral" community possible. Over the course of The Hamlet, Flem introduces a new element of efficiency into Varner's store, marries his daughter (who is pregnant, although not by Flem), getting the Old Frenchman place as a dowry. After a honeymoon to Texas, which conceals how long after the marriage Eula's baby was born, he returns with a set of wild ponies, which he barters away through a proxy (the ponies are dangerous and untameable). Presumably using that money, he seeds the Old Frenchman place by burying money and then going to it at night, as if he is digging for treasure, which attracts treasure hunters, including V.K. Ratliff and Henry Armstid, who then buy the place from him at a

substantial markup. This marks the end of The Hamlet; in The Town Flem moves to the town, Jefferson, and moves from being a small restauranteur (V.K. Ratliff had previously owned a share in the restaurant, which he had given up for a stake in the Old Frenchman Place) to the supervisor of the power plant, to eventually having a position in a bank, which he obtains by turning a blind eye to his wife's affair with one of the other owners of the bank, Major De Spain. In The Mansion, on the other hand, Flem essentially waits to die at the hands of his kinsman Mink Snopes, who he had chosen not to help either defend himself or escape after murdering Jack Houston, the second largest landowner in Frenchman's bend.

Many of Flem's actions are reprehensible by anyone's standards: he twice impoverishes Henry Armstid, and directly or indirectly encourages his wife's suicide. He is, to put it mildly, nobody's hero. But that does not explain the degree of animosity he attracts, both from other characters and from critics: Henry Armstid brutalizes his wife and deprives his children without receiving more than a passing glance. More to the point, Will Varner remains generally well-liked by other characters and even often by critics, despite the fact that he is a local tyrant with far more power than Flem ever manages to acquire (he is the "chief man of the country"; Flem never becomes more than the president of one bank). Yet, V.K. Ratliff, who narrates much of all three novels, dedicates much of his life to "Snopes-watching," and to trying to defeat Flem, while remaining on relatively good terms with both Armstid and Varner.

One easy explanation for all of the animosity is simply that Flem isn't likable: his manipulations and chicanery are always cold, and he seems to get little pleasure out of them, unlike Varner and Ratliff. Perhaps a better explanation for the loathing which Flem inspires, though, is that he acts like a mirror, revealing to others a version of themselves without trappings

or dissembling. James Snead states in <u>Figures</u> <u>of</u> <u>Division</u> that critics have split, with most seeing Flem as representing the "changing economic order of the South," while others emphasize the similarity of Varner and Flem, making the case that Varner only hides his Snopesism (although again, I'll point out that he always has vastly more power than Flem) behind a happy face. Snead articulates the reason for the split: "Flem knows the game, but as an outsider cannot and does not have any reason to hide its cost. He represents 'the commercial spirit in its purity,' but this pure attack brings out impurities that the hamlet has formerly preferred to carry forward" (159). Frenchman's bend is racially uniform (and dangerous to "strange negroes") and, Snead argues, is dedicated to a myth of equality, a myth that the folksy-yet-sharkish Will Varner is glad to perpetuate, and which still convinces many critics – Carl Dimitri confidently asserts that Will Varner, despite his ownership of a variety of industries and enterprises, and his tight-fisted control over an entire congressional district, is pre-modern, as opposed to Flem, who is an avatar of instrumental reasoning (75). "Everyone" is happy with the myth that all the (white) people of the hamlet are equal, that nothing ever changes, that they are a pastoral community rather than a producer of a raw material for a global industry. Flem Snopes owes nothing to this facade, and sees no need to carry it on – thus, he is hated.

One should also note that, despite the outward whiteness of the Snopes family, there is a strange undercurrent of blackness that swirls around them. "I reckon I'll have word with the man that aims to begin to-morrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months," Ab Snopes declares at the beginning of "Barn Burning" (<u>Stories</u> 9). For the <u>honest</u> poor white sharecropper, his own condition borders on slavery. One attribute of Snopesism is the refusal to hold illusions. In <u>Fictions</u> <u>of</u> <u>Labor</u>, Richard Godden argues in much greater detail for the existence of an

undercurrent of racial ambiguity about the character of Ab Snopes (125-8).[66] Godden argues that

"Barn Burning" was written "out of Faulkner's despair over modernization," with the story

exploring "the limited patterns of resistance within the cropping contract" (129). That "Barn

Burning" is resonant with despair is hard to deny – the barn burning itself certainly has the stench

of automatism to it – but if Faulkner despairs at modernization in this story, it's a modernization

which is curiously indistinct from the preceding states; that is, if this variation on serfdom is

modernization, then we have already been modernized for a very long time, and Ab Snopes'

automatism is, perhaps, a response to the failure of any true change to emerge against this old

modernism. Under the sway of Flem Snopes, it seems, everything should change, and yet

nothing does: the Snopes family reveals the dark side of modernization to be part and parcel of

what the South has always been: a sophisticated, highly organized link in a global structure,

which was highly innovative in its mixture of "aboriginal" agricultural technologies and

"western" organizational technologies (Pacey, World Civilization 100). In fact, Arnold Pacey

states that Peter Worsley has made a coherent argument that plantation agriculture served as a

model for factory labor: in other words, "modernity" migrated north, east and west from

Caribbean and North African sugar plantations (Pacey 100-1). Flem Snopes reveals the South to

be everything which it is, which its mythology denies. Factory laborer, slave, and sharecropper

all belong to the same system; Will Varner and Flem Snopes' managerial techniques are

continuous with those of Northern factories: the South exported scientific management to the

north, rather than vice versa.

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[66] In a somewhat similar move, in Faulkner on the Color Line Theresa Towner argues that one of
the central effects of the Snopes trilogy, especially through its conscious use of an almost all-white cast,
is to lay bare an ideology of whiteness (79).

There is an ongoing tendency in Faulkner criticism to see V.K. Ratliff as an opponent of

Flem Snopes' mechanizing worldview; Corinne Dale, for example, sees Ratliff as a kind of

organic alternative to Flem in a 1992 article, "Absalom, Absalom! and the Snopes Trilogy:

Southern Patriarchy in Revision," although Corinne also acknowledges an essential kinship

between the planter of the "Old South" and the businessman of the "New South" (337, 323-4).

There is a danger in the belief that Ratliff presents a true alternative: because Ratliff is more

affable and kinder than Flem does not mean that his worldview and his modernity or lack of it, is

essentially different. John Lutz, who does see the transition from Varner to Flem as being

basically a story of sameness and continuity, also points out that Ratliff has at best an ambiguous

relationship to capitalism: he is, after all, a sewing machine salesman, and a stakeholder in

various businesses (171). Ultimately, Lutz goes far enough to argue that Ratliff can be as

"predatory and cold blooded" as Flem, because he aggressively tries to sell unneeded sewing

machines to the impoverished, essentially as a status symbol (89). Arguing that Flem's Texas

ponies and the desire that they evoke basically tell a story about commodity fetishism, Lutz

writes:

> Rather than being described as a moral community under assault by a single individual,
>
> the society of Frenchman's Bend might be better characterized as one in which an
>
> emerging market economy is substituting exchange value for personal worth while further
>
> eroding the conditions under which individuals can achieve autonomy by participating in
>
> a community (74).

Clearly Lutz is correct in a sense, but there is also an absurdity in his position: horses, as

Faulkner's fiction obsessively reveals, are always individuals. There is <u>nothing</u> of the

commodity about them. The threat to autonomy which Lutz comments on is real, as even Ab

Snopes, taken by himself, reveals. Lutz fails to recognize that there was no time when there was

autonomy. The slave economy is continuous with the sharecropping economy which is

continuous with the market economy. The destruction of autonomy is partially economic, yet

automatism is not chronologically modern, but almost primordial, as Sartre would surely

recognize. One strong argument in favor of seeing the issue of automatism as continuous and

overwhelming in the Snopes trilogy is the fact that Flem, despite his knowledge that his kinsmen

Mink Snopes is likely to be hunting him down, takes no effectual action against him. He does

hire a bodyguard, but only part-time. Despite the apparent force of Snopesism, at the end he

simply gives in to his fate, not unlike Quentin Compson. "In that case, what do you reckon

Flem's reason was for setting there in that chair letting Mink snap them two shells at him until

one of them went off and killed him" (Snopes 1060), Ratliff wonders aloud after the death of

Flem. The all-powerful man, who seems to be free to pursue his own dreams, collapses into

nothingness at the end; the belief in and acceptance of destiny is automatism. Flem remains a

victim of the worldview which, in a process of scapegoating for much older sins, he is blamed for

introducing.

Throughout the Snopes trilogy, there are scattered moments which give the lie to the

concept of a machine suddenly entering and disrupting the southern garden: the pastoral myth is

continuously exposed as having always been a lie. As Varner and Ab Snopes first talk at the

beginning of The Hamlet, Varner sees Ab's yard (that is, his own yard, since he owns it and Ab

has only just moved in) as a "grassless desolation scarred with the ashes and charred stick-ends";

he sees two women pumping "with metronome-like regularity to the wheel's not-quite-musical

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complaint, turning slowly again as though riveted and synchronized to one another by a mechanical arm..." (24). What Varner doesn't realize, as he debates how to handle Ab, is that <u>he himself</u> is the mechanical arm which rivets and synchronizes the Snopes women, he is the personification of the economic system which turns them into machines; this is the environment from which Flem emerges. The image of the metronome returns at the end of the novel, with Henry Armstid digging hopelessly in the Old Frenchman place (348). He is where he is because of Flem's trickery, but also (albeit less directly) because of Ratliff's, and because of the whole system in which he exists: his one attempt to escape the automatism of his daily life ends with him as a metronome.   Shortly after Ab and Varner's conversation, we discover that Colonel Sartoris – the ultimate emblem of the confederacy – built a railroad (32). The mechanization of the South is in the beginning, not in the end. Much of <u>The Town</u>, on the other hand, is concerned with the transformations wrought by the automobile's arrival. But although we get many details about these changes, they are remarkable mainly for their superficiality: the automobiles of the novel mainly provide occasions for men (Major De Spain, Gavin Stevens, etc.) to have disputes which are really occasioned by women and old grudges.

The <u>Mansion</u> ends shortly after Mink Snopes murders Flem. Mink, whose language hearkens back to the language of Faulkner's great novels of the 1930s, has sometimes been categorized as a kind of epic hero (Brooks 220). And yet, unlike the hero of the epic, who, following Lukács, is characterized by the way in which he belongs within the rounded totality of the world, Mink is a deeply novelistic hero, at odds with everyone and everything, the very earth most of all (Lukács 32-3). He is utterly estranged from his dead wife and living daughters, and has no other human contacts to speak of; his life is given meaning only by his quest to destroy

Flem. And although he has been a cotton farmer all of his life, he experiences no bucolic unity with the earth: his relationship with the earth, even above and beyond the stranglehold that his landlord has upon him, is one of eternal war:

> . . . the ground, the dirt which any and every tenant farmer and sharecropper knew to be his sworn foe and mortal enemy – the hard implacable land which wore out his youth and his tools and his body itself. . . until was it any wonder that a man would look at the inimical irreconcilable square of dirt to which he was bound and chained for the rest of his life, and say to it: You got me, you'll wear me out because you are stronger than me since I'm just flesh and bone... And not just me, but all my tenant and cropper kind that have immolated youth and hope on thirty or forty or fifty acres of dirt that wouldn't nobody but our kind work because you're all our kind have. But we can burn you. Every late February or March we can set fire to the surface of you until all of you in sight is scorched and black, and there aint one god-damn thing you can do about it. (760)

Mink's voice is a voice of utter alienation and despair, of warfare against the gods (landlords) above and against the earth below. His bottomless bile in The Mansion reveals what The Hamlet insistently hints at: the nostalgia and romanticism which yearn for the "traditional values" which have been shattered by the arrival of modernity are a mirage. Agriculture is alienation, Mink bitterly attests, or, as Bergson puts it so eloquently: "We are at ease only in the discontinuous, in the immobile, in the dead" (Creative 165). Instrumental reasoning is ugly and alienating, but it is also primordial. Mink must forever turn his world to ashes to survive, and though he strikes Flem Snopes, he strikes like the snake which Ratliff compares him to at the nearest thing to hand:

his rage could be directed against Varner or Sartoris just as easily as it is against Flem, and more fittingly.

It is true that Mink gains some momentary relief with Flem's death, but it is also true that Gavin Stevens and Ratliff are revealed to themselves as being more like Flem and Mink than they had hoped – that is, for all their wishes, they are not so unlike Flem, who is only a part of a vastly larger and older system: the newness of modernity is a lie, and this fact is the very fact of automatism, like the wheels in Light in August which can never get anywhere.

G. FAULKNER'S TELOS, FAULKNER'S FUTURE

Many critics have claimed that Faulkner's work is haunted by mechanization and modernity, that he portrays a modern world in which life is at danger of being overcome by the machine. There is truth in this widespread idea, but it is a truth which, returning to Sartre once more, is insufficiently metaphysical, which is not to say that Faulkner is not concerned, first and foremost, with politics, understood partially as the plethora of specific political concerns which I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Faulkner's concern with the danger posed by the "machine" and industrial culture to "nature" and regionalist culture is actually a concern with the danger of automatism which haunts life. However old the threat of automatism is – Faulkner, unlike Bergson, is not particularly concerned with showing that automatism haunts all of history – it is relatively old, stretching back at least to the origins of American slavery and plantation culture. Automatism is not a Northern imposition, but fully native, and deeply rooted in racial ideology,

as we see in <u>Light</u> <u>in</u> <u>August</u>. Automatism is not simply manifested through particular

technological devices and practices; it is both manifested through and opposed by these devices

and practices, as we see in <u>Pylon</u>. <u>Absalom,</u> <u>Absalom!</u> contains and combines the insights of

both novels; it reveals a vision of time which has long been threatened and even overcome by

automatism. Among the many concerns of the <u>Snopes</u> novels are the way in which a causal link

is made between mechanization and modernity on one hand and automatism on the other; Flem

Snopes becomes a scapegoat, reviled for decapitating a future which was already long since

decapitated.

Despite what has appeared to many to be Faulkner's forthright opposition to modernity,

especially in the form of mechanization and capitalism, there is a countermovement through the

body of his work, which is especially strong in the major novels of the thirties and the <u>Snopes</u>

novels. This countermovement recognizes the deception involved in setting up a "natural" ideal,

especially one founded in the sophisticated and exploitive slave culture of the antebellum south,

against a "mechanization" which mirrors it and interpenetrates it. Modernity, mechanization and

instrumental reasoning have a long history. The darkest component of this realization is that it

participates in what Sartre and others have seen as the future-annihilating aspect of Faulkner's

work. In an understanding of history which sees a <u>good</u> past set against the horrors of the

present, we are at least left with the reactionary hope that we can return to the golden age. If,

however, one agrees with the darkest critics of modernity and, and sees that the "modernity"

which they criticize is nothing essentially new, but only an evolving facade for an ongoing aspect

of human life, then how does one see anything in the future other than the continuation of the

present? In many of the works of high modernism, the end of history impends: the critical

difference in Faulkner's work, which Sartre has still best articulated, is that the end of history has

already happened – the instrumental reasoning which Adorno and Horkheimer, among others,

assail for brutally exploiting the world originated much earlier than they acknowledge, even

equiprimordially with humanity itself, if we follow Bergson. From another point of view,

Faulkner's critique of modernism is a variation on Bergson's concept of time and history, but

stripped of the notion of the overall forward progress of life which Bergson endorses: to rephrase

Sartre, Faulkner's concept of time, history and technology is Bergson's with the head lopped off.

The extremity of Faulkner's despair in the face of modernity and its long history owes much to

his always explosive and contradictory reaction to the reality of American racial oppression: he

saw a rawer edge of instrumental reasoning, with its primeval roots more exposed, perhaps, than

Bergson was exposed to.

Faulkner's understanding of history, time and technology bears no small resemblance to

Melville's; in Faulkner as in Melville (especially Melville as read by Lewis Mumford, as detailed

in the previous chapter), instrumental reasoning, or simply Domination, in Horkheimer's

terminology, only <u>seems</u> to be a peculiar characteristic of our historical moment. The reality, for

both Faulkner and Melville (and eventually for Mumford), is that the struggle between the free

self and the enslaved or mechanized self, between freedom and automatism, is historically old.

Faulkner's thought, though, is darker than Melville's; while Faulkner's automatism may not be

as old in some sense as Melville's, which dates back to the Pyramids and the creation of God, it

is far less easily resisted. The resistance put up by Lena Grove, for instance, is but a shadow of

the resistance of Ishmael and the Confidence Man. In Faulkner, in fact, the confidence game

itself is subverted by automatism, with V.K. Ratliff thinking that he resists Snopesism, when Snopesism is only a symptom of a longer problem.

In a sense, though, this increased darkness represents a kind of progress, for Faulkner makes the connection between automatism and racial oppression more clearly than Melville does. This does not appear to be an improvement in itself, but it offers an opening. It would take someone on the <u>inside</u> of the American system of racial oppression to show that, just as the brutality of instrumental, technological reasoning is old, there is an equally old hope that also dwells within it, which is what Ralph Ellison accomplished.

V. "OUR TECHNOLOGY WAS VERNACULAR": RALPH ELLISON AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL HERO

A. RACE, TECHNOLOGY, AND ELLISON

I begin this chapter with an observation: technology and race are not completely independent ideas, floating in a metaphysical void. Michael Adas has thoroughly detailed in <u>Machines</u> <u>as</u> <u>the</u> <u>Measure</u> <u>of</u> <u>Man</u> (1989), for instance, how race and technology have been conceptually linked, especially in European empires: racial difference is signified, even constructed, by technological difference.

The same holds true in America, unsurprisingly. Many books await to be written on this subject (a few have already been written), but I want to start out with a brief note, drawn from <u>Technology</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>African-American</u> <u>Experience</u> (2004), a book which Bruce Sinclair's introduction presents as the moment of the disciplinary formation of the unified study of race and technology in America. In the midst of a variety of essays more or less focused on race and machine technology, one article stands out. Barbara Garrity-Blake's essay "Raising Fish with a Song" deals not with race in the abstract, but with a particular set of songs sung by black sailor-

laborers in the menhaden (a species of oily, bony fish which requires mechanical processing) fishery in the early twentieth century.

Her remarkably straightforward argument is this: "the work song or chantey was more than an accompaniment to the work process: it was used by laborers as a necessary means of raising the heaviest sets of fish" (107). She then details the basis for this claim, focusing on the necessity of song for the work at hand. The workers' songs, in other words, were among the vital techniques which made this fishery possible. She is pointing out, in a book dominated by a standard understanding of technology, that "critical technologies do not necessarily come out of formalized learning or from the use of mechanical devices" (108). Although she does not mention Lewis Mumford by name, I am reminded of his claim in Technics and Human Development that "Tool-technics... is but a fragment of biotechnics: man's total equipment for life" (7).

I begin with the dual assertions that race and technology are not independent and that machine technology and cultural techniques (including, in some cases, folklore and mythology) form a continuum, in which what is and is not normally considered technology is partially a matter of racial hierarchies (the technologies of black workers and the technologies of white workers being labelled, respectively, as a folk technique and an authentic technology). The remainder of this chapter, which deals with the interlocking concepts of myth, ritual, leadership, technology and self-knowledge in Ralph Ellison's work, can be taken partially as an elaboration or commentary upon these two ideas.

My more particular argument in this chapter is that Ralph Ellison, beginning in his work at The Negro Quarterly and continuing through Juneteenth (1999), but mainly in his novel

Invisible Man, articulates a political understanding of time and technology which refuses to be either teleological or apocalyptic, in opposition to the dominant ideologies of his time and ours. He does not make this intellectual leap by denying or qualifying the reality of technological change; to the contrary, his work is obsessed with technological change and its potential. Nor does he resist or oppose the process of technological change by dreaming of an alternative cyclical, mythical time, although his conception of time is indeed mythic. Technological development does not push towards any telos, whether utopian or dystopian, in Ellison's vision, although it does push. Change is real, but its consequences complex and unforeseeable. The urgent rush of teleological time, the locomotive's time, is answered from the underground by the "other," underground time of the mythic hero; returning to my earlier chapters, one can certainly think of Queequeg's war against/for Ahab, and of the clash between opposing conceptions of time (in this case, two contradictory teleological systems) in Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum." Like Faulkner, Melville and Poe, Ellison continually reveals that the dangers of instrumental reasoning are as old as they are terrible, that the mechanization of humanity is nothing new, that it is not some telos at which we are only now arriving. Like Faulkner and Melville, Ellison links instrumental reasoning to race. Either directly or indirectly, Ellison's understanding of time and technology is partially a development of the thought of Melville and Faulkner, but not a frozen reiteration of their visions.

Ellison's developing counter-apocalyptic, anti-teleological vision of time and technology is precisely that: a development, an evolution which is not readily labeled as progress, but is certainly change. Unsurprisingly, Ellison's vision of a non-teleological relationship between technology and time is deeply connected to his adapting understanding of what he termed, in the

dedication of Juneteenth as it stands, as "that vanished tribe" into which he was born, "the American Negro" (ix). Ellison's understanding of time and technology is not a fixed entity, but a snapshot of a turbulent stream, related to the flexibility he finds in the American Negro, more specifically, to the Negro's hypermodernity, which he opposes to conceptions of history as progress, whether their origins are black or white, Marxist or capitalist. One central idea in Ellison's work, which a number of critics have recognized, is that American racial oppression does not operate on pre-modern objects, but on subjects who become almost hyper-modern.

Ellison's particular concern with time is a frequent object of critical inquiry, as is his interest in and critique of modern technology. There has not, however, been a systematic discussion of the relationship between his understanding of time (relating to his use of the mythic hero) and his understanding of technology. Furthermore, while there has been work on Ellison's relationship with the thought of Melville, Faulkner, and Lewis Mumford, as well as to the work of Lord Raglan, who analyzed the archetype of the hero and the archetypal hero story, my concern is to pull these various threads together, partially in the context of Ellison's political thought: Ellison's understanding of the relationship between time and technology is central to his work and politics, and rooted in his readings of Melville, Faulkner and Mumford. Perhaps most importantly, his interest in the "timeless" archetype of the hero, partially based on his reading of Lord Raglan, is not distinct from his understanding of time and technology. Ellison's use of the hero's mythic time and his use of the accelerated time of the modern, industrialized and reified Negro are one and the same: "the end was in the beginning," as Invisible Man announces (571). Ellison's art demands (and indeed, enacts) change, while refuting teleological change, that is, progress, as fundamentally totalitarian.

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I will begin this chapter with brief discussions of two of the sources of <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u>: the electrical engineering department at Tuskegee and Ellison's work with Angelo Herndon at <u>The Negro Quarterly</u>, to demonstrate the political origins and purpose of his latter artistic articulation of a theory of time and technology. I will follow this with a more extended analysis of Ellison's use of the works of Lewis Mumford and Lord Raglan. These sources are my entry point into a discussion of Ellison's anti-teleological exploration of the relationship between time, race, and technology.

B. THE LIGHTS OF TUSKEGEE

Most Ellison critics are justifiably obsessed with the prologue and epilogue of <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u>, which make use of a remarkably <u>other</u> language, as distinct from the language of the rest of the novel as it is from the work of other writers. These sections of the novel exemplify Ellison at his best, allusively and elusively modernist yet thoroughly vernacular. These sections of the novel are well-baited for the unwary fly, rich with treasures which cannot easily (if ever) actually be opened. I begin perilously, then, with a passage that obsesses me, but not only me. The invisible man is in his basement, contemplating light, invisibility and the very nature of history, which leads to his confrontation with Monopolated Light & Power:

> That is why I fight my battle with Monopolated Light & Power. The deeper reason, I
>
> mean: It allows me to feel my vital aliveness. I also fight them for taking so much of my
>
> money before I learned to protect myself. In my hole in the basement there are exactly

1,369 lights. I've wired the whole ceiling, every inch of it. And not with fluorescent

bulbs, but with the older, more-expensive-to-operate kind, the filament type. (7)

The narrator fights the power company to feel alive: he is an individual against a giant,

mechanical institution, but his combat against the technological system is carried on by

technological means. The number 1,369 demands interpretation, but also refuses it. Do we take

it as a simple number, or as a sequence of digits in a series? The order and symmetry urges us to

take the latter route, but the comma interferes. It isn't quite a sequence of the powers of three

$(y=3^x)$: $3^0=1$, $3^1=3$, $3^2=9$, giving us 139 – where does the six come from? Nor is it quite a

sequence of integer multiples of three $(y=3x)$, which would yield the sequence 369. This

sequence of digits both alludes and eludes. But what does it allude to? The addition of another

digit in the series would either break the number's symmetry or give its equation a name: is the

next member of the series 12 or 27 (136912 or 136927)? Either way, the number creaks

portentously: surely the addition of another digit would resolve the question of whether it is a

mere integer or a set generated by an equation? It is also, incidentally, a preposterously large

number of lights, especially for the time, enough lights for a very sizeable building (I count

twenty two bulbs in my house, fifty years of profligacy past Invisible Man). This is both pure

absurdity (his basement would be an oven – light bulbs expend far more energy on heat than on

light, and he is specifically using inefficient bulbs) and Dantean numerology. His situation is

impossible; the number, hinting at progress through a series of ascending digits, teeters at the

breaking point where it must, seemingly, resolve its ambiguous status.

It is also, I believe, a specific historical reference. I refer to the lights of Tuskegee, as

discussed in Charles Pierce's 1904 article "How Electricity is Taught at Tuskegee." This article,

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a straightforward piece of boosterism published originally in The Colored American Magazine, and reprinted in A Hammer in Their Hands (2005), presents a forward-looking, industrially-oriented program very much in line with Booker T. Washington's educational ideals, in the same year as Washington's Working With the Hands was published. The article is essentially descriptive, beginning with the practical reasons for wanting to generate electricity on campus and a description of the machinery used. It lays out the international scope of the program (as aspect of Tuskegee which receives considerable attention in Booker T. Washington's Working with the Hands), the academic requirements for students, a description of the differences between night and day study in the program, and the practical focus of the program (136-8). Then Pierce describes the use to which the power is put:

> There are at present thirty-four buildings lighted by electricity with a total of 1,717 lights. The division supplies lights to several places off the school grounds, among these being the residence of the late Col. Charles Thompson, Congressmen from the district, the Tuskegee railroad station, and a church. . . There are 34,000 feet of primary line, 22,000 feet of secondary line, and 8,000 feet of street-light wiring used (138).

There may well have been exactly 1,717 lights at Tuskegee, although I, at any rate, find myself incredulous. Regardless, the number is appropriate: the digits repeat, in accordance with the Tuskegee promise to accept the ongoing political order, as long as education and financial

improvement (electric lights, etc.) were possible within it.[67] Ellison's four digits are ambiguous,

and yet poised at the brink of a crisis; Tuskegee's four digits are dependable, predictable.

Pierce's article emphasizes the practicality of the electrical engineering program: it

provides practical services, has an especially practical pedagogy,[68] and is intended to graduate

employable professionals. The Tuskegee electrical plant is thrifty: "The running expense of the

plant amount to about 4.5 cents per kilowatt-hour, although the price of coal is $4.00 per ton for

a very poor grade of bituminous" (139). The invisible man's lights, to the contrary, are

extravagant, deliberately wasteful: "An act of sabotage, you know. I've already begun to wire the

wall. A junk man I know, a man of vision, has supplied me with wire and sockets. Nothing,

storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light" (7).

The invisible man gathers his materials, in all their presumed chaotic diversity, from the junk

heap. In the Tuskegee program, on the other hand, the diversity in techniques and materials

exists strictly for pedagogical purposes:

> New buildings are being constructed from time to time, and in these buildings the latest
>
> methods of wiring are adopted. The students have done cleat, moulding, brass-armored-
>
> conduit, flexible-metallic-conduit, and iron-armored-conduit wiring – a variety of forms

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[67] "All the Negro race asks is that the door which rewards industry, thrift, intelligence, and character be left as wide open for him as for the foreigner who constantly comes to our country. More than this, he has no right to request. Less than this, a Republic has no right to vouchsafe." Washington, Working With the Hands 246.

[68] That is, it was thrifty, and aimed to earn as much money as possible, but not at the expense of education, an important balance for Washington. "The effort to make an industry profitable should not be the aim of first importance. The teaching should be most emphasized. Our policy at Tuskegee is to make an industry pay its way if possible, but at the same time not to sacrifice the training to mere economic gain." Working With the Hands, ii.

of wiring being selected in order to familiarize the student with the different methods.

(138)

The invisible man's diversity comes from the junk heap, while Tuskegee's comes from a pedagogical plan.

Whether or not Ellison is drawing specifically on this article (I believe he is, but the evidence is purely circumstantial), he might as well be. The narrator's basement is a Dostoevskian counter-institution, an anti-Tuskegee. In one basement he mirrors and parodies the whole Tuskegee project: his project is chaotic where Tuskegee's is ordered, based on deliberately antiquated technology where it is cutting-edge, compact where it is expansive, secretive where it is painfully and perilously open, on the brink of numerological crisis where even Tuskegee's numerology is steady, dependable. Where Tuskegee husbands its light and power, the narrator expends his wildly, drawing on nearly as much power as the Tuskegee of the essay.

He has made an anti-Tuskegee; as the anti-Tuskegee, it still mirrors the original. Black men, in both cases, are the source of power, of light and knowledge, a point which Ellison himself emphasizes in Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke:

> In keeping with the reverse English of the plot, and with the Negro American conception
> of blackness, his movement vertically downward (not into a "sewer," Freud
> notwithstanding, but into a coal cellar, a source of heat, light, power, and through
> association with the character's motivation, self-perception) is a process of rising to an
> understanding of the human condition. (Essays 111)

The difference is partially a matter of application: economic and economical versus wildly artistic, sluggish and cautious versus mercurial and profligate. It is also a matter of purpose:

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while both the narrator and Tuskegee aim for leadership, the kinds of leadership are diametrically opposed. The lights of Tuskegee are organized to generate racial progress, the "progress of the Negro," while Ellison's narrator rejects progress, the "black rite of Horatio Alger" (Washington 238; Ellison, Invisible 111). Ellison, instead, describes his novel as attaining "timelessness through time"; his narrator "gets his restless mobility not so much from the blues or from sociology but because he appears in a literary form which has time and social change as its special province" (Essays 111). Change is opposed to progress; "timelessness through time" to linear history.

The invisible man's rejection of progress is ambiguous. He refuses "progress," the "spiral of history" (6). He is easily caricatured by the brotherhood as a "mystic idealist" (570). He rejects linear time most straightforwardly of all at the end of the last chapter before the epilogue: "I could only move ahead or stay here, underground. So I would stay here until I was chased out. Here, at least, I could try to think things out in peace, or, if not in peace, in quiet. I would take up residence underground. The end was in the beginning" (571). He refuses all progress, all linearity (more on this later), but his numerology of light (1,369) implies a crisis, as opposed to the numerology of Tuskegee (1,717), which implies pure repetition.

Paradoxically, boomeranging is change and "progress" (uplift) is repetition. This paradoxical understanding is the "slightly different sense of time" which invisibility grants (8). For the Tuskegee ideology of uplift, of course, progress is real, and the alternative is to be behind the arc of history, as we see at the end of Pierce's essay, when he feels free to tell a story, which "will illustrate the popular conception" of the Electrical Engineering program, as shown during a yearly "Negro conference" at Tuskegee:

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we were at work in the dynamo room clearing up the dynamo for an evening run, when

one of the delegates was seen looking in at the door. I wished to make him feel welcome

so I stepped to the door and asked him in. He said to me that he was afraid; and when I

assured him that he would be perfectly safe, he went on to say that he had "no business

fooling around the dynamite machine," because at his home three men had been "killed

by dynamite made from the dynamite machine." (141)

Other, similar stories follow. The ignorance of the delegate, and the relish with which Pierce

relates the story, resonates with the hatred Ellison's narrator feels for Trueblood, the incestuous

sharecropper who, he feels, reflects so poorly upon him. But while both Pierce and the young

narrator <u>know</u> themselves to have the proper, progressive relationship to both history and

technology (those who know the new technology from an educated standpoint are, in this

standard American tradition, the very embodiment of history's spiral), Trueblood's real

relationship to the power of the college and the technologies it contains are far different from the

stereotyped delegate's, and the "true" nature of time and technology in <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u> is far

different from what the young narrator (who seems much like Pierce) makes it out to be.

Trueblood is many things. As Susan Blake argues, he is a black character who deals

successfully with the white world, who, like Ellison's other "successful" characters, inhabits an

underworld, in this case made of his own unconscious (129). He is a folk character, a trickster.

His life is an unfolding of the battle between the id and the superego in broad daylight, to the

narrator's shame and consternation. But his dreams are rich with the lust for technological,

electrical power, in direct opposition to the stereotyped bumpkin who, Pierce reported, trembles

before the "dynamite machine." Trueblood <u>lusts</u> for the dynamo, to the point where we might

ask if the dynamo symbolizes his desire for his daughter or if his daughter symbolizes his desire

for the dynamo. The following is Trueblood's account of the dream he has while penetrating his

daughter:

I don't quite remember it all, but I remember that I was lookin' for some fat meat. I went

to the white folks downtown and they said go see Mr. Broadnax. . . . I goes in and I'm

standin' in a big room full of lighted candles and shiny furniture and pictures on the

walls. . . . So I calls his name, but still don't nobody come and don't nobody answer. So

I sees a door. . . . Everything in the room was white and I'm stand' there knowin' I got no

business in there, but there anyhow. It's a woman's room. . . . Then I looks over in a

corner and sees one of them tall grandfather clocks and I hears it strikin' and the glass

door is openin' and a white lady is steppin' out of it. She got on a nightgown of soft

white silky stuff and nothin' else, and she looks straight at me. I don't know what to do.

I wants to run, but the only door I see is the one in the clock she's standin' in – and

anyway, I can't move and this here clocks is keepin' up a heap racket. It's gittin' faster

and faster all the time. [He and the woman fall into bed]

And I caint stop – although I got a feelin somethin' is wrong. I git aloose from the

woman now and I'm runnin' for the clock. At first I couldn't git the door open, it had

some kinda crinkly stuff like steel wool on the facing. But I gits it open and gits inside

and it's hot and dark in there. I goes up a dark tunnel, up near where the machinery is

making all that noise and heat. It's like the power plant they got up to the school. It's

burnin' hot as iffen the house was caught on fire. . . . I runs and runs till I should be tired

but ain't tired but feelin' more rested as I runs, and runnin' so good it's like flyin' and I'm

flyin' and sailin' and floatin' right up over the town. Only I'm still in the <u>tunnel</u>. Then

way up ahead I see a bright light like a jack-lantern over a graveyard. It gits brighter and

brighter and I know I got to catch up with it or else. Then all at once I was right up with

it and it burst like a great big electric light in my eyes and scalded me all over. (57-9)

Incestuous desire flows into miscegenous desire which flows into technological desire; the

climax is associated with the machine, not with either woman. The urge for technological power

is inextricably related to a particular vision of time, rooted in the clock which Trueblood

physically enters (simplistically, a mechanized and mechanizing time). The stereotypical rustic

recoils from mechanical time, and is unable to adjust to it; Trueblood plunges eagerly into the

clock and the power plant behind it, symbolically entering into the clock's discipline. The clock,

like the railroad, was and is a pedagogical device, intended to teach middle-class values:

discipline, self-reliance, the understanding that time is money (Adas 226, 251). Trueblood is a

folk (anti)hero, a farmer who knows he must "move without moving" to escape his situation

(59). Nonetheless, his desire is unambiguously for the clock and the power plant beyond it. <u>The</u>

<u>rustic</u> <u>is</u> <u>no</u> <u>rustic</u>. Michael Adas argues that: "The strictures that European travelers and

missionaries leveled at Africans and Asians for their indolence, improvidence, and disregard for

punctuality were applied as readily by middle-class authors to the working classes, peasants, and

entire "racial" groups within Europe itself" (209). This understanding of European peasants as

primitive made them a worthwhile entry into studying the primitive mind for ethnologists like

James Frazer, according to Adas (209). The European peasant, the black American, the African

and Asian all require the mechanical, clock-based discipline of Western culture. Stories of their

absurd resistance (again, the fear of the dynamite machine) abound. They are worthy of study,

and in need of discipline. Indeed, Trueblood's dream begs for a Frazerian or Freudian study, which will reveal the primordial nature of man – except for the fact that Trueblood's orgasm, ultimately, is for the power plant and the clock; the incest is something of a smokescreen. His incest is a source of voyeuristic pleasure for the white men around him; technological power would be another matter. What he unconsciously desires – the recreation of Tuskegee's power system, from which he is excluded, in defiance of all powers white and black – is what the narrator accomplishes with his 1,369 lights. Like Frankenstein's gothic dream, Trueblood's gothic dream is of technological power, a response to Booker T. Washington's philosophy of industrial education which seeks the power of technology (and industrial education) while eschewing the ideology of progress which goes along with it; for Washington, a large part of the point of education is that it generates moral progress, but we see a powerful counter-example in the person of Norton, who shares Trueblood's inclinations despite his "advanced" condition.

Before we meet Trueblood, Norton expounds on his notion that his fate is connected with the narrator's: "You are important because if you fail I have failed by one individual, one defective cog. . ." (45). The narrator is willingly a part of a machine, subordinated to Norton's understanding of time and fate. Not coincidentally, the invisible man despises Trueblood: "How all of us at the college hated the black-belt people, the 'peasants,' during those days! We were trying to lift them up and they, like Trueblood, did everything it seemed to pull us down" (47). The peasants, that is, don't accept the "black rite of Horatio Alger," which is celebrated with "voices mechanically raised in the songs the visitors loved" (111). But Trueblood, too, as desirous as Queequeg is of attaining mechanical power, sees the world mechanically. When he describes his wife rushing to attack him with an ax, he says "I might as well been pleadin' with a

switch engine" 64). When women come to help his daughter they "looks at me like I'm some new kinda cotton-pickin' machine," which is <u>exactly</u> what he is, as a man who has seemingly been reduced to standing-reserve: only a mechanical resource (65).

The women despise Trueblood like they would a new cotton-picking machine, one which would threaten their livelihood; Booker T. Washington, incidentally, argued in favor of cotton-picking machines, which would give "Negros, and in fact the whole South, more time to raise other things" (Pursell 190). Trueblood understands and perhaps partakes in the loathing of the cotton-picking machine which he imaginatively assigns to the women, but any hatred he has is alloyed with desire; he wants to claim the clock and the power plant.

This is hard for Emerson and the narrator to grasp: they both need Trueblood to be a savage, like Freud's imagined savages (nobody wants to be confronted with a Babo or a Queequeg). He is the other against whom they define themselves as members of Western civilization: their moral constraints, technological sophistication, scientific understanding of time and complex anxieties contrast to his primitive abandon, closeness to nature and what the narrator will refer to later in the novel as "slow c.p. (colored people's) time" (163). They need to both envy and despise him, with Norton mostly envying his "primitive" condition and the narrator mostly despising it. Trueblood, although different from themselves, is no less advanced, despite the mythic roots of his character.

Trueblood, in this instance, belongs to a long tradition of black Americans whose <u>technologies</u> have been claimed and reinscribed as white technologies (which then, as at Tuskegee, can be doled out as a gift). The rice plantations of South Carolina are a perfect example. Traditional histories, even ones sympathetic to oppressed peoples, have imagined the

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plantation system as depending on slaves only for their labor and on the masters for everything

else, as Judith Carney argues in "Landscapes of Technology Transfer." This view, she argues, "is

emblematic of a more pervasive scholarly view toward Africa and its peoples as having

contributed little across geographic space besides labor" (42). This view, however, is incorrect:

the intricate waterworks which were the foundation of the rice plantations were imported

wholesale from Africa, although these technologies eventually came to bear the marks of

European techniques, becoming a creole technology (42). Carney notes that "the shares of slaves

brought directly from the West African rice coast grew during these crucial decades of from 12

percent in the 1730s . . . and then to 64 percent between 1769 and 1774" (36). As the plantations

became more complex, they did not grow more dependent on skilled <u>white</u> planning and

engineering, but on <u>slave</u> engineering. Rather than only providing the labor on the rice

plantations, the slaves provided most if not all of the skill and technology, which gradually

developed under the new conditions. Trueblood is no more a primitive than these slaves with

their waterworks; like them, his technological desire (as opposed to their technological

achievement) is forbidden and forgotten.

Trueblood yearns for the machine; Trueblood has, perhaps, a different sense of time, but

not one which makes "mechanical time" incomprehensible or even undesirable to him. He may

well be an automaton, but it is precisely <u>as</u> <u>an</u> <u>automaton</u> that he yearns for power; as in Bergson,

automatism is inescapable, but the struggle against automatism (which inevitably involves

understanding the world itself as an automaton) defines life. Trueblood is no embarrassing relic

of a past best forgotten; he does not need to be uplifted through the "Black rite of Horatio Alger,"

although he is desperate for change. He is connected to (or even born out of) myth and ritual, but that does nothing to repress his historical or even technological reality.

I will return later to this theme of the technological hero, especially as it develops in the person of the narrator. For now, I will turn to Ellison's wartime thoughts on these topics, before he began writing Invisible Man.

C. THE HERO AND THE NEGRO QUARTERLY

In 1941 Ralph Ellison's earlier enthusiasm for the Communist party began to wane, as the party began to backpedal on black rights in favor of a focus on the war effort. Ellison continued to work, albeit more skeptically, for The New Masses, but when the opportunity rose he followed the famous and charismatic Angelo Herndon to Herndon's new publication, The Negro Quarterly (Jackson, Emergence 253-4, 263). Ellison quickly became the magazine's managing editor, while Herndon focused on promoting "large public events" (Emergence 279). Both Herndon and Ellison drew increasingly distant from the Party over the year and a half run of the journal; in Herndon's case, the split became final in 1942 (Griffiths 625). Larry Neal summarizes the situation in "Ellison's Zoot Suit": "The Negro Quarterly appears to have been the last attempt on the part of black intellectuals of that period to fashion an ideological position that was revolutionary but not totally dominated by the white Marxist Left" (90).

Neal, Jackson and Griffiths all argue that "Invisible Man remakes images from The Negro Quarterly" (Griffiths 619). Griffiths offers a detailed reading of Herndon's "Frederick Douglass:

Negro Leadership and War," published in the journal's fourth and final issue, in conjunction with

the "Editorial Comments" from that issue (which he argues were coauthored by Ellison and

Herndon; Neal and Jackson attribute them to Ellison alone) and Homer Barbee's speech from

Invisible Man. The language of Herndon's assault on false black leadership, as contrasted to

Frederick Douglass' leadership, resonates with Barbee's mythologizing of The Founder in

Invisible Man. I quote from Herndon's article:

> When such a Negro is promoted by others than the Negro people themselves as a "Negro
>
> leader," his mind is orientated [sic] in directions away from the real problems of the
>
> Negro. He knows neither whom he leads nor where he is leading. Thus his vision is like
>
> the moon in eclipse. While an eclipse is a momentary thing, this type of leader goes on
>
> forever and ever. . . He suffers from a lack of spiritual sustenance which can only come
>
> from that body of life which illuminates clearly and distinctly the authentic experience of
>
> the Negro people (312).

Homer Barbee's speech on the Founder, of course, mentions the moonless sky, as he enacts,

"minstrel-like, the lunar eclipse of black leadership" (Griffiths 620). Griffiths traces out

numerous other references to Herndon through the novel, arguing that Herndon made his own

particular impact on Ellisons' merger of "Marx and Freud and Raglan" (620).

All three critics discuss the "Editorial Comment" heading the final issue of The Negro

Quarterly in detail. I will reiterate my own version of their reading, with one major additional

observation, which is the fact that technology is central to the question of black leadership,

especially in its mythical aspect.

The editorial, which I, following Jackson and Neal, rather than Griffiths, will attribute to

Ellison,[69] begins with a listing of possible "Negro attitudes" towards "their war-time

experiences" (295). These are, first, fullhearted participation and criticism of those who "want to

be Negro first and American second"; second, that of unqualified rejection of the war as a "white

man's war"; and third, that of "critical participation" (295-8). Critical participation – obviously

the position which Ellison endorses – involves the premise that "the historical role of Negroes to

be that of integrating the larger American nation and compelling it untiringly toward true

freedom" (298). Anti-fascism abroad demands equal, unwavering devotion to anti-fascism at

home. Ellison argues that Negro power must be centralized, so that Negros will not "always play

the role of a sacrificial goat" (300). Critical participation demands the centralization of power,

which leads into a discussion of the nature of leadership which is necessary for his vision.

> [The Negro leaders] must integrate themselves with the Negro masses: they must be
>
> constantly alert to new concepts, new techniques and new trends among other peoples and
>
> nations with an eye toward appropriating those which are valid when tested against the
>
> reality of Negro life. . .   When needed concepts, techniques or theories do not exist they
>
> must create them. Many new concepts will evolve when the people are closely studied in
>
> action. And it will be out of this process that true Negro leadership will come. . . (300)

The new leadership will achieve centralization through studying and imitating the best

techniques it finds in the masses and abroad, while supplementing these techniques with ad-hoc

techniques of its own. The leadership must not only emerge from the people, but it must take the

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[69] I make this choice mainly because of Jackson's authority as Ellison's biographer, but also because the style of the editorial is thoroughly Ellisonian, as opposed to Herndon's transparent lucidity in the following article.

people as its ongoing inspiration, in a kind of technocracy learned from the masses. The next

paragraph in the editorial has occasioned little, if any, critical commentary:

> A second problem for Negro leadership to master is that of accurately defining the
>
> relation between the increasing innovations in technology and the Negro peoples'
>
> political and economic survival and advancement. During the war the mastery of hitherto
>
> unavailable techniques by Negroes is equivalent to the winning of a major military
>
> objective . . . (301)

In order for centralized leadership to be effective or possible, it must not merely take advantage

of technological advances, but recognize the connection between the people's very survival and

technological advancement. It might seem that this position is not fundamentally different from

Booker T. Washington's emphasis on industrial education, but that would be taking Ellison's

second paragraph out of the context of the first and third.

> The third paragraph has drawn far more commentary; it is certainly more appealing to

most literary critics.

> A third major problem, and one that is indispensable to the centralization and direction of
>
> power, is that of learning the meaning of the myths and symbols which abound among the
>
> Negro masses. For without this knowledge, leadership, no matter how correct its
>
> program, will fail. Much in Negro life remains a mystery: perhaps the zoot suit conceals
>
> profound political meaning: perhaps the symmetrical frenzy of the Lindy-hop conceals
>
> clues to great potential power – if only Negro leaders would solve this riddle. (301)

This is, as Neal argues, "a clear, definite statement of cultural nationalism at work," and an

attempt "to get past the simplistic analysis of folk culture brought to bear on the subject by

Marxist social realists. For rather than locating the mechanisms for organizing political power totally in an analysis of the black man's class structure, Ellison turns Marxism on its head, and makes the manipulation of cultural mechanisms the basis for black liberation" (93). This is true, but also incomplete: Neal, Jackson and Griffiths alike have given short shrift to the second paragraph, which emphasizes that the true Negro leader must define (and control) the relationship between the Negro masses and technology. Ellison's three points should not be separated: the true Negro leader must integrate the masses, define their relationship to technology, and learn to understand and manipulate their symbols and folklore. Nor are these three ideas separated: knowledge of the masses (partially as self-knowledge), knowledge of the relationship between the masses and technology, and knowledge of the masses' folklore are hardly separate topics.

The problem with Ellison's prescription for these three kinds of knowledge is, as he acknowledges, that "these hopes can be used by the charlatan and agent provocateur as well as by the true leader" (302). The danger, in short, is Rinehartism, an application of technological and mythical knowledge to purely selfish ends; among Rinehart's titles is "spiritual technologist" (495). One might also note that Ellison's prescription for a combined understanding of folklore and technology is reminiscent of fascism, a danger which can see emphasized in the novel's satire of the Tuskegee system, which is technologically sophisticated and simultaneously rooted in folklore and mythology, as we see most profoundly in Homer Barbee's speech.

To clearly articulate Ellison and Herndon's response to the threat of both internal and external fascism, I turn to the "Editorial Comment" at the beginning of the first issue of The Negro Quarterly.[70]

> Today history moves by bombing planes, and what now threatens Britain and India might, sooner than we think, threaten our own shores. Some might object to our identifying the American Negroes as a nation. But if this war is to be a peoples' war, based upon the Four Freedoms, then along with the discarded techniques of imperialist domination must go all of the old imperialist definitions and classifications of minority and colonial peoples. All peoples must be allowed to define themselves! (iv)

History is driven by machines (the bombing planes), but not only by them; it is also driven by the aspirations of nations and peoples. Herndon and Ellison's nationalism is one which demands self-determination in opposition to expansion; the synthesis of folklore and technology which they propose, although it surely shares some origins and characteristics with fascism and totalitarianism in general, is radically opposed to totalitarian goals, through the simple acknowledgement of endlessly divergent nationalisms, which do not require unification; the people – their folk customs, their technologies, their aspirations – continually direct their leaders. The black leader must continually work to understand, explain and finally use these aspects of black life; he is rooted in the actual, evolving practice of his people's lives and practices, as opposed to the fascist leader, who dictates what the people must become; that is, Ellison and Herndon's nationalist synthesis of technology and mythology empiricist where fascism is idealist.

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[70] For lack of any evidence to the contrary, I attribute this editorial to both Herndon and Ellison. The style is distinctly Ellisonian, but its Marxism and internationalism, although hardly anti-Ellisonian, seem to bear Herndon's mark.

Ellison and Herndon were disappointed, of course, in their hope for an authentic

leadership, as opposed to one hand-picked by the government "to bargain away the rights of the

Negro people" ("Editorial Comment" 1). This seems to have only made the question of black

leadership more important for Ellison, as it became a central question in <u>Invisible Man</u>.

D. ELLISON'S RAGLAN

Ellison's interest in Lord Raglan's <u>The Hero</u> (1936), which was written under the influence of

James Frazer's <u>The Golden Bough</u> (1890-1915),[71] is explicit and substantial; he comments on it

repeatedly in his essays, and it left an enormous mark on <u>The Invisible Man</u>. In a way, this

influence may be too obvious; it has received some critical commentary, but not the sustained

analysis which it deserves. This is not to say that a number of authors have not dealt with Lord

Raglan's influence upon Ellison: relevant works include Lawrence Clipper's "Folkloric and

Mythic Elements in <u>Invisible Man</u>" (1970), William Schafer's "Ralph Ellison and the Birth of the

Anti-Hero" (1974), Robert O'Meally's <u>The Craft of Ralph Ellison</u> (1980), Larry Neal's

"Ellison's Zoot Suit" (1987), and the Frederick Griffiths' "Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and

the Case of Angelo Herndon" (2001). But these readings of Ellison and Lord Raglan's influence

upon him have dealt with Lord Raglan's text rather superficially, using a conventional

understanding of the text rather than the text itself (despite evidence that Ellison's interest in the

text went far beyond the superficial), and not fully exploring the relationship between Lord

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[71] That is, the final volume of the final edition was published in 1915; the first edition was
published in 1890.

Raglan's text and the problem of leadership, especially the three-pillared version of leadership presented in Ellison's "Editorial Comment" in The Negro Quarterly, as previously discussed. This is not to say that these are superficial essays; most of them are very good indeed, but a serious study of Lord Raglan is not, for the most part, their goal.

I do not intend to do a full analysis of the influence of Lord Raglan upon Ellison's work, which would require a detailed reading of Frazer, Raglan and Ellison in relation to one another; I want to explore how Ellison's reading of Lord Raglan influenced his views on teleology, time and technology, and show (following Neal, Griffiths and Jackson) how this use of Raglan related to Ellison's political development.

In "That Same Pain, that Same Pleasure," Ellison's 1961 "interview" (most of Ellison's interviews are really complex literary collaborations) with Richard Stern, Stern begins by asking Ellison why he has "vaulted the parochial limitations of most Negro fiction" (Essays 63). Ellison's answer emphasizes the importance of technology in the form of the "mass media" – the whole experience of working with, listening to and building radios – as well as his exposure to literary culture in the form of Vanity Fair (63-4). Despite his emphasis on the technological media which so many writers have found dehumanizing, Ellison continually returns to the importance of black individuality: "Too many of us have accepted a statistical interpretation of our lives" (75). But Ellison's obsession with individuality and individualism is anything but a denial of the importance of leaders and leadership, as the whole published text of Juneteenth, a text focused on the techniques and possibilities of leadership, affirms. Ellison uses Lord Raglan when discussing his earlier notions of leadership:

When I started writing <u>Invisible Man</u> I was reading Lord Raglan's <u>The Hero</u>, in which he

goes into figures of history and myth to account for the features which make for the

mythic hero, and at the same time I got to thinking about the ambiguity of Negro

leadership during that period. This was the late forties, and I kept trying to account for

the fact that when the chips were down, Negro leaders did not represent the Negro

community. (77)

Ellison presents himself, in other words, as using Lord Raglan to try to understand the ongoing

failure (which includes the failure, presumably of <u>The Negro Quarterly</u>) to form an authentic

black leadership. Lord Raglan's text is, according to the ordinary understanding, concerned with

the characteristics of the mythic hero; perhaps most famously, Raglan gives a list of the twenty-

two stages of a mythic hero's life, running from the fact that his mother is a royal virgin to the

fact that a sepulchre is erected on his tomb, and then uses these twenty-two stages to discuss the

essential unity and the thorough non-historicity of hero myths. The most detailed work on

Ellison's relationship to Lord Raglan, in fact, deals exclusively with the correspondence between

Ellison's narrator and Lord Raglan's twenty-two points (Clipper 236-41). By Clipper's count,

Ellison's hero scores between twelve and eighteen points. My initial tabulation, similar but not

identical to Clipper's, follows:

	Raglan's Text	Commentary on <u>Invisible Man</u>
1	The hero's mother is a royal virgin.	His parents are unknown to us, but his conception seems to have been normal. (0 points)

2	His father is a king, and	One could consider the clearly kingly Bledsoe as IM's metaphoric father (see #6), but also consider the grandfather's role as legislator and spiritual tyrant. Nonetheless, both seem like a stretch. (0 points)
3	Often a near relative of his mother, but	This point doesn't seem to work, although Trueblood's incest and its relationship to the school may make some connection to Raglan. (0 points)
4	The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and	We known nothing about IM's conception. (0 points)
5	He is also reputed to be the son of a god.	The people back at home place all of their hopes in him; Bledsoe holds him in unusually high regard.
6	At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather, to kill him, but	Bledsoe, as metaphoric father, betrays and tries to destroy IM. (1 point)
7	He is spirited away, and	He goes to New York, of course! (1 point)
8	Reared by foster-parents in a far country.	The men's house, but mainly Mary. (1 point)
9	We are told nothing of his childhood, but	His real childhood is a cipher, inhabited only by yams and his grandfather; his metaphoric childhood with Mary is almost equally mysterious. (1 point)
10	On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom	He enters the Brotherhood as a leader from the beginning. (1 point)
11	After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,	His success as a speaker and leader, especially his first major speech, which Brother Jack viewed as a victory. (1 point)
12	He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor	His affairs in the Brotherhood. (1 point)
13	Becomes king.	His leadership of the Harlem Brotherhood. (1 point)

14	For a time reigns uneventfully, and	He is able to give magazine interviews and engage in political quarrels, etc. (1 point)
15	Prescribes laws, but	The perception that he himself has become a lawgiver/king fuels Brother Wrestrum's resentment. (1 point)
16	Later he loses favor with the gods and/or his subjects, and	The Brotherhood turns against him, while the Brotherhood itself loses street credibility. (1 point)
17	Is driven from the throne and city, after which	He is endangered by Ras, and joins, in some sense, with the rioting masses. (1 point)
18	He meets with a mysterious death	That is, he falls into a coal cellar. (1 point)
19	Often at the top of a hill	This one doesn't work. (0 point)
20	His children, if any, do not succeed him.	That is, his "children" within the Brotherhood do not succeed him within the Brotherhood, even as the Brotherhood becomes irrelevant in Harlem. This is a stretch. (0 or 1 points)
21	His body is not buried, but nevertheless	After all, he is technically alive (1 point).
22	He has one or more holy sepulchers.	A temple of light and electric power; electricity and religion were earlier associated in Rinehart's church. "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (1 point)

Scoring on Raglan's system, the Invisible Man clearly experiences fifteen or sixteen of the bullet points, giving him a similar score to King Arthur, Moses or Heracles. This can hardly be dismissed as coincidence; after all, Ellison repeatedly brought attention to the fact that Raglan influenced the early composition, at least, of the novel. We can take it as a given, then, that Raglan's schema was influential upon Ellison's text, based both on textual evidence and

Ellison's own statements about Lord Raglan. But we should beware of the trap which even the best critics have fallen into: Lord Raglan's text is not simply about the nature of the hero. Having demonstrated that Lord Raglan's schema works in Ellison, we should not stop at the schema; there is more to Raglan's text, and more to Ellison's use of it.

Robert O'Mealy simplistically claims that The Hero is about "historical and mythical heroes," in his brief acknowledgement of Ellison's use of Raglan (78). Clipper simply discusses the twenty-two points as if there is nothing else to Raglan's long and complex text. Jackson states in his biography that Ellison was originally reading Lord Raglan to research the "mythic dimensions" of the "sentient young black pilot," a prisoner in a German war camp, who was the main character of his Ellison's novel project before Invisible Man (320). William Shafer's "Ralph Ellison and the Birth of the Anti-Hero" proposes that Ralph Ellison's novel is structured around Lord Raglan's understanding of the hero, but then pulls a bait-and-switch, by substituting Joseph Campbell for Lord Raglan, as if the two were the same.[72] Griffiths, though, describes

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[72] The essay begins with an excerpt from Ellison's interview with Chester and Howard (regarding Ellison's reading of The Hero), but rather than engaging in a discussion of Ellison's concern with Raglan in relation to Negro leadership, Schafer spends most of the essay detailing how "Ellison builds on epic and mythic conventions," which Schafer explicates (erroneously) using Joseph Campbell rather than Lord Raglan (Schafer 115, 119). Thus, the invisible man is "Like the hero of myth and ritual [who] finally descends from life on the mortal plane into an underworld of death" (Shafer 119). He undergoes multiple ritual deaths and reconstructions of his identity; for instance, he is reconstructed by the hospital doctors, with "the electrotherapy machine [as] an emblem of the mechanical society imprisoning the anti-hero" (120). Eventually "Buckeye the Rabbit has grown into the formidable Jack-the-Bear. . . as the anti-hero has passed his trials and journeyed on his downward path, reliving the recent history of the Negro. He lies in wait beneath the inferno, under the underworld, listening for the hero's call" (123). Throughout this interesting and plausible reading, Schafer is drawing on Joseph Campbell, rather than on Lord Raglan, despite all appearances, as becomes clear near the end of the essay:

> The imagery and the outline of the hero's life serve to give a classic shape to Invisible Man. If we take Joseph Campbell's summary of the hero's career as a standard, we can see how Ellison moved from reading Lord Raglan and pondering Negro leadership to the form of the novel. [A long block quote from Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces follows]. . . Invisible man follows this loose form. The epic journey from southern oppression to northern invisibility is

how Ellison makes use of a specific device discussed by Lord Raglan, arguing that the letter the

narrator carried to his seven potential employers may be based partially in Raglan, as well as in

an actual experience Angelo Herndon had:

> Along with the Seven Seals from the Book of Revelation Ellison folds in the archetypal
>
> kill-the-bearer letters carried by Homer's Bellerophon and Shakespeare's Hamlet, a
>
> device discussed by Lord Raglan in The Hero . . . As a source for Bledsoe's letter,
>
> Herndon has never been noticed, and we have not missed him. Yet the intertext with
>
> Herndon gives the passage something that Ellison valued. Reining in the over-readers of
>
> his tricksters, he cautioned: "Archetypes are timeless, novels are time-haunted." Myth
>
> must enter the world of the novel through historical moments, "the specific texture of a
>
> specific form of social reality" ("Change" 111). For Lord Raglan mythic devices like
>
> "Bellerophontic letters" do not happen in history. Save that it happened to Herndon (or
>
> so he claims) through the throwback of an Alabama judge [who set Herndon loose with a
>
> "job recommendation" that really "recommended" him to the Klan]. . . (618)

Later, Griffiths argues in detail (as I discussed earlier) that Homer Barbee's speech on the

Founder is based partially on Herndon's essay on Frederick Douglas as well as moments in his

autobiography Let Me Live (1937): "Though the details sprawl, it should quickly become

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> shaped by the elements of the ritual hero; the anti-hero gains stature and universality by his
> connection with Negro folk-heroes and through his enactment of a ritual role. Only the last part
> of the myth is incomplete – Ellison does not decide whether the hero will emerge from
> underground and whether he will bring elixir or destruction. The last question of the novel is
> posed the reader: will it be death or spring? (125)

This would be all well and good, if we accepted that Campbell's version of the hero's journey is
compatible with Ellison's project. But Frazer is not Raglan, and Raglan is not Campbell, and Campbell
is not Otto Rank.

apparent why his dream imagery registered on Ellison as he set about to merge Marx and Freud and Raglan" (620).

Griffiths realizes, first, that Raglan was as influential on Invisible Man as Marx and Freud and, second, that Raglan's claim that such archetypal occurrences as "kill the bearer" letters don't happen in history is important. In fact, the main theme of Lord Raglan's book is that "real history" has little role in constructing the narrative of the hero's life (or anything else, for that matter); history is revealed as a chimera in Raglan's text, in a move which distinguishes Raglan from James Frazer. Griffiths implicitly raises a question, by linking Raglan to Angelo Herndon and Homer Barbee's speech: does Ellison's use of Lord Raglan have a political significance? Is he doing more than simply finding a source for some interesting archetypes? To begin to answer that question, I turn in more detail to Ellison's multiple explanations of the relationship between Invisible Man and The Hero, all of which revolve, not around "timeless archetypes," but around the problem of leadership, as Griffiths implicitly realizes, though the subject is only incidental to his work.

Take, for instance, "The Art of Fiction," Ellison's 1955 interview with Alfred Chester and Vilma Howard. One question the interviewers ask, following an intricate discussion of literary modernism and politics, among other things, is simply "When did you begin Invisible Man?" Ellison's answer is as follows:

> In the summer of 1945. I had returned from the sea, ill, with advice to get some rest... So
> on a farm in Vermont where I was reading The Hero by Lord Raglan and speculating on
> the nature of Negro leadership in the United States, I wrote the first paragraph of Invisible
> Man, and was soon involved in the struggle of creating the novel. (Essays 218)

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The connection could not be more clear: the novel developed immediately out of his application of Lord Raglan to the issue of "Negro leadership." Among all of the texts which have been claimed as the ancestors of <u>Invisible Man</u>, Lord Raglan's book has the unique distinction of being repeatedly claimed by Ellison not merely as an ancestor, but as having been involved in the novel's conception, clearly in response to the failures of both the communist and anti-communist leadership.

Later, in his 1969 address at West Point (printed in 1975 as "On Initiation Rites and Power), Ellison discussed his reading of Raglan in more detail, once more in the context of the composition of <u>Invisible Man</u>.

> I was reading Lord Raglan's <u>The Hero</u>, which has to do with tradition, myth and drama. . . . [The full title of the book is <u>The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama</u>; Ellison's interest in Raglan clearly has not flagged] Raglan was concerned with the manner in which myth became involved with the histories of living persons, became incorporated into their personal legends. I seem to recall that he noted about twenty-two [Ellison was precisely correct] aspects of character and experience that were attributed to most heroes, and he discovered that historical figures. . . tended to embody clusterings of these same mythological aspects, and this whether they were figures of fact or fantasy. . . . it isn't unusual in the mythology of mankind to find figures said to have been conceived. . . through virgins. Nor is it unusual to find leaders who were exposed to death as infants. . . . Anyway, I was concerned with such findings of Lord Raglan's as a literary matter, but at the same time I was concerned with the nature of leadership, and thus with the nature of the hero. . . because during the historical moment when I was working out the concept

of Invisible Man my people were involved in a terrific quarrel with the federal

government over our not being allowed to participate in the war as combat personnel in

the armed forces on an equal basis. . . This quarrel led to my concern with the nature of

Negro leadership, from a different and nonliterary direction. I was very much involved

with the question of just why our Negro leadership was never able to enforce its will.

(524-5)

An interesting choice for an address to be given at West Point during the height of the Vietnam

War: on the one hand, Ellison is concerned with connecting the epic hero – that is, contextually,

the war hero – with the composition of Invisible Man. On the other hand, the epic hero is

invoked to help explain an intensely modern political problem: why don't the "Negro leaders" act

on the behalf of their ostensible constituents, during the War, in particular? Speaking at West

Point, in the midst of the Vietnam War, Ellison makes a point that would surely have been clear

to the more forward-looking (which is not to say liberal) members of his audience: the epic hero

must be a politician if he is to succeed and survive (we might think of Odysseus) and the

politician must be an epic hero in order to fulfill his destiny. If myth and history fail to

interpenetrate in the person of the politician-cum-hero, acting on the behalf of his community,

whether knowingly or unknowingly, the war will end in disaster. This role of politician-cum-

hero is precisely the role which the boy-preacher Bliss is being groomed for in Juneteenth; his

infernal descent from being Bliss, the white boy who preaches in mostly black churches, rising

out of a coffin to proclaim the resurrection, to becoming Senator Adam Sunraider, who never lets

an opportunity for race-baiting slide by, mirrors the fall of Ellison's "Negro leaders," who refuse

the hero's call to defend their community; they and he are like an Odysseus who abided with

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Kirke rather than returning to Ithaka. The "Negro leadership" is unwilling or unable to perform a successful ritual on behalf of the community; either the ritual fails, or it is not on behalf of the people.

Ellison's critics, with the halfhearted exception of Griffiths, treat Ellison's use of Lord Raglan as a transparent delving for mythic archetypes. But even looking at Raglan's list of twenty-two common elements of the hero's life, something should stand out: <u>Raglan's</u> <u>particular</u> <u>concern</u> <u>is</u> <u>with</u> <u>the</u> <u>hero</u> <u>as</u> <u>leader</u> <u>and</u> <u>legislator</u>. Unlike Campbell, who emphasizes the hero's journey into the underworld, Raglan is interested principally in the hero's career as king: ritual and politics are not distinct; both assert authority both over a community and for that community, hence the relationship between ritual and leadership. In fact, Raglan's schema <u>does</u> <u>not</u> <u>even</u> <u>mention</u> the hero's journey into the underworld and resurrection; rather, the hero rises to kingship, makes laws, and then dies. To be sure, Lord Raglan acknowledges that the hero undergoes an underworld journey: "They do so in order that they may return from the dead as gods," he acknowledges, making him sound compatible with Schafer's reading of Campbell (165). But the subject is soon dropped, because the hero's kingship – the social aspect of heroism – is of more interest to him. One of Raglan's summaries of the significance of the mythic hero reads as follows:

> The conclusion that suggests itself is that the god is the hero as he appears in ritual, and the hero is the god as he appears in myth; in other words, the hero and the god are two different aspects of the same superhuman being. The myth describes the victories that the hero won over the forces inimical to his people, the laws and customs which he instituted

for their benefit and finally the apotheosis that enables him still to be their guardian and guide. (203)

The significance of the god/hero as legislator is foregrounded; he is a lawgiver as much as a warrior. The bumbling, speech-impeded Moses of Exodus is more of a hero (nineteen points) than the monster-slaying Perseus (eighteen points) by Raglan's account, because the hero's essence is not in martial deeds, but in the ritual characteristics of his leadership. Raglan's hero-king, like Ellison's ideal black leader, is a political being who represents his people through the use of ritual. Ritual does not substitute for politics; it is politics. Returning to Ellison's "Editorial Comment" from the last issue of The Negro Quarterly, Ellison asserts that the Negro leader must simultaneously integrate with the Negro people, define their relationship to technology and understand their myths and symbols: the simultaneous use of technology and myth is critical for an authentic leader.

This critical point has been missed in Ellison criticism. In "The Conscious Hero and the Rites of Man," John Wright acknowledges that "riffs on Lord Raglan's myth of heroic biography [guides] the ritual understructure" of the novel (222). Wright, though, argues that Rinehart is a "subversive antitype to Lord Raglan's hero of tradition" (224). Eventually, he argues that the narrator himself is "a thoroughgoing mock-heroic counterpart to Lord Raglan's hero of tradition" (225). What Wright has missed is the significance of Lord Raglan's inclusion of Moses as one of the people who best fits the model of the hero, for Moses is himself a transparently mock-heroic figure.[73] Lord Raglan's hero is a ritual hero and a leader, not necessarily a warrior; he can, in

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[73] Beyond Moses' old age and apparent speech impediment, we should consider the following adventure from Exodus:
So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went

fact, be something of a trickster himself. Lord Raglan hints at even more, by approvingly

quoting one Professor Hocart, who argued that "The clown. . . is the earth-cousin of the sky-king,

and so does everything topsy-turvy" (217). The clown is intimately connected to the god-hero (it

would be a wild exaggeration to connect Raglan's thought with Bakhtin's, but one with a

worthwhile core).

 Contra Wright, Ellison's mock-heroic epic is a development of Lord Raglan's work, not

an inversion of it. The mock heroic <u>is</u> nothing other than the heroic, as should have been

perfectly clear, at the latest, with the composition of <u>The</u> <u>Odyssey</u>, a worldwide ramble of one

damned thing after another, in which Odysseus' wit repeatedly gets him from out of the frying

pan and into the fire, and then, scorched, out of the fire again. Wright, wisely, sees the invisible

man in exactly this way: he is trapped in a picaresque world, and suffers one damned thing after

another:

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 up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he
lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put
it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other
on the other side, so his hands were steady until the sun set. And Joshua defeated Amalek and
his people with the sword. (Exodus 17: 10-13)
The broad comedy physical comedy needs little comment: two trembling old men need to find a way to
hold up the hands of an even older man, who trembles more. And yet the Bible has its "traditional"
heroes, in Wright's terminology – men like Samson, for instance. Mock-heroes are usually held in higher
regard than "traditional" heroes in the Bible, of course, as is made clear early in Genesis:
 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went
in to the daughters of humans, and bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of
old, warriors of renown.
  The Lord saw that the wickedness of humanity was great in the earth, and that every
inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. (Genesis 6: 4-5)
The "heroes of old, warriors of renown" are clearly connected with the wickedness of humanity which
leads to the flood. The faithful Moses, for all of his physical weakness, is to be valued above the mighty
heroes. And yet, Moses fits admirably into Lord Raglan's schema, because that schema <u>is not about</u>
<u>"traditional" heroism at all</u>.

His apprenticeship to life and leadership, in the lenient logic of the bildungsroman, would have allowed him numerous mistakes of judgement and repeated chances to right himself without experiencing undue suffering. Instead, his "education" is hyperbolized, by the brutal logic of the picaresque, into a chronicle of comic catastrophe; and he is caught in a labyrinth where his errors unerringly cause him pain and where only a true picaro, who is born knowing and needs no education, would not err. (225)

But if this is picaresque, so is the world of The Odyssey, and so is the world of Exodus, in which a single misstep can lead to a lifetime of wandering, and another can lead to the denial of the promised land, even to Moses himself, to say nothing of the mock-heroic journey of Jonah, who is first conjured, along with Melville, in the introduction of Invisible Man (9-10). Ellison's mock-heroic is traditional, that is, a variation on a mythic form which is related to the stories of Moses and Odysseus; this use of tradition, together with an understanding of his (and the people's) relationship with technology are necessary to his quest for leadership. This is not a satire of Raglan, but a wholesale adoption of him as part of a particular politics. But Wright has by no means missed the political significance of myth; he refers, in fact, to The Negro Quarterly:

> . . . the zoot-suited trio in New York's subway underground provides a focal image for unmasking the character of leadership in the urban North. There, in symbolic tableau, Ellison's meditations on Raglan's heroic mythology and the problem of black leadership converge explicitly in a riddle of cultural creativity that his 1942-1943 Negro Quarterly editorials had proposed as a functional test in political decipherment for those who would be masters of social movements. Ellison's assertion then that the zoot suit. . . might conceal "profound political meaning" crucial to black leaders expands here, in the wake

of the genuinely tragic death of Tod Clifton. . . into a metaphysical consolidation of all

those notions of history, culture, consciousness, art, war and dominion that the ritual

progress of the hero-narrator has cumulatively brought to the surface. (257)

But Wright, although dealing with myth and, implicitly, with the leader's integration with the

people, at this point ignores the third part of the triad, technology. In the absence of this member

of the triad (which is the entry point of the timeless into history, to refer back to "Change the

Joke and Slip the Joke"), the myth begins to seem like mere myth, rather than a component of a

radical new politics. And indeed, late in his essay, Wright downplays the significance of the

ritual and the hero as such: in a move which is typical of much of contemporary literature and

criticism – call it a move towards postmodernism – the proper subject of all art becomes art, and

the proper subject of criticism becomes criticism. For Wright, the hero is most interesting not as

the hero, but as an artist, and the ritual as such becomes artistic ritual (Wright is specifically

commenting on the singing on the occasion of Clifton's funeral):

> In this dramatic image of art and leadership conjoined, the undergirding logic of the
>
> narrator's epilogue reveals itself. For the problems of heroic leadership in Invisible Man
>
> through which Ellison focused his extrapolations from myth, folk tradition, history, and
>
> political philosophy ultimately move toward resolution through the assimilation of the
>
> myth of the birth of the hero to the myth of the birth of the artist. Though rarely read in
>
> such terms, the book is, as Ellison has quietly insisted, a "portrait of the artist as rabble-
>
> rouser." (244)

The hero – Raglan's political and potentially mock-heroic hero – has been subordinated to the

artist; the novel has conquered the epic, and Lord Raglan has been subordinated to Ellison, not to

mention James Joyce. The movement of the novel, instead of towards a new, authentic leadership (drawing on a polyphony of myth and technology) is towards modernist, artistic resolution. This is straightforward progress, driven towards the telos of resolution, of the kind which the Brotherhood embraces, and of which the narrator his learned to be wary. Even though the myth of the hero is, according to most of Ellison's interpreters, supposed to be cyclic (to accord with the cycle of the seasons, etc.) the meaning of Ellison's use of the myth of the hero, is (we are told) highly linear: the myth of the artist owes something to the myth of the hero, and then moves onward and upward from there. This in spite of the fact that Raglanian heroes can be artists: again, we should think of Moses, allegedly the author of the Torah, and of the artisan Odysseus.

Curiously, while Wright has given arguably the best account of Ellison and myth he has also given arguably the best account of Ellison and technology, in "'Jack the Bear Dreaming': Ellison's Spiritual Technologies" (1993) and "Ellison's Experimental Attitude and the Technologies of Illumination" (2005). In the later essay, Wright acknowledges that "we as readers" have understated the "least acknowledged corner – revolutionary technological modernity – of what he often posits as a triangular sense of African-American identity" (161). What Wright misses is that the triad stands together: myth and technology must now, according to Ellison, be part of a single politics, which helps to forge Ellison's distinctive temporality. The seeming modernity (future-orientation) of technology clashes with the seemingly backward-looking nature of mythology, and with the nowness of self-scrutiny. Ellison's great insight – his slightly different sense of time – is the revelation that technology does not only belong to the future (as I discussed in my first section), nor does the power of myth belong to the past (which is

a straightforward reading of Lord Raglan); he is, contra Wright, not moving <u>beyond</u> the story of

the epic hero. Ellison is demanding a technological, self-analytical mythic consciousness. This

is a thorough rejection of salvation history, for the self-analytical present contains both what is

customarily pushed into the distant past and what is pushed into the looming (disastrous or

wonderful) future. <u>Arche</u> and <u>telos</u>, <u>protos</u> and <u>eschatos</u> are run together in the (ritual) present.

   We should beware of readings of <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u> which smell too much of linear time and

progress, the ridiculed specialties of the Brotherhood and of the Tuskegee system. In the

introduction we have the powerful image of the yokel fighting the scientific boxer; the yokel

triumphs by stepping "inside of his opponent's sense of time" (8). The invisible man gives his

absurd speech on humility as the secret of <u>progress</u> (17). Trueblood at his most cunning refers to

progress: "You know, we gittin' to be a better-lookin' race of people. . ." (54). As he gradually

grows more discerning, the narrator mocks the "black rite of Horatio Alger (111). Brother Jack

at his worst teaches that "we stand at a terminal point in history" (306). When the invisible man,

still mystified and naive, contemplates Clifton's death and the events preceding it, he is

astonished that "he had chosen. . . to fall outside of <u>history</u>" (434). The introduction famously

proposes the boomerang, rather than the arrow or the spiral, as the proper model for time: "I have

been boomeranged across my head so much that I now can see the darkness of lightness" (6).

We are warned incessantly against images of progress, linearity, assimilation; things which had

been destroyed, forgotten or ignored boomerang back, as Jonathan Arac argues: "The spiral . . .

figure of historical progress. . . gets reconfigured as a painful, even dangerous form of closure"

(212). The narrator himself has boomeranged: "I am an <u>invisible</u> <u>man</u>. Thus I have come a long

way and returned and boomeranged a long way from the point in society toward which I

originally aspired (573). "The end was in the beginning," the last chapter before the epilogue

concludes (571).

Wright's move, which I take as emblematic both of criticism in general and of Ellison

criticism in particular, towards resolving the problem of the hero by making the hero into an

artist, partakes fully, if not consciously, in linear history, a notion of history-as-progress, towards

some set resolution; this is precisely the historical thinking, which Ellison (and Herndon)

repeatedly criticize, which assumes the ability of progressive intellectual elites to guide (or

reject) the benighted masses; these elites, both black and white, assume Trueblood's

backwardness and ignorance of the technology which, in fact, is his only desire. The hero must

become an artist if history is to be justified. Wright's criticism, that is, takes part in the very

same salvific history which Ellison assaults.

Fittingly, Ellison's temporality, or at least certain aspects of it, has a great deal in

common with Lord Raglan's concept of the hero's time. The hero's time is not an arrow or a

spiral: it is <u>ritual</u> time. One aspect of ritual time is familiar. It is a cyclical concept of history, in

which chronology is confused or nonexistent (Raglan 156). But although Lord Raglan begins the

following passage with a notion of cyclical history, he ends with something very different.

Quoting and expanding on one Professor Hooke and one Professor James, Lord Raglan writes:

> The cyclic movement of the seasons and the heavenly bodies, together with the ritual
>
> system associated with them, "inevitably tended to produce a view of Time as a vast
>
> circle in which the pattern of the individual life and of the course of history was a
>
> recurring cyclic process." This view of time as a ritual circle seems to have been carried
>
> over into Christianity, since, according to Professor James; "in the Eucharistic sacrifice

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the redemptive work of Christ was celebrated, not as a mere commemoration of a historical event, for in the liturgy the past became the present, and the birth at Bethlehem and the death of Calvary were apprehended as ever-present realities independent of time and space."

It is difficult for those who regard rites and ceremonies as desirable but not indispensable aids to the attainment of certain religious or social ends to understand the attitude of those to whom ritual means life, life in the social as well as in the religious sense. Ritual is far more to millions today than history has ever been to anyone. (156)

The last sentence is most striking: the importance of "history" – that is, the arrow or the spiral – remains marginal, despite all "progress," compared to the importance of ritual. And ritual has its own temporal characteristics. Lord Raglan, who is anything but a systematic thinker, for all his tables and charts, happily contradicts himself in this passage. On the one hand, we have the entirely conventional notion that the pre-modern (or savage) notion of time was cyclical, not linear, although he also introduces the notion that this pre-modern understanding of time still survives.[74] But then immediately we are given James' notion of Eucharistic time, in which the ritual literally allows the past to erupt into the present – and yet this "past" is not really the past, but belongs to some "other" time. Lord Raglan continues by arguing that the ritual, which has just been pinned down as an eruption of the "past" into the present, is life itself. Time is not a spiral; the ritual moment is a boomerang emerging into the present with explosive power. Hence the victory of the yokel over the scientific boxer: if the "other" time into which the yokel has

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[74] I have heard strangers assert – on what sort of basis, I have no idea – that the Iraqi sense of time is alien to "our" sense of time, that it is cyclical and without a concept of progress.

entered is ritual time, he has entered into power. To push the point a little further: for Lord

Raglan, the story of the hero is not based on biography or history, but on the demands of ritual.

The story of the hero's life is ritual, and is an alternative to chronological time, in Raglan's

revision of Frazer.[75] But to what purpose, one might ask? It's simple enough: for Ellison, as we

see from his "Editorial Comment" through his Collected Essays, in "The Little Man in Chehaw

Station," for instance, or in "Harlem is Nowhere," it is critical to recognize the humanity and

modernity of black men and women everywhere; there is no question, as in Booker T.

Washington, that the "race" needs to "rise" or "progress." Once we accept linear history, though,

the oppressed are to be pitied at best or scorned at worst: they need to be either uplifted or

oppressed more; as Michael Adas details through Machines as the Measure of Man, they are

especially in need of technological discipline, not to mention assimilation; a technological

identity and a folk identity are opposed. To combine them is to resist history-as-progress, which

is to resist the very structure of (American) oppression. By appropriating Lord Raglan's

opposition of myth to history (and prioritization of the former), Ellison undermines history-as-

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[75] For Frazer the power of ritual ultimately collapses into linear truth (although, to be fair, the
Modernists who appropriated Frazer perhaps tended to see things more as Raglan does). Frazer argues
that we owe a debt to our "savage ancestors" for putting us where we are today

> It is only by the successive testing of hypotheses and rejection of the false that truth is at last
> elicited. After all, what we call truth is only the hypothesis which is found to work best.
> Therefore in reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages and races we shall do well to
> look with leniency upon their errors as inevitable slips made in the search for truth, and to give
> them the benefit of that indulgence which we ourselves may one day stand in need of (307).

Truth, although relative and imperfect, is steadily perfected through a falsification (shades of Karl
Popper), as progress marches on. For Lord Raglan, on the other hand, we are not tidily distinct from
savages at all; Frazer's confidence in the march of human progress (and his gratitude to his savage
ancestors for playing their part in that progress) has dissolved. The tidy continuity of history is
marginalized; myth, rather than being sidelined by the march of history, continues to loom over it. Hence
Ellison's appropriation of Lord Raglan, for all of his flaws, rather than Frazer, for all of his
sophistication: ritual is not, for Lord Raglan, something which we can ever abandon, no matter how our
hypotheses develop.

progress without having to give up the potential of technology, which helps to constitute the particular historical moment into which the myth erupts. Ellison's Negro is distinctively modern, because of rather than in spite of folk beliefs (the zoot suit, again).

This is not to say that normal, chronological time does not exist for Raglan, or for Ellison under Raglan's influence, but that it is less important than the ritual time which erupts into it. Faith in the efficacy of the ritual, according to Raglan:

> . . . is induced by myth, which not merely links the ritual of the present with the ritual of the past, but actually identifies the present, in its ritual aspect, with a past conceived solely in terms of ritual – a past, that is to say, in which superhuman figures devote themselves to the performance of acts which are the prototypes of the ritual. The stories of their activities, the myths, then perform the dual function of sanctifying and of standardizing the ritual. This standardization of myth is never complete, however, before the introduction of writing. . . (97)

The time of the ritual is not exactly linear time or chronological time; it is the coexistence of two times together, or an invasion of chronological time by a kind of outside time (more radically than it is with Frazer).[76] The function of the myth is to generate faith in the ritual; the function of writing is to stabilize and finalize the myth. The myth is a "narrative connected with a rite"

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[76] Any hint at Lovecraftian (even Borgesian) occultism and horror conjured by "outside" time is, of course, strictly intentional. It would require – and warrant – a whole book to trace out the few successes and endless failures of modern fantasy, science fiction and horror to grapple with "Other" time, ritual time, but it would be well worth the effort.

Typically, of course, the "ritual" time which such works invoke is a political fantasy – take, for instance, the ritual invocation of the antebellum South in Newt Gingrich's alternate history novels, or the pseudo-fascist fantasies of Robert E. Howard.

These books are dangerous. All the more reason why the use of ritual time should not be abandoned to them.

(109). The concern of the rite, of course, is with power, with shaping and controlling the world: the concerns, in other words, of leadership.

Reading Raglan's ritual time as a powerful influence upon Ellison's design, we can see that the invisible man's movement underground, into his hibernation, is a removal into ritual time which nonetheless remains saturated with technology; his life, in essence, becomes a ritual, with his 1,369 lightbulbs, his reefer-dreams and his ritual near-slaughter of the man who had "called him an insulting name" (4). Ritual is an aspect of his invisibility, and one reason why he refers to himself, not only as invisible, but as a "phantom" and as "ectoplasm" (3, 4); he, like a creature from a monster movie, has become Other than flesh, Other than real. He has been afflicted with the boomerang of history, but he has also become the boomerang, the eruption of ritual world and time into the "real" world and time which, following Lord Raglan, matters less to anyone than the ritual world and time matters to most.

Invisible Man's vision of clashing concepts of time bears a deep kinship to Lord Raglan's concept of mythic time in opposition to chronological time; the hibernating Jack-the-Bear, beyond being a hero who has gone into the underworld, has entered into mythic, "timeless" time. The invisible man's biography follows Lord Raglan's schema nearly as well as the biography of Oedipus, and better than Moses, who fits it remarkably well. The full depth of the kinship of Ellison's text to Lord Raglan's has not received critical acknowledgement, partially because it is easy to caricature Lord Raglan, for instance, by opposing the Raglanian hero to the mock-hero, when the Raglanian hero easily encompasses the mock-heroic; Raglan's theory of history and ritual is displaced in favor of the twenty-two bullet points.

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None of this is to say that Ellison is some kind of pupil of Raglan's, although I may have

given that impression so far. But it is critical to clarify the depth of the connection between them

in order to then demonstrate how Ellison uses Raglan (I mean at no point to imply that Ellison

has merely repeated Raglan) to develop his vision of leadership, as articulated in The Negro

Quarterly before it was developed in Invisible Man – a topic to which I will eventually return.

E. ELLISON'S MUMFORD

Ralph Ellison's interest in Lewis Mumford is transparently obvious in the early chapters of

Invisible Man: the bar to which the invisible man takes Norton, prostrated by his encounter with

Trueblood, is named The Golden Day, in a pointed reference to Mumford's The Golden Day

(1926). In his Invisible Criticism (1988), Alan Nadel gives a detailed reading of Ellison's use of

and response to Mumford, which he sees as principally a negative response, at least within the

pages of the novel; despite various flaws in Nadel's work, it is the only criticism which has

treated Ellison's relationship to Mumford at length.

Nadel points out that the bar (and the book for which it stands) is mentioned thirty-four

times through Invisible Man (85). Mumford's book is, as Nadel recognizes, a celebration of an

ostensible high point in American culture: the age of Emerson, or more accurately of Emerson,

Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne and Melville, a book which sees in these authors a kind of

pinnacle of thought and spiritual triumph, which is ultimately wrecked by the Civil War, and the

desolation and corruption which follows it. "Mumford's argument requires that we see the Civil

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War as a turn for the worse," argues Nadel; most of Mumford's readers would certainly agree

(Nadel 88). Mumford even at his best is obtuse, in his inimitable paleo-leftist fashion, to even

the most glaring of racial issues, and in The Golden Day he is not at his best. Nadel's compact

reading of the book is perfect:

> oversimplification is at its core. It seeks to reduce the course of American literature to
>
> one dramatic action. The book is, in fact, organized like a classic tragedy, in which we
>
> see enacted a drama whose hero is the individual and antagonist the machine. The
>
> "Golden Day," the period from 1830 to 1860 that historians often call the Era of Reform,
>
> was, according to Mumford, the period when the individual had the greatest hopes of
>
> triumphing. Alas . . . he did not. Industrialism, the machine, the Gilded Age triumphed;
>
> materialism, cynicism, shallowness replaced idealism, optimism, depth. Revealing this
>
> tragedy is the purpose of Mumford's book. (86)

And yet this thinker who wanted to boil down complex history into a simplistic morality play

was also in the process, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, of founding American

architectural criticism and a new field which we might call technology studies, in such books as

Technics and Civilization. One wonders if Nadel knew of Mumford's lifelong ambition to be a

novelist and especially a playwright (Mumford, Sketches 370). The language of The Golden Day

(some of which I dealt with in chapter three) is melodramatic, but it reads easily; its characters

become principles and its principles, characters. The Golden Day is, more than even Nadel

admits, criticism as art. As hard as it is to recognize now, in a critical era shaped by high theory

and sophisticated historicism, it was a spellbinding book, critical to the intellectual formation of

figures from Van Wyck Brooks to F.O. Matthiessen; yet it was a book of which the older

Mumford could readily confess that it was not a bad book for a young man, as long as one did not use the young Melville for comparison; similar disparaging comments about The Golden Day pepper Mumford's later work (Brooks-Mumford, 409). The older Mumford would possibly even have agreed with Nadel's assertion that the book was "a fictive conception, an ode to a period that never existed" (92).

But that is precisely its power, even if we have difficulty accessing that power. Mumford (under the influence of Van Wyck Brooks) was not simply composing an ode to an era that never existed; he was creating it and the rough outlines of the canon of early nineteenth century American Literature as most of us have known it. One of Mumford's projects was to create a new literary genealogy for himself, a genealogy which, as I argued in chapter three, was to have great consequences for his later work, once one understands that Melville, not Emerson, is at the true center of Mumford's canon. One may concede that inventing a heritage for one's own work is hardly unusual among authors, but the sheer repercussive, contradictory (how to encompass both Melville and Emerson? This is the second great duality, along with that of organism and machine, which troubles the book) force with which Mumford did it reminds one of Ellison's forceful claim in "The World and the Jug" and elsewhere that he has created his own literary ancestry, exemplified by Hemingway and T.S. Eliot, not Richard Wright (Essays 185).

Nadel reluctantly acknowledges the enormous influence of The Golden Day, including the debt which Matthiessen owed to it, but – presumably because it is a drama, rather than proper criticism (contemporary criticism tends to see the critic in the artist more willingly than the artist in the critic) – downplays its particular importance:

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The Golden Day is an appropriate target for Ellison, therefore, not because it was the

most significant book of its type but because it was one of the earliest and most typical:

one that represents a typical whitewashing of American history, one that flows from

exactly that social/historical consciousness that forced the black into invisibility. (94)

Mumford's book is not distinctive, but representative.

Nadel admits that the chapter set in the Golden Day is not merely a satire of Mumford. In

fact, he argues that "Mumford's book becomes one which confers the right name for the wrong

reasons" (98). Nadel argues that the complexity and "protean aspects of the period" gave it a

unique, chaotic energy: "the Golden Day was on the brink of chaos which the tradition of

American criticism erased. The school . . . made it 'respectable' for the eyes of Mr. Norton,"

who is, we recall, a fan of Emerson (98). Norton does, indeed, find stimulation in the Golden

Day, just not the kind he had bargained for: he finds "riot, chaos, manic energy," but also irony

(101). Ellison's relationship with Mumford is critical, but also complex. Very near the end of

his chapter on Mumford, Nadel argues that the movement of the invisible man to the North,

where he is caught in an explosion and is "given an electric lobotomy" represents "not only the

motion of American blacks from the South to the North and from the farm to the city, but also

from the nineteenth to the twentieth century" (103).

Strangely, Nadel argues that after the Golden Day, the invisible man moves immediately

into industrialization, into his dehumanizing encounter with the hospital machine. In other words,

Ellison reproduces the central conflict of The Golden Day, culture versus machine, as Nadel put

it, soon after the narrator leaves the literal Golden Day. When he moves North, away from the

ancestral home of prejudice and slavery, he encounters enslavement at the hands of the machine.

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This movement from quasi-slavery in the South to mechanized slavery in the North is, in fact, Mumford's understanding of the Civil War: as a conflict between two kinds of servitude, the slave and the machine; Nadel willingly ignores this powerful correspondence between the "plot" of <u>The Golden Day</u> and the plot of <u>Invisible Man</u> (<u>Golden</u>, 136). The South is not innocent, however, of mechanical Domination (think of the electrified mat at the beginning, and of the power plant at the school), while the north is not free of old-fashioned racism. Both mechanical domination and the consequences of slavery are revealed in multiple places and times; the meaning of the machine is always ambiguous, offering both enslavement and rebirth in the power plant at the College, in Brockway's basement, in the hospital machine and, finally, with the descent into the coal cellar at the end of the novel. After his plummet, he loses himself underground, and dreams of being castrated by Brother Jack, Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton, Ras and others:

> "Still," I said, "there's your universe, and that drip-drop upon the water you hear is all the history you've made, all you're going to make. Now laugh, you scientists. Let's hear you laugh!"
>
> And high above me now the bridge seemed to move off to where I could not see, striding like a robot, an iron man, whose iron legs clanged doomfully as it moved. And then I struggled up, full of sorrow and pain, shouting, "No, no, we must stop him!" (570)

Immediately after this moment, the narrator wakes up in the coal cellar. After a dream which ended with his defiance of the power of the scientists, in which he accuses their history of emptiness, and in which a part of the technological power which they seemed to command rises up with a new volition of its own, he awakes into the place (and time, or understanding of time),

which is going to become the site of his own technological power, a place which (as I discussed

at the beginning) mirrors in detail the Tuskegee power plan after which Trueblood lusts. There is

a deep ambivalence (not hostility, as such) to science and technology in this passage; it is

associated with the history that his enemies have made, but also with his laughter in response to

that history; the iron man is not under their control, any more than it is under his.[77] Nadel is

correct that oversimplification is at the core of The Golden Day, but Ellison does not simply

satirize it; he digs under the surface of its simplistic drama to show a complex drama that,

nonetheless, owes much to the one which Mumford laid out.

"The end was in the beginning" is the phrase which both ends the prologue and sends the

reader to the time of the prologue and epilogue (Invisible Man, 571). This phrase reminds us of

Ellison's deep affiliation with European modernism (the cyclic nature of Finnegan's Wake being

the most extreme example), but even more directly of Ellison's use of Dostoevsky's Notes from

Underground (so important to both himself and to Richard Wright), which provides the model

for Ellison's structure, although Dostoevsky's epilogue is more radically truncated than Ellison's,

and is not separated from the body of his main text. Ellison adopts the circular

hyperconsciousness of Dostoevsky's narrator, which is already a political consciousness oriented

against history-as-progress, as we see when the underground man mocks the "crystal edifice,

---

[77] Nadel understands this passage as being partially an ambivalence about Emerson, as we see below:

> The mechanical man thus becomes for the invisible man both his revenge and his nightmare, but this nightmare has an oddly Emersonian character. First, the generation of the mechanical man in a grotesque way parallels the process described in the poem at the beginning of "Circles". . . In a more full way, too, the invisible man's position embraces – or perhaps it is better to say fails to escape – the principles of "Self-Reliance" and the world view of "Circles." (121-2)

Emersonian optimism becomes a circle that cannot be broken, a dream that cannot be escaped, a machine that cannot be evaded or defeated.

forever indestructible" which is based on the crystal palace of the London Exhibition of 1851,

which is normally understood as a central moment in the history of human progress or, of the

story of human progress (35).[78]   Ellison's impulse is towards aesthetic modernism, but also

towards a Dostoevskian rebellion against progressive history itself; he outdoes Dostoevsky by

stripping Dostoevsky's chaotic, underground world of the hope of a Christian eschatos which

sometimes leavens it, especially in The Idiot and Crime and Punishment.[79] Unlike Dostoevsky's

narrator, though, the invisible man is ultimately struggling not for anonymity but for leadership,

or at least for the possibility of a new leadership. His politics, unlike those of Dostoevsky's

underground man and of Mumford's hypothetical, Thoreauean protestor against mechanical

civilization, are meant to ultimately return directly to the outside world: "Please, a definition: A

hibernation is a covert preparation for a more overt action" (Invisible Man 13). Dostoevsky's

underground man has taken the plunge outside history; Ellison's underground man uses a

synthesis of technology and myth to be both inside and outside history. He is underground, but

ready to erupt in to the world.

　　When the narrator finds his power and his mythic struggle, it is with a political opponent,

"Monopolated Light and Power" (5), as megatechnic a name as we could imagine, from which he

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[78] Dostoevsky's text is most directly a response to Chernyshevsky's 1862 utopian novel What is
to be Done, which was a major influence on Lenin; Dostoevsky's anti-socialist nationalism is one basis
for Ellison's similar position.

[79] The Adolescent, on the other hand, is the one great novel of Dostoevsky's which comes nearest
to repudiating salvation history; the classical Golden Age is mocked at great length, but nothing comes to
replace it. Consequently, The Adolescent is translated, published and read far less often than
Dostoevsky's other major novels. The Idiot is most explicit in its endorsement of salvation history, by
offering the promise, uttered by the epileptic Prince Myshkin, that "time shall be no more" (Part 2, Ch. 5;
227). Ironically, The Idiot is perhaps the most temporally bizarre of Dostoevsky's novels, moving in fits
and starts which I have always believed make the novel formally epileptic.

steals the power for his lights. The Invisible Man has, in the prologue (which is in the end),

despite his terrible vision of the apocalyptic arrival of the mechanical man, entered into the "great

American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I

have a theory and a concept, 'a thinker-tinker.'" (7). His further development of his defiance of

the "scientists," of his Dostoevskian decision to follow Clifton by plunging outside history, and

of his response to his dream of the mechanical man, is to become, in his mythological,

underworld setting as Jack-the-Bear, a thinker-tinker. It is his technological orientation which

clarifies his existence as a political figure, as opposed to Dostoevsky's underground man; it is no

accident that the master inventors who he mentions were, even more than inventors, political-

managerial figures, as are engineers in general. Making, thinking and leading are no longer

divided, nor is epistemology any longer prior to technology, once he has plunged outside history.

One interesting side-effect of this change is to wipe out the hierarchical relationship between

science and technology which has become dominant in Western thought: technology is liberated

from the scientists, who seek to control history.[80] By stepping outside history, he has escaped

the process by which he is excluded from progressive history, as, we might note, most black

inventors and engineers have been.[81]

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[80] Ellison critics, like literary critics in general, tend to confuse science with technology. John
Callahan's article "'Riffing' and Paradigm Building" (1987) is one example; Callahan continually
emphasizes Ellison's interest in "the theory and practice of science and technology" (93). This accepts
the mainstream acceptance of the priority of technology over science, which perpetuates what Giedion
calls the anonymity of technology, which, I assert in the spirit of Technology and the African-American
Experience, in turn silently perpetuates and mirrors racial hierarchies. Technology must not be buried
within discourses about science.

[81] See Portia James' "Invention and Innovation, 1619-1930" in Technology and the African-
American Experience for details. Which isn't to say that black inventors could always be shut out
entirely; see Bruce Sinclair's "Pictures from an Exhibition" from the same volume, which briefly
discusses Thomas Calloway and W.E.B. Du Bois's exhibit in the Palace of Social Economy at the Paris

In another move which mirrors or restages Mumford's drama of culture and the machine, in which the latter imposes automatism which must be shaken off -- possibly, as in <u>Technics</u> <u>and</u> <u>Civilization</u>, through contemporary, etherialized technologies, Neotechnics, which includes electrification -- the invisible man finds life as soon as he has discovered his invisibility and rejected

> I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility.

> That is why I fight my battle with Monopolated Light & Power. The deeper reason. I mean: It allows me to feel my vital aliveness. (7)

The organic fights the machine, albeit by mechanical means, which is a major theme in Mumford. Many readers, including Nadel, who focus on such early works as <u>The</u> <u>Golden</u> <u>Day</u>, understand Mumford's struggle between life and the machine as coming to a head around the Civil War, but as I have argued earlier, Mumford eventually came to understand that the struggle between Organism and Machine was not exclusively of our time, but that it shot or cut through history; he was especially fond of comparisons between Western civilization and those of Babylon and Egypt.

Exposition of 1900. See also the Du Bois edited <u>The Negro Artisan</u> (1902)

A vital point which is made in the latter work is that "Negro machinists were also becoming numerous before the downfall of slavery." For instance, many Southern railroads had "their entire train crews, expect the conductors, made up of slaves – including engineers and firemen" (17). In other words, because Trueblood was a sharecropper does not mean that his grandfather or great-grandfather were not engineers or blacksmiths.

Incidentally, this book reproduces a speech that Booker T. Washington gave in praise of Du Bois' work in gathering data on "The Negro artisan".

One concern which both Du Bois and Washington had was that black mechanics and artisans were being increasingly, rather than decreasingly, pushed out of technical training and technical positions. This ongoing concern is one source (presumably indirect) of Ellison's emphasis on technology.

John Wright analyzes the relationship between Mumford's understanding of technology and Ellison's understanding of technology at considerable length in "'Jack-the-Bear' Dreaming: Ellison's Spiritual Technologies." At the heart of his essay is the critical point that, for Ellison as for Mumford, there is a fundamental connection between artistic <u>technique</u> and mechanical <u>technology</u>.[82] Early in his argument, Wright quotes the entirety of a footnote from Nadel's <u>Invisible</u> <u>Criticism</u>, which is an excerpt from a personal communication from Ellison to Nadel regarding Ellison's relationship to Mumford. Curiously, despite the clear centrality of the quote to understanding that relationship, it is included only as a footnote to a passage about Mumford's whitewashing of American history. Like Wright, I am reproducing the entire quote:

> It wasn't that I didn't admire Mumford. I have owned a copy of the sixth Liveright printing of THE GOLDEN DAY since 1937 and own, and have learned from, most of his books. I was simply upset by his implying that the war which freed my grandparents from slavery was of no real consequence to the broader issues of American society and its culture. What else, other than sheer demonic, masochistic hell-raising, was that bloody war all about if not slavery and the contentions which flowed there-from? As a self-instructed student I was quite willing for Mumford to play Aeschylus, Jeremiah, or even God, but not at the price of his converting the most tragic incident in American history into bombastic farce. For in doing so he denied my people the sacrificial role which they had played in the drama. (Nadel 158)

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[82] Also see Callahan's "'Riffing' and Paradigm Building" on this topic. He makes many of the critical moves and missteps as Wright does, by insisting on seeing Ellison's focus on technology metaphorically instead of literally. This is not to say that Callahan and Wright's readings don't <u>work</u>; they work very well, but it is important that we take technology literally before we take it metaphorically.

This passage is, not coincidentally, almost pure Raglan; Ellison's people played a sacrificial <u>role</u> in the <u>drama</u>; in his West Point address, quoted earlier, Ellison had specifically referred to Lord Raglan's interest in drama. That interest takes this form: the drama is a particular form of the ritual. In Ellison's understanding the Civil War as a whole becomes a ritual drama (he, unlike Nadel, does not criticize Mumford for reducing history to drama), which <u>must</u> be meaningful.

For Ellison to claim that he had read and learned from most of Mumford's books clearly implies a broad familiarity with Mumford's books on the city and technology; although <u>The Golden Day</u> is the target of Ellison's ire, it is an ire which is contextualized within broad interest and general agreement. Ellison even, unlike Nadel himself, doesn't object to Mumford "playing Aeschylus" and turning American history into a drama; his sin is narrow and highly specific: Mumford denies the particular significance of the Civil War as at least partially liberating. As Wright acknowledges, Ellison's admiration for Mumford includes a Mumfordian understanding of "the <u>omnipresence</u> of technology and the machine, and the artist's moral obligation to envision aesthetic possibilities for the machine that will not reinforce the fragmenting, life-denying, dehumanizing conditions created by capitalist technology" (<u>Spiritual</u> <u>Technologies</u>, 178).

As in Mumford, so in Ellison: machine and organism are inevitably at war, as we see most dramatically in the invisible man's second birth from the hospital machine and his ecstasy/disgust at the arrival of the mechanical man at the end of the novel. And yet technology is fundamentally, deeply human, an inescapable reality and a source of endless potential, while Ellison, unlike Mumford, has no sympathy for the pastoral: the machine may be dangerous, but Trueblood does not exist in any Jeffersonian rural Eden – or rather, he pays the price for whatever existence it has; "nature" has limited appeal for him. For Mumford the question is

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always one of balance, of ends and of means: how is technology to be used for human purposes,
rather than being merely part of a faceless and monstrous technological system, or
megamachine? For Ellison, the important questions tends to be more concrete: how can people,
especially black people, be liberated rather than enslaved by technology? How does one become
a thinker-tinker, rather than a victim? Once again I find myself quoting exactly the same passage
as Wright, although for somewhat different purposes; the passage is from the "interview" "Some
Questions and Some Answers," in which (quoting Wright), Ellison "addresses directly the
problematic role of modern industrial evolution in 'the spiritual crisis of the Negro people of our
times" (Spiritual Technologies, 182):

> The role of modern industrial evolution in the spiritual crisis of those whom you refer to
> as "negro" peoples seems to me to be as ambiguous as its role in the lives of peoples of
> any racial identity: it depends upon how much human suffering must go into the
> achievement of industrialization, upon who operates the industries, upon how the
> products and profits are shared, and upon the wisdom used in imposing technology upon
> the institutions and traditions of each particular society. Ironically, black men with the
> status of slaves contributed much of the brute labor which helped get the Industrial
> Revolution under way; in this process they were exploited, their natural resources were
> ravaged, their institutions and their cultures were devastated, and in most instances they
> were denied anything like participation in the European cultures which flowered as a
> result of the transformation of civilization under the growth of technology. But now it is
> precisely technology which promises them release form the brutalizing effects of over
> three hundred years of racism and European domination. Men cannot unmake history:

thus it is not a question of reincarnating those cultural traditions which were destroyed, but a matter of using industrialization, modern medicine, modern science generally, to work in the interest of these peoples rather than against them. . . One thing seems clear: certain possibilities of culture are achievable only through the presence of industrial techniques.

It is not industrial progress per se which damages peoples or cultures; it is the exploitation of peoples in order to keep the machines fed with raw materials. It seems to me that the whole world is moving toward some new cultural synthesis, and partially through the discipline imposed by technology. There is, I believe, a threat when industrialism is linked to a political doctrine which has as its goal the subjugation of the world. (Essays, 293-4)

This passage offers as part of its riches a concretized version of Heidegger's essential argument from "The Question Concerning Technology": humanity is in danger from a technological system, but in the heart of the danger "a saving power grows," which is technology itself ("Question" 32). Heidegger, Mumford and Ellison alike understand that "technology" or even "the technological system" are not essentially an array of artifacts, but are more essentially a set of techniques which are not unlike artistic techniques. The danger of technology is that humanity will be turned into just another raw material, or "standing reserve," in Heidegger's terminology.

What is critically different in Ellison, as opposed to Mumford or Heidegger, is that Ellison is not writing about the abstract future fear that humanity will be fully subjugated; the saving power in the heart of technology, rather, is the only saving power available to people who have already been fully subordinated, who have already become standing-reserve, to whom the

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"middle state" before the locomotive's arrival is <u>slavery</u>. "Now it is precisely technology which

promises them release from the brutalizing effects of over three hundred years of racism and

European domination." Ellison knows from the beginning what Mumford had begun to

understand by the time he wrote <u>The Pentagon of Power</u> (1970): the danger of technological

domination is another variation of the same slavery which afflicted Babylon and Egypt, and this

slavery was fundamentally technological, that is, a <u>technique</u> of management and domination

over people who are also technological themselves, which takes me back, briefly, to Melville.

 <u>Invisible Man</u> begins with a epigraph from Melville's "Benito Cereno," a tale about the

struggle between a group of rebellious slaves on the one hand and their former Spanish masters

and an American ship on the other hand.[83] The ex-slaves have numbers on their side, along with

a true understanding of the situation; the American ship has superior arms and a certainty of their

own righteousness and superiority. One of the many ironies of the story is that the superior

intelligence of Babo, the leader of the rebellion, is insufficient to secure victory: brute force and

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[83] Nadel details a rich set of references to "Benito Cereno" in <u>Invisible Man</u> (particularly the chapter on "The Golden Day"), including "a pale, traumatized aristocrat [Benito Cereno/Norton], in the grip of imprisoned blacks who have violently overthrown their overseer [who] is both sustained and abused by these blacks" (107). Nadel argues that Ellison understood Melville much earlier than mainstream criticism, which was still obsessed with the idea of Babo as a symbol of evil. What was special in Melville, according to Nadel, was that in such works as "Benito Cereno" he was able to use the "Negro as symbol of man," linking the "democratic Experiment" and the "Negro Question" (111). Ellison, then, by Nadel's reading, reiterates

> Melville's objections to Emerson [and thus, implicitly, to America] – that he failed to confront evil. Mumford failed to see this difference between Emerson and Melville , and Matthiessen failed to see it in its political/historical context, which wedded the question of slavery to the question of evil. When Ellison has the Emersonian, Mr. Norton, enter the Golden Day to play the role of Don Benito Cereno, he has in one densely allusive dream scene rewritten a literary tradition. Ellison has created a world in which the allusions comment not only on tradition, but constantly on one another. (122)

Where I differ from Nadel is in his failure to discuss Melville and Mumford together (and then to discuss both in relationship to Ellison's understanding of technology), when even the structure of his book invites him to do exactly that.

certainty win the day. Babo has something in common with Queequeg: he needs to master a variety of Western technologies (mostly meant in the sense of "techniques"), especially navigation, and cannot do so sufficiently quickly, and so his rebellion perishes. He shares something of Queequeg's Petrine dream.

As I have documented in earlier chapters, the essential movement in Mumford's late work was towards Melville: he may have masqueraded as an Emersonian early in his career, but he wrote one book on Melville and planned to write another, while the shadow of Melville and Melville's pyramid lays across long over Mumford's later work. The epigraph from "Benito Cereno" which opens Invisible Man is the famous line: "'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?" The answer in Melville's text, of course, is "The Negro." Ellison doesn't complete the line, but lets it hang in silence; in Nadel's argument, this reveals that "the book is a critique on American blindness masked as American optimism" (105). This American blindness/optimism is associated with both Emerson and Mumford. And yet, from the beginning of the novel, one of Ellison's obsessions is with unfolding a kind of conflict between Organism and Machine which is the very conflict that Mumford uses to displace the moral meaning of the Civil War from his national drama – although in all fairness we should note that part of the reason for Mumford's loathing for the Civil War, after all, was that "the negro question" persisted after it; the Civil War didn't work (Golden 158). Ellison, in turn, displaces Mumford: the dramatic conflict between individual and machine exists, but is drawn out, with both sides becoming ambiguous – do we side with Norton's individualism rather than the machine, for instance?

For both Mumford and Ellison, Melville becomes a pivotal figure for understanding the question of evil in America, but while Mumford focuses on the implicitly Ahabian megamachine, Ellison is continually fascinated, both through the novel and in his non-fiction, with the relationship between technology and management on the one hand and the "problem" of America on the other hand, while still contextualizing these issues with race; he absorbs Mumford's concerns into his own, as one part of the triad necessary for a new, authentic leadership. Part of Captain Delano's blindness in <u>Benito</u> <u>Cereno</u> is his inability to understand Babo as a thinking, technical being, a tinker-thinker; Ellison takes up that project where Melville left it off, borrowing Mumford's analysis of technology in the process.

F. AUTOMATISM AND TIME

What Mumford only saw dimly, at the end of his career, shines throughout <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u>: the battle with the megamachine has always already been lost, but it is not therefore over. This is an understanding of the relationship between time and megatechnics conditioned by historical oppression, rather than by relative historical privilege; the <u>eschatos</u>, instead of imminent (as it is for so many thinkers), is buried in the deep past.

Ellison called for a Negro leadership based integration with the Negro masses, a definition of the Negro's relationship to technology and an understanding of Negro "myths and symbols." The reality of an oppression which is, in some sense, mechanical in character is resisted through myth, which does not, however, obviate the need for a technological response to

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this technological oppression, since the people have always been technological; there is no primordial past (whether in Eden, the deep South or Africa innocent of technology), as we see in the case of Trueblood.

Norton, the narrator and Trueblood all belong to the same system, with Norton on the top, the narrator near the bottom and Trueblood in the depths – with the distinction that Trueblood, like Babo, and unlike the invisible man, knows who he is and where he is, and lusts to seize a different position, with his very lust for machinery combining with the art of his story and his blues combining to make him a potent and complex rebel. Peasant that he is, he takes the role of the "yokel" against the "scientific boxer"; he steps inside Norton's sense of time, signified by literally stepping into the clock in his dream, bringing about the crisis that leads back to the Golden Day. The man from the black belt, the peasant, does not belong to a primitive world; he is mechanized and yearns to seize control of the machinery. One might argue, in fact, that Trueblood has all of the characteristics necessary for black leadership according to Ellison's "Editorial Comment," except for leadership itself. Nonetheless, he is the perfect material from which a true leader must learn, a test which the narrator fails with flying colors.

The blindness of the narrator and Norton compared to Trueblood is central to chapter three, which takes place in The Golden Day. The ex-brain surgeon who speaks with Norton and the narrator mocks them both, but especially the narrator:

> he has eyes and ears and a good distended African nose, but he fails to understand the simple facts of life. . . He registers with his senses but short-circuits his brain. Nothing has meaning. He takes it in but doesn't digest it. Already he is – well, bless my soul! Behold! A walking zombie! Already he's learned to repress not only his emotions but

his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect

achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man! (94)

The narrator is, like Trueblood, a mechanical man; unlike Trueblood, he doesn't understand his

situation, and therefore doesn't rebel against it. His desire for progress, as opposed to the simple

desire for the machine, has made him more mechanized than Trueblood. As a zombie, he lacks

the incestuous, miscegenous, power-plant-dominating urges which drive Babo and Trueblood.

Importantly, the ex-surgeon conflates the "mechanical man" with the "zombie"; the creature of

science fiction, the apostle of the future, is synonymous with the "primitivism" of voodoo.[84]

History boomerangs; the threat of automatism runs through all of it, as in Bergson (and in

Freud).[85]

Elsewhere in this chapter, the invisible man moves "automatically" (86). Norton is

described as "an aged doll" (84). After the near-apocalypse in the Golden Day, Norton

accidentally gives voices to the true (Mumfordian) relationship between himself and the invisible

man. After the invisible man asks if Norton will need him in the evening, Norton responds "No,

I won't be needing the machine" (108). For all of Ellison's critique of Mumford, at this moment

Norton is the typical Mumfordian northern industrialist, who has displaced one kind of slavery

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[84] The primitivism of voodoo, of course, is a creation of the mass media, and yet the mass media has always commented on that primitivism. Witness the 1932 Bela Lugosi vehicle, White Zombie, in which Lugosi (who plays a white character) has stolen the secrets of a black zombie master; he turns his zombies to grinding sugarcane with a mill.

[85] This dovetails with the other obvious meaning of automatism in this section: Ellison clearly refers to Freudian automatism. But Bergsonian automatism and Freudian automatism are by no means independent from one another: Bergson discusses automatism in metaphysical terms, but also in relationship to humor in Laughter; Freud uses this aspect of Bergsonian automatism in Wit and the Various Forms of the Comic (761). There is no conflict between Freudian and Bergsonian automatism; Ellison invokes and uses both simultaneously.

with another; he ambiguously refers to "the machine," which could be either the narrator or the automobile, because he regards both of them essentially the same way. Furthermore, he is obsessed with the narrator as his <u>destiny</u>, an already-known future which is another form of automatism. If his destiny is the narrator then his destiny is the zombie, or the mechanical man.

Trueblood's desires remain in suspension, despite his ability to get money in return for telling his story; he lusts for mechanical power, but does not obtain it. These desires, though, <u>are</u> fulfilled by Lucius Brockway, who operates the machines underneath Liberty Paints. "They got all this machinery, but that ain't everything; <u>we</u> <u>the</u> <u>machines</u> <u>inside</u> <u>the</u> <u>machine</u>" (217). For all that Brockway has everything that Trueblood desires, he lacks Trueblood's volition, aspiring for nothing other than the acknowledgement of his importance by the Old Man who owns the factory. "Now that was the Old Man hisself!" he exclaims in pride (216). Brockway is exactly what he is supposed to be: the machine inside the machine, cantankerous and even dangerous, but thoroughly obedient to the Old Man. He is deeply technological, and has not forgotten his folk roots (his marketing slogans are variations on pieces of folk wisdom – "if you're white, you're right"), but he lacks any degree of self-consciousness (218). He is not in any sense "integrated with the Negro masses," or with any other mass, as signalled by his enraged hostility to the very idea that the narrator may be involved in a union.

After the invisible man is nearly killed in an explosion, because of Brockway's machinations, he becomes a character in a kind of American Gothic: he is recreated inside a machine. "A flash of cold-edged heat enclosed me. I was pounded between crushing electrical pressures; pumped between live electrodes like an accordion between a player's hands" (232). He is in a mechanistic nightmare, trapped inside a "glass and nickel box" (233), subjected to

electroshock under the direction of "scientists" and "doctors." The machine is the new-fangled

alternative to a lobotomy, as one doctor/scientist preaches to another: "from now on do your

praying to my little machine. I'll deliver the cure" (235). Inside this stunning image of

mechanical control and oppression the invisible man finds himself massively disoriented: "I lay

experiencing all the vague processes of my body. I seemed to have lost all sense of proportion.

Where did my body end and the crystal and white world begin? Thoughts evaded me. . ." (238).

Faces hover above him, and nothing makes any sense: "A terrible sense of loneliness came over

me; they seemed to enact a mysterious pantomime" (239). He finds that he no longer knows who

his mother was, and even begins to identify the machine as his mother, which incidentally makes

him a Raglanian orphan-hero (240). A "scholarly looking man" writes on a slate, asking him

questions. One unexpected question is "Who was Buckeye the Rabbit?" The narrator, in delight,

associates himself with that childhood character. After he has begun to identify himself with

Buckeye the rabbit, he is finally allowed to leave the machine. Ironically, those who have

lobotomized him want him to retain only an element of his folk identity, but yet he has been

mechanically recreated; he is now a cyborg, and cannot readily separate the one from the other.

Outside the machine, the scientists discuss history and politics, discourses which they control: "I

believe it is a mistake to assume that solutions – cures, that is – apply in, uh, primitive instances,

are, uh . . . equally effective when more advanced conditions are in question" (236). The student

from Tuskegee can't and won't be dealt into progressive history. "I wasn't sure whether they

were talking about me or somebody else. Some of it sounded like a discussion of history" (236).

His case is one which has been "developing some three hundred years" (237). Their control over

history goes with their control of the hospital machine; an effective black leadership requires that progressive history be challenged and technology be seized.

Within the machine, everything has fallen to pieces: he has lost all understanding of where his body ends and the world and the machine begin. Time and space have little meaning; the narrator finds himself in an embryonic state. In this other, electrified, terrorized state he finds a new identity in a myth, and suddenly finds himself freed. But ironically, he does not retreat into the identity of Buckeye the Rabbit, as a childish response to the horror which is inflicted upon him; rather, the acquisition of the identity flows naturally from his rebirth in the machine. The new mythic identity is imposed on him as an automatism, but it also boomerangs back with his own ultimate seizure of technological power.

This scene in Invisible Man has received great volumes of critical commentary. Brian Reed comments in "The Iron and the Flesh: History as Machine in Ellison's Invisible Man" that "Readers. . . often interpret the hospital machine. . . to be a symbol of external forces working to modify his behavior" (261). But Reed himself reads this process as being essential internal: the invisible man is transforming himself into a machine, with "machine-like indifference" (263). Reed argues that one of the novel's central problems is that the brotherhood insists on a mechanical, inhuman notion of history. Reed ends his essay with the march of the mechanical man, writing "The image of history which he sought in the machine he now finds in the chaos of night. . . It is the hope of order that they all, the narrator and his tormentors, see the machine out of their lives as the bridge become a robot and clangs over the horizon, never to return" (273). But, to expand on Reed's point: it is not merely an inhuman history which goes into the darkness. It is the hope of all chronology and of all history; the invisible man has displaced history the

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spiral with the boomerang, which is, returning again to the politics of <u>Negro</u> <u>Quarterly</u>, the

persistence of black cultures and black technologies in the face of oppressive actions and

discourses which would annihilate or subsume them. What the narrator struggles to shed is not

merely mechanical oppression, but the oppression of all history and all progress, explicitly

including the Tuskegee notion of progress, the "black rite of Horatio Alger." His Dostoevskian

abandonment of progressive history, following Clifton's, is an abandonment of <u>all</u> progressive

history, human and inhuman, Marxist and capitalist, black and white, in favor of the boomerang

of myth, of anti-teleological history, which asserts that slavery and oppression do not ever make

one fully inhuman, but that humanity (which Bergson associates with <u>freedom</u>, although not

political freedom as such) is always in a state of crisis. <u>Human</u> <u>progress</u>, which is so often

understood as humanity and history itself, is abandoned. We see this complex abandonment

especially in Tod Clifton, whose bearing and dolls are both a shocking mixture of the human and

the inhuman:

> It was as though he had chosen – how had he put it the night he fought with Ras? – to fall
>
> outside of <u>history</u>. . . . But he knew that only in the Brotherhood could we make
>
> ourselves known, could we avoid being empty Sambo dolls. Such an obscene flouncing
>
> of everything human! My God! And I had been worrying about being left out of a
>
> meeting! I'd overlook it a thousand times; no matter why I wasn't called. I'd forget it
>
> and hold on desperately to Brotherhood with all of my strength. For to break away would
>
> be to plunge . . . (435)

The Brotherhood offers humanity, that is, a place inside progressive history. But Clifton realizes

what the narrator will not realize until the prologue/epilogue: either with or without Brotherhood,

he is located by history and humanity as the Sambo doll, a mechanical man. The narrator is correct to recognize that Clifton is flouncing everything human, and he repeats this defiance of humanity in the prologue/epilogue.

Even the invisible man, naive though he often is, can't always pretend to himself that "humanity" and "history" include him, even in the eyes of the Brotherhood. When he is with the Brotherhood, occasional racist eruptions make him question his place in the organization. "Maybe she wants to see me sweat coal tar, ink, shoe polish, graphite," the invisible man thinks, after overhearing Emma tell Jack that the invisible man isn't black enough. "What was I, a man or a natural resource?" (303). Even at his most naive, even he can't pretend that he isn't often viewed as an object, a resource, pure standing-reserve; he becomes a technological object, rather than a technological subject. He understands that he is often viewed as something of a Sambo doll himself; the gulf between him and Clifton is that the invisible man believes that he is viewed by a Sambo doll only by those who reject humanism and history-as-progress, whereas Clifton understands that the enemy is humanism and history-as-progress.

Again and again, he seems instinctively inclined to agree with Clifton, although he fights against that instinct. As he prepares to give his first great speech for the Brotherhood, he feels an "electric tingling" along his spine, reminding us of the way electricity was used to torment him at the beginning of the novel and in the hospital machine (339). Facing the microphone he "felt the hard, mechanical isolation of the hospital machine and I didn't like it" (341). He accurately associates the Brotherhood's vision (in particular, its understanding of history) with the terror of being trapped in the machine.

A number of critics have argued that electricity in <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u> plays a complex and subversive role. The novel is contextualized within American's ongoing electrification by Douglas Ford, for instance: "I argue that Ellison's narrator occupies a reality increasingly <u>defined</u> by electricity, where its theft signifies a radical attempt to effect social change" (890). The political message of Ellison's use of electricity, according to Ford, is that:

> Ellison stresses the need to do more than simply master the social political and
>
> technological apparatuses of white America, for to do so entails the risk of replicating old
>
> systems of subjugation. Rather, he points toward the necessity of cagey rewiring, forging
>
> an ability to disrupt established forms of power from within. (896-7)

The invisible man does, indeed, aim to disrupt (or perhaps more accurately, seize) "established forms of power from within." But it is not just a question of being on the inside of the <u>power</u> as such. Brockway is on the inside of the existing power system in one sense, as Bledsoe is in another sense, but both of them are, as far as their people are concerned – recall that Ellison began the novel with Lord Raglan and the problem of leadership in mind – worse than useless. Being on the inside and wielding power accomplishes nothing if only the power itself is rewired; what needs rewired more desperately is <u>time</u>; that is, a leadership which simply seizes technological power without simultaneously absorbing the "power of myths and symbols which abound among the Negro masses" will necessarily fail (Ellison, "Editorial Comment" 301). Intense modernity must be simultaneously atemporal, or primordial. Which is not to say that it is enough to "plunge outside history" any more than it is enough to take over part of the system – say, a power station – from the inside. Nor can the power system, the megamachine in Mumford's terminology, or Domination in Horkheimer and Adorno's, be dismantled or denied.

There is nothing of the pastoral about Invisible Man. What the narrator accomplishes in the

ending-as-beginning, is to plunge outside history with the Mumfordian power system, or perhaps

to rewire the Mumfordian power system through Raglanian "myths and symbols." The core of

the rewiring is not the electricity itself, but the displacement of history-as-progress.

The chief potential of the invisible man in the prologue/epilogue is that he has begun to

understand the great drama of American history – the struggle for freedom – through myth and

technology; Ellison's understanding of the drama is both broader and narrower than Mumford's,

more nationalistic but less focused on a single variety of automatism. As in Bergson, thought

and technology are not divided; the mind is threatened by mechanization, but it is also

mechanization itself. The invisible man comes to understand his role in the drama: by the

epilogue/prologue he acts the mythic role of the mechanical man (tinker-thinker), who is both an

automaton and the inventor of a new world (like Prometheus), as a way of defeating progressive

history. To recognize that the mechanical (that is, the inhuman) and the human are one is to

master the ritual and act, like Dostoevsky's underground man, against history and historical

thinking, but Ellison's version of Dostoevksy's "sick man. . . wicked man" turns his sickness and

wickedness into a form of self-education, in a Dostoevskian parody of Booker T. Washington's

ethos of self-help (Underground Man, 3).

A number of critics have written on the importance of the shattering of teleological

notions of time in Invisible Man. Jim Neighbors, writing in "Plunging (outside of) History:

Naming and Self-Possession in Invisible Man" argues that Clifton's plunge outside of history is

terrifying to the invisible man because the notion of an ahistorical existence challenges his very

notions of what it means to be human (235). The invisible man, Neighbors reminds us, believes

in what he calls "that progress goo" which "a transcendental history requires, and hence the possibility of teleological movement and linear temporality is challenged," which in turn "belies the stable and unified Aristotelian Self still lingering behind his name, one capable of writing a 'useable history'" (237). The collapse of historical, teleological understanding threatens everything, including his very identity. Yonka Krasteva, picking up on the invisible man's comment in the prologue about invisibility giving one a "slightly different sense of time," argues that the "belief in the interdependence between 'historical time' and human progress is rendered problematic" (Invisible Man 8; Krasteva 59). But this assault on teleological/historical time presents a problem. Neighbors and Krasteva are correct, with the caveat that this attack on teleological time is essentially political and deeply rooted in technology.

In "'A Slightly Different Sense of Time': Palimpsetic Time in Invisible Man," Marc Singer proposes that the rejected model of linear time is replaced with the notion of a palimpsest in the novel: "time in Invisible Man is. . . palimpsetic, as the novel constantly provides echoes of past eras within the narrative present" (390). He argues that Ellison, under the influence of Alain Locke's The New Negro, is interested in the idea that "African-American's prolonged feudal indenture and their drastic transition in industrial modernity have resulted in an accelerated sense of time" (390). In the course of the novel, Singer argues, various notions of time are tried and found wanting: "Norton's mechanical time," "Brockway's acceptance of mechanical time," "the Brotherhood's teleological time," Ras's arrow of time which "simply points back" (393; 399; 401; 411). Brother Tarp's broken chain, which he passes on to the narrator, becomes profoundly important in Singer's reading:

When the Golden Day veterans tell Norton that history moves in a circle, they undermine

his linear and deterministic view of time, yet when Tarp bestows his chain, time's

circularity itself has become an oppressive feature that must be resisted and escaped.

This dramatic change reflects the Invisible Man's growing temporal consciousness: he

must first learn to perceive time's circularity before he can discover its ill effects. (404)

Singer proposes the palimpsest, the image of a parchment with new text written over the traces of

old text, as an alternative to the destructiveness of both linear and cyclic time, with both Brother

Tarp and the young zoot-suiters on the subway serving as positive examples of the palimpsest

(406). The image of the boomerang's motion (not a pure circle, but a parabola, as Singer quotes

Ellison pointing out) is, Singer proposes, the same as a palimpsest. And yet, Singer's description

of what it means to think of time as a palimpsest is less than revolutionary: "He realizes he is a

composite man comprised of his past experiences, a living palimpsest of his own history –

which, through his many encounters with historical allegories through the novel, is also African-

American history" (409). To recognize the importance of history seems somewhat different from

what the invisible man proposes as a plunge outside history; this is a wise, measured

understanding of history, not an oppositional rejection of it (like the boxing yokel's rejection).

This is not, after all, a novel which proposes particular wise, progressive political notions; it is

anything but sociological. It is, rather, a rejection of progressive history itself (following Raglan)

and of deterministic thought (following Dostoevsky). Which is not to say that Invisible Man is

not a novel about race and the problem of racism in America; rather, it is a novel which reveals

that the history of racism and the history of the divide between "human" and "machine" in

America are not readily distinguishable from historical thought itself.

To attack racism at its roots, one must attack history-as-progress, which means attacking history as technological progress (since technology is, however poorly understood, at the heart of what we understand to be progress), without denying the obvious reality of technology and technological change. We might think momentarily of the rice fields of South Carolina, which have been imagined, even by historians, as being simultaneously the site of terrible, mute oppression and a technological wonder: the story has been understood as one which is about black suffering and the triumph of the white managerial mind. When we delve deeper into the history, though, the technology at the basis of this plantation system turns out to be a creole technology (originally an African technology). Rejecting history-as-technological progress does not mean rejecting technology itself. To the contrary, it can mean, as in Ellison, using technology as something which belongs to the those left out of progressive history as well as those included in it, never fully imposed from the outside. The slaves of South Carolina, that is, were thinker-tinkers, not mere laborers, although enslaved. These rice plantations are, of course, only an example; similar examples abound in the unfolding sub-discipline of what I'll clumsily call black technology studies, which has now been defined as a distinct discipline Bruce Sinclair's "Integrating the Histories of Race and Technology."

We have a narrator who seemingly rejects mechanical notions of time, yet who was reborn in a machine, and whose conflicts were initiated by an encounter, metaphorically, with Mumford's Golden Day, in which the meaning of history is the conflict between "The Organic" and "The Machine." He clearly and emphatically rejects teleological history by the end of the novel, yet does not, as Singer discusses, embrace any cyclic understanding of time. Seeing his understanding of time as either powerfully anti-mechanical and anti-progress, as both Kristeva

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and Neighbors do, or as intensely humanistic and centered around the individual experience of history, as Singer does, both dodge around one of the central features of the novel. The narrator in his hibernation is not an intellectual or a mystic, nor even a humanist: he is a tinker-thinker, surrounded by and obsessed with electrical machinery. If he has rejected teleological history, he has accepted the machine; he has Trueblood's urge, while being in something like Brockway's position. His new, violent sense of time as a boomerang, which is intimately connected to his obsession with the mechanically reproduced music of Louis Armstrong, rises together with his obsession with electricity and electrical devices and machines. He is, true to Donna Haraway's understanding of the Cyborg, a bastard child of his mechanical mother (the hospital machine); he cannot and would not unmake that particular history; this is a novel where we can't escape the fact of a machine-human interface (Ford 888).

The beginning-ending of the novel isn't simply saturated with machinery, and the narrator isn't only obsessed with machinery. This is also the part of the novel where Lord Raglan's influence is most obvious. As Schafer succinctly phrases it, at the end of the novel we are presented with Jack-the-Bear "in wait beneath the inferno, under the underworld, waiting for the hero's call" (123). He is waiting, not in suspended animation, but in hibernation, "a covert preparation for a more overt action" (Invisible Man 13). The thinker-tinker is also the hero; the type of Edison and Franklin is also a type of King Arthur. The two identities emerge together as aspects of the leader, along with the recognition of history as a boomerang.

Ellison's critics, including Frederick Griffiths, John Wright, and Lawrence Jackson have focused

on the most famous and obvious part of The Hero: it presents a detailed schema for the life of the

"traditional hero." Even Raglan's schema, though, has typically been glossed over or confused

with those of Joseph Campbell and Otto Rank. But although Ellison was interested in Raglan's

schema, as I have demonstrated, Invisible Man owes more, if anything, to a more important but

less famous component of Raglan's book: Raglan's understanding of time and history in

relationship to the hero. Time is a difficulty when combining "myth and symbol" with

technological modernity; how can the black leader draw upon and use both, when drawing on

technology implies one sense of time and drawing on myth implies another?

The heart of Lord Raglan's primary argument is encapsulated in the first sentences of the

book, which do not directly concern the "traditional hero":

> Only the smallest fraction of the human race has ever acquired the habit of taking an
>
> objective view of the past. For most people, even most educated people, the past is
>
> merely a prologue to the present, not merely without interest in so far as it is independent
>
> of the present, but simply inconceivable except in terms of the present. . . [we] regard the
>
> story of our lives not as a crosscountry walk upon which we are still engaged, but as a
>
> path, cut deliberately by fate and ourselves, to the positions which we now occupy. (3)

Although Raglan does not refer to Bergson, there is at least a kinship here to the Bergson of

Creative Evolution: we organize our understanding of life and of the world simultaneously, in

order to control our life and our surroundings. But for Raglan, we do not only, or even primarily,

attempt to control the world through technology, but through ritual: "Ritual is far more to millions today than history has ever been to anyone" (156). The drive to control the world through ritual is the origin of myths, of gods, and of drama, according to Lord Raglan's argument.

Lord Raglan's interest in the stages of the typical hero's life is not an isolated interest; he is not _merely_ attempting to reveal the commonalities in the lives of all traditional heroes across cultures, although one gets no sense from most of Ellison's critics that Lord Raglan had any larger issue in mind. Rather, he shows the universality of the pattern in order to demonstrate definitively that all heroes are purely ahistorical; that there is no historical substance to the stories of Odysseus or Heracles, Oedipus or Moses, King Arthur or Robin Hood: "The thesis of this book is that the traditional narrative, in all its forms, is based not upon historical facts on the one hand or imaginative fictions on the other, but upon dramatic ritual or ritual drama" (278). The assumption of the role of the god-hero in the ritual drama is not meant to be edifying or amusing, although it may be both. It is an attempt to wield power: "The chief actor in a ritual drama pretends to be a god or hero – as we have seen, there is no real difference between them – in order that he may be able to exercise the power which that God or hero is believed to have exercised" (279). The life of the hero is not merely bad history, or incomplete history.[86] It bears _no relationship_ to ordinary chronology; Homer contains _no_ historical content, for instance (245). Once again, Lord Raglan takes an idea from Frazer, but makes it more radical. Rather than the

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[86] This is somewhat similar to J.R.R. Tolkien's argument in "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1937), which advanced the argument a year after Lord Raglan's work that no part of Beowulf should be taken historically, and that critics who meant to extract any history from it were, at best, barking up the wrong tree.

historical content of myth being irrelevant, it becomes relevant and important that myth has <u>no</u> historical content.

The ritual drama is an attempt – within ordinary time – to draw upon the ahistorical power of the hero-god (248). It is characterized by the donning of ritual costumes and masks, particularly animal masks (252, 260). It focuses on royalty, but in a way that does not correspond with any historical reality, for the kings of myth are characterized by solitude, especially in combat; King Arthur's single combats and Jacob's single combat with God serve as perfect examples (270-1).

It goes without saying that all of these characteristics play a role in <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u>. The invisible man assumes Rinehart's role and Rinehart's divine powers as soon as he dons Rinehart's costume; Ras the destroyer appears in animal garb, wielding a spear. Both Tod Clifton, whom Ras acclaims as his king, and the invisible man as god-hero dwell in a solitude which is incommensurate with their divine state. The invisible man undergoes a ritual birth and a ritual castration; he witnesses the black <u>rite</u> of Horatio Alger. Further examples abound, but my point is not to demonstrate <u>in</u> <u>general</u> that Ellison has been heavily influenced – more influenced than has been previously acknowledged – by Lord Raglan. My main point is that the idea of history-as-boomerang, the "different sense of time," is the fusion of or unresolved conflict between the different temporalities of the mythic hero and of modern technology, that is, the locomotive's time. The technological hero, the invisible black hero, the authentic "Negro leader," holds both temporalities within himself and puts them both to work: this is the step outside history. His rejection of progress – which is defined, even owned, by those in power – is

not a rejection of <u>change</u>, which is how his temporality differs from that of the god-hero of ritual, who are, like the Arthurian heroes, changeless:

> All the heroes are contemporaries, and the Britain of the legends has no past and no
> future. The characters, again, never grow old. Guinevere has apparently been married for
> some time before Launcelot's birth; he carries her off after the death of his son Galahad –
> when, that is, she could hardly be less than sixty. (Raglan 246)

The boomeranging of history is the enactment of the ritual: the ritual appearance of the God-hero reshapes and restores the world. Ritual time is opposed to "that progress goo," and also to Ras's merely backward-looking time; the ritual hero <u>masters</u> the world, but in the case of Ellison, he masters the world through the ritual use of ever-shifting technology. In some ways we should be reminded of Melville's Confidence Man – but this confidence man, rooted in ritual, serves a political purpose, as all heroes do, according to Raglan.

At this moment, I want to briefly return to one of Ellison's comments about his reading of Raglan: "So on a farm in Vermont where I was reading <u>The Hero</u> by Lord Raglan and speculating on the nature of Negro leadership in the United States, I wrote the first paragraph of <u>Invisible Man</u>, and was soon involved in the struggle of creating the novel" (<u>Essays</u> 218). What does <u>The Hero</u> reveal about the nature of black leadership? Implicitly, it reveals what black leadership lacks: the current leadership (from Ellison's point of view) is oriented towards the spiral of progress, rather than to the palimpsest/boomerang of ritual; it is focused on individual, Bledsoeian achievement rather than on the masked, <u>invisible</u> individuality of the actor who becomes the ritual god-hero; it is rooted in the exceptional individual rather than in the people (Ellison's Raglanian hero is rooted in the masses). Thus is explained the insistence of the

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narrator simultaneously on his invisibility, his technological orientation, his potential, suspended power and his other understanding of time and history. Ellison's artistic version of the invisible hero has moved well beyond his earlier, intellectual version; invisibility is the key addition. The invisible leader, in direct opposition to the Tuskegee system which he mirrors and mocks, eschews individual progress, including individual technological progress, in exchange for technology as ritual, combining two conflicting temporalities.

The mythic hero, dwelling in ritual time, exists in tension with the undeniable reality of historical and technological change. The spiral of history and "that progress goo" may be rejected, but the change which underlies these ideologies cannot be denied; the New World is real, even if the spiral of history is not, but that New World exists in tension not merely with an Old World but with the world-time of ritual and myth. The reason why the invisible man is so special, the reason why he is suited to wear the ritual mask which is suitable for or comprehensible to the New World, is precisely because he is a black American. In "Indivisible Man" Ellison writes on the Negro and technology:

> Our experience in the acculturative process differed from the European's because he didn't have the necessity. This can be said about American culture in general: it was an extension of European culture. What is new about it is the presence of the African influence as projected by black Americans. . . There was a modification of language necessary to communicate with the slaves and with people who came from other parts of Europe. All of these created a tension which in turn created what we all the vernacular style. Our technology was vernacular. And it grew so fast precisely because they had to

throw off the assumptions of European technology and create one which was in keeping

with conditions in the New World. . . (<u>Essays</u>, 369)

The Negro is the very heart of the creation of the New World and the technologies of the New

World, simultaneously the greatest victim of the Western power system, its living heart (the

machines within the machine) and potentially its greatest beneficiary. In this ritual drama, the

invisible man is able to play the part of "the mechanical man," who is at first directed by outside

forces, but is also the source of their power within chronological time. His technology is

vernacular; it belongs to him, and he to it, even as he belongs to the masses (the masses are their

own technologies). He plays a part, seemingly, in a ritual drama under the control of outside

forces until, under the influence of Rinehart "the spiritual technologist," he sheds automatism,

and begins to seize control of the ritual himself (495):

> My entire body started to itch, as though I had just been removed from a plaster cast and
>
> was unused to the new freedom of movement. . . Then I looked at the polished lenses of
>
> the glasses and laughed. I had been trying simply to turn them into a disguise but they
>
> had become a political instrument instead; for if Rineheart could use them in his work, no
>
> doubt I could use them in mine. (499)

Rinehart's <u>work</u> is a vast con game, stretching from religion to number-running to prostitution.

Rinehart the rascal, like Bledsoe, who causes a ritual to be performed commemorating and

recreating the life and death of the Founder – Barbee's life of the Founder, John Wright argues,

following Neal, is essentially taken directly out of Raglan – has ritual power; he plays a role in a

ritual drama, and that role grants him a power which boomerangs into ordinary time (Wright

"Conscious", 229). But neither Bledsoe or Rinehart perform the ritual for anyone other than

themselves; they do not perform rituals in the service of the community; they don't integrate with the community. Bledsoe's manipulation of technology, myth and symbols becomes fascist, and Rinehart's merely criminal. What they lack, perhaps, is anonymity, full withdrawal into an underground ritual. Perhaps this has something to do with the role that they play; "Rinehart the rascal" and Bledsoe, like Adam Sunraider in Juneteenth, play the role of the rascal, evasive and treacherous from the beginning; they are essentially like the main character of Melville's The Confidence Man: His Masquerade. The mechanical man, though, played by the blues-singing Trueblood, the aged and paranoid Brockway and the naive invisible man, suffers. He suffers as a mechanical man, oppressed standing reserve, and as a black American. The great Mumfordian divide between Mechanical and Organic is also the division between master and slave; the specifics of the post Civil-War divide between Organism and Machine are another eruption, or boomeranging, of the rite of the mechanical man into ordinary chronological time.

Despite Ellison's admiration for Lewis Mumford and his works, Mumford had the critical flaw of failing to see the meaning of the Civil War; he hardly acknowledged the existence of black Americans. Instead, at least early in his career (and certainly according to Ellison's viewpoint), Mumford subordinated everything to the apocalyptic conflict between the machine and the garden, regarding its resolution or its telos as imminent. The stakes are high for Mumford, as they are for other critics of the power system: all of humanity is at risk of being turned into automatons.

But Ellison writes from the perspective of those who have been defeated, who have already, in advance of the technologies which are supposed to bring the danger of mechanization, been turned into mechanical men. The apocalyptic moment, the horrors of mechanization, have,

as in Faulkner, already happened long since. It has, in fact, happened over and over again; the

threat of automatization in general (as opposed to particular incidents thereof) is not something

which belongs to any historical moment; it looms over history (the timeless entering into time),

and can only by the interpenetration of ritual and technology. Again, as in Bergson, technology

is related to automatization but is also part of any solution to it. The concepts of time and history

associated with technology, rather than the technology itself, is the real problem. By performing

a ritual, or entering into ritual time (which can only be done through a specific "social reality"),

the invisible man (and Adam Sunraider and Reverend Hickman in <u>Juneteenth</u>), struggle to

impose a ritual upon history, but a ritual the forms of which have been adapted for American

usage; thus the invisible man is a thinker-tinker, a maker and saboteur of electrical systems. He

wears the ritual mask appropriate for his era; the details of the ritual are distinctive, but not the

purpose, which is to loose those who are bound and give them power against their oppressors.

This reading is consistent with and strengthens the novel's political thrust, which is towards a

new anti-totalitarian nationalism rooted in the chaos of American life, and yet approaches the

technological and ritual tools of fascism itself, avoiding them through a development of the third

pillar of Ellison and Herndon's vision of leadership, continual learning from and consciousness

of the masses; I would go so far as to say that in the novel Ellison would apply to America what

he applies only to black Americans in <u>The</u> <u>Negro</u> <u>Quarterly</u>.

I have one more item of evidence to offer for this way of understanding <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u>:

another Raglanian schematization of the novel, which makes the assumption that the hero's life

is identical to the (Mumfordian) mechanization of man. That is, Ellison is synthesizing a

Mumford-influenced understanding of the mechanization of humanity to his own understanding

of slavery and oppression, and attaching both of them to Raglan's schema; we can and should

understand this hero <u>technologically</u>.

	Raglan's Text	**Commentary on <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u>**
1	The hero's mother is a royal virgin.	The hospital machine, cold and inviolate, is his mother. (1 point)
2	His father is a king, and	His father is Brockway, tender and master of the machines of Liberty Paints, and a vicious defender of his own irrational view of his prerogatives. (1 point)
3	Often a near relative of his mother, but	Brockway's kinship to all machinery, especially explosively dangerous and complex machinery, is clear. Moreover, given Brockway's deep involvement in all the fundamental operations and machinery of the factory, it seems likely that he was directly or indirectly involved in the design of the experimental machine. (1 point)
4	The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and	His conception, then, is an outmatched physical struggle with his diminutive father – which turns out to be even more outmatched because of his father's mastery of the machinery of his abode. The period of his gestation and birth from the machine are, it goes without saying, even more unusual. (1 point)
5	He is also reputed to be the son of a god.	He has been placed in the factory by the friendly advice of the young Emerson, whom Brockway would surely consider a kind of God. He has also been sent by the godlike Bledsoe, whose own life story, as well as the Founder's, also can be understood through Raglan. (1 point)

6	At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather, to kill him, but	Brockway nearly kills him in the explosion in the basement, which follows Brockway trying to <u>bite</u> him. He also undergoes the danger of dying through the shocks he receives. In short, every threat to him is mechanical in nature. (1 point)
7	He is spirited away, and	Mary spirits him away from the hospital and its machinery – more directly in the famous early drafts than in the published version. (1 point)
8	Reared by foster-parents in a far country.	He is raised by Mary, although arguably also by the Brotherhood; both Mary and the Brotherhood believe in "that progress goo." (1 point)
9	We are told nothing of his childhood, but	Our information about his time with Mary and the Brotherhood is sparse, but hardly nonexistent. One might legitimately claim, though, that our information about his "childhood" is as sparse as the novel form will allow. (0-1 points)
10	On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom	He immediately becomes a leader, or at least an apparent leader, in the Brotherhood. Nonetheless, he has occasion to wonder if he is a man or a natural resource. (1 point)
11	After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,	His success as a speaker and leader, especially his first major speech, which Brother Jack viewed as a victory. The moment of his ascension is his confrontation with the microphone, which makes him feel as if he is in the hospital machine again. This also signals the fact that he has accepted the Brotherhood's mechanical notion of historical progress. (1 point)
12	He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor	Both of his affairs with Brotherhood women. (1 point)

13	Becomes king.	In fact, his problems in the Brotherhood begin with the claim, advanced by Brother Wrestrum (who tries to <u>wrest</u> his power away) that he has tried to push himself forward as an individual. (1 point)
14	For a time reigns uneventfully, and	He is able to concern himself with such small details as magazine interviews; the membership expands greatly under his leadership. (1 point)
15	Prescribes laws, but	He absorbs and reissues the laws of the brotherhood within this community, more accurately. (1 point)
16	Later he loses favor with the gods and/or his subjects, and	He is displaced and rejected multiple times by the leadership of the brotherhood. (1 point)
17	Is driven from the throne and city, after which	When he journeys through the city as a doppleganger of Rinehart, who is a "spiritual technologist," who makes use of machinery even in church. His ritual dethroning leads him into a whole new understanding of the power of technology-as-ritual and ritual-as-technology. (1 point)
18	He meets with a mysterious death	His plummet into the coal cellar reminds us of Trueblood's incestuous dream of the power plant: it is a fall <u>into</u> mechanical-ritual power. (1 point)
19	Often at the top of a hill	Well, in this case it's in a cellar. Yet, we should be reminded that his descent into the cellar involves, according to Ellison, a kind of rising (Essays 111). (0-1 points)

20	His children, if any, do not succeed him.	That is, his "children" within the Brotherhood do not succeed him within the Brotherhood, even as the Brotherhood becomes irrelevant in Harlem. What will succeed him, one suspects, is the influence of the mechanical contrivances which he is assembling in his cellar. (1 point)
21	His body is not buried, but nevertheless	After all, he is technically alive. (1 point)
22	He has one or more holy sepulchers.	A temple of light and electric power which is associated with his culture and folklore; electricity and religion were earlier associated in Rinehart's church. "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (1 point)

Once we understand the ritual life of the hero as being oriented around the machine, and the struggle between machine and organism, Raglan's schema works even better than before, with the invisible man's total points (20) falling barely short of Oedipus's (we can even stretch the total count to 22); focusing on his life as an automaton greatly clarifies the text's relationship to Lord Raglan. Teleological time is the ritual of the mechanical man, which is slavery/Domination/the Megamachine. One part of the significance of Invisible Man is that it adopts Mumford's (and later, Leo Marx's) understanding of the crisis around the machine in American thought, while also adopting Lord Raglan's meditation on history and ritual (and the relative insignificance of history compared to ritual) by way of the hero, and demonstrates their underlying kinship, while focusing on a racialized form of domination/mechanization. The

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problem of race and the problem of the machine are equated and simultaneously confronted through a rethinking (abandonment) of history.[87]

H. THE MECHANICAL LEADER

I have demonstrated in some detail that Invisible Man makes great use of Raglan's heroic schema, and that the narrator's consciousness of himself as first a ritual scapegoat and then as a ritual actor is one with his growing understanding of himself as being a technological object and subject, under technological Domination and yet (as Ellison details in his discussion of the Negro and technology) uniquely able to exploit the full possibilities of technology; the narrator is, in short, developing his identity as a black leader through his self-conscious examination of himself and other Americans, black and white, not simply through an understanding of myth or of technology, but through an integrated understanding of both. Before he understands himself as a mechanical man, the object and subject of a technological ritual, he is an utter failure as a leader. Only in his self-awareness as a mechanical man, both mechanized and mechanizing, is he free, for himself, for his people, and for America as a whole.

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[87] This position is extended in Juneteenth, but a similar extended position is also visible, for instance, through Octavia Butler's work. Given the lack of a scholarly edition of Juneteenth, I don't believe it is yet appropriate to make any detailed claims about it, but it is clear, at least, that the connections are there.

The prologue and epilogue of <u>Invisible</u> <u>Man</u> are an anticipation of and a return to the central issues of the novel, but with the addition of a narrator who is self-conscious and self-reflective. To a great extent the prologue and epilogue are a meditation upon leadership and the various forms that it takes; various problematic "Negro leaders," mirroring the black leaders of the real world, are contrasted to the narrator's alternative, Raglanian and yet technological conception of the leader, as well as to the problematic leadership of the nation as a whole.

> The narrator tells us early in the prologue that the hole into which he has been driven is: warm and full of light. Yes, <u>full</u> <u>of</u> <u>light</u>. I doubt if there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway. Or the Empire State Building on a photographers's dream night. But that is taking advantage of you. Those two spots are among the darkest of our whole civilization. . . Which might sound like a hoax, or a contradiction, but that (by contradiction, I mean) is how the world moves: Not like an arrow, but a boomerang. (6)

The narrator, although he is describing his own vision of the technological or electrical sublime, simultaneously rejects the principle, classic instantiation of the electric sublime in the lights of Broadway, "the great white way."[88] He can – he must – understand world and time technologically, but not in the ordinary way, and yet also not by rejecting or turning from technology. He asserts, much like Bergson, that "Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in the face of certain defeat" (577). A new definition of humanity has replaced the old one, with the spiral's displacement by the boomerang.

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[88] See David Nye on this subject, including in <u>American Technological Sublime</u> (195-6).

Automatism is inevitable; humanity is the ongoing struggle to be human in spite of automatism, even after disillusionment.

The language of <u>light</u>, in imitation of the New Testament, pervades the prologue. The invisible man specifically references Saint Paul:

> Meanwhile I enjoy my life with the compliments of Monopolated Light & Power. Since you never recognize me even when in closest contact with me, and since, no doubt, you'll hardly believe that I exist, it won't matter if you know that I tapped a power line leading into the building and ran it into my hole in the ground. Before that I lived in the darkness into which I was chased, but now I see. I've illuminated the blackness of my invisibility – and vice versa. (13)

As in the Christian, specifically the Pauline (exemplified by Paul's vision of Christ), transvaluation of values, blindness becomes sight and sight, blindness. Invisibility becomes substance, visibility the lack of substance, and automatization, freedom, as we see most radically with Tod Clifton. In this upside-down, transvalued world, it is only the hibernating leader, the hidden leader, who is a leader at all; to regard the narrator of the prologue and epilogue as leader requires the same kind of transvaluation as is necessary to regard a crucified carpenter as a king. The narrator's underground struggle (though by no means itself a Christian struggle) hearkens back to the Christianity of the catacombs, of dwelling in hiding from the infinite power of Rome (Monopolated Light & Power). Like Paul, opposed to the Roman state as it exists but cognizant of its potential, the invisible man cannot fully condemn the American state, because he, wrapped in light, sees it as it might be, not merely how it is. He dreams of America as the site of true diversity:

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. . . Diversity is the word. Let man keep his many parts and you'll have no tyrant states.

Why, if they follow this conformity business they'll end up by forcing me, an invisible

man, to become white. . . .   America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them

and let it so remain. It's "winner take nothing" that is the great truth of our country or of

any country. Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to

play in face of certain defeat . . . (57)

The invisible man, the automaton, becomes the avatar and preacher of chaos, as opposed to

progress, to "winning." His leadership is ambiguous and paradoxical because, in a dreamlike

extension of one American ideal, he is a leader who promotes nothing but endless autonomy, a

mechanical man engaged in sowing chaos.

But am I merely repeating things which many other critics have said? Is Ellison merely a

multiculturalist? No, and no. For the road to this image of diversity and multiculturalism is one

which leads directly through profound mechanization. Only those who have been most subject to

this mechanization can fulfill the "historical role of the Negroes [of] integrating the larger

American nation and compelling it towards true freedom" (Ellison, "Comment" 298).

There are numerous models of leadership in <u>Invisible Man</u>, all of whom have something

to offer, and all of whom also come far short of what they need to be. Bledsoe, for instance, is

the very image of everything that might go wrong with "Negro leadership": he is deeply corrupt

and self-serving, perhaps interested in advancing the cause of his people, but far more interested

in advancing his own cause, and complicit in a counter-productive understanding of history.

Brother Jack, too, seems finally to be most interested in wielding power for its own sake. The

distant white leadership scarcely warrants mentioning: while Mr. Norton is not an <u>entirely</u>

unsympathetic character, he needs no discussion as a leader, nor does the infinitely remote elder

Mr. Emerson. For all the failures of "Negro Leadership" and Brotherhood leadership, they at

least have the tiniest shred of credibility, as compared to the distant powers of white business and

government.

Ras the Destroyer and Rinehart the Runner, as signaled by the semi-divine titles of their

names, are less absurd leaders, or less easily dismissed as leaders. Not coincidentally, their

"leadership" verges far away from the ordinary. They live in and as ritual, fulfilling the parts of

the Destroyer and the Runner (Runner, of course, literally referring to Rinehart as a numbers

runner, but also marking him as a trickster more broadly, a kind of Hermes); they respond ritually

to a technologically conditioned situation. Ras is selfless, as far as we can tell, fully and

authentically dedicated to his cause in a way that has long ceased to be true (but likely was once

true) for Brother Jack; we see this in Ras's behavior with Clifton. The fact that Ras and Rinehart

are different from other leaders is clear; the invisible man's experience in Rinehart's role helps to

reveal the real world to the invisible man, as do (indirectly) his encounters with Ras.

In the prologue, the invisible man remembers the night he listened to Louis Armstrong

after having smoked a reefer. "I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its

depths. And beneath the swiftness of the hot tempo there was a slower tempo and a cave. . ." (9).

In the cave which lies beneath Louis Armstrong's music and an ordinary sense of time he

encounters ritual after ritual. First there are slaveowners bidding for a naked girl, and then he

goes into a variation of the "Negro Church" Ishmael enters at the beginning of Moby-Dick,

where the text is the "Blackness of Blackness" in Ellison's version, or the "Blackness of

darkness" in Melville's (Invisible Man 9, Moby-Dick 10). Then he encounters an old woman

who loved and hated her master; her son arrives and attacks the invisible man, nearly killing him before releasing him:

It was dark. My head cleared and I wandered down a dark narrow passage, thinking I heard his footsteps behind me. I was sore, and into my being had come a profound craving for tranquility, for peace and quiet, a state I felt I could never achieve. For one thing, the trumpet and blaring and the rhythm was too hectic. A tom-tom beating like heart-thuds began drowning out the trumpet, filling my ears. I longed for water and I heard it rushing through the cold mains my fingers touched as I felt my way, but I couldn't stop to search because of footsteps behind me.

"Hey, Ras," I called. "Is it you, Destroyer? Rinehart?"

No answer, only the rhythmic footsteps behind me. Once I tried crossing the road, but a speeding machine struck me, scraping the skin from my leg as it roared past.

Then somehow I came out of it, ascending hastily from this underworld of sound . . . (12)

When he descends into the underworld under the reefer's influence, he expects to encounter Ras and Rinehart, especially after hearing the tom-toms and trumpets, the former, presumably, associated with Ras's ritual primitivism, and the latter with Rinehart's ritual sophistication, a comparison which teaches us that rituals are not inherently primitive. But instead of them, he encounters the machine, and his scrape with the machine brings him back to the surface; if this scene is Dantean, then the machine is his Virgil. The violent collision of mechanical time and ritual time leads to his emergence.

The invisible man is doubly distinguished from the other models of leadership we see. He is distinguished, first, because he is a ritual leader, which is to say, he becomes conscious of himself as a ritual leader. In this, he arguably follows Ras and Rinehart, who certainly are ritual leaders, whether they recognize themselves as such or not. But he is finally distinguished from Ras and Rinehart, as well as all of the other leader figures, as opposed to more thoroughly subaltern figures like Brockway and Trueblood, by being integrated with the "negro masses" while being both ritually and technologically oriented. He draws not only on the "true," subaltern black leadership represented by such figures as the enslaved woman with many sons, but from some of the most conventional, and yet still extraordinary, images of American greatness and leadership, the "thinker-tinker," like "Ford, Edison, and Franklin" (7).

We can characterize his leadership three ways. First, he is a "true" leader, in the sense that he does not, ultimately, betray his people in favor of his own interests, as do Rinehart and Bledsoe; he takes his direction from them, from beneath (as in the case of Clifton's funeral) rather than imposing a prefabricated politics upon them. He is always integrated with them. Second, he ultimately constructs himself not merely as a political leader, but as a techno-political leader. Despite Ford and Edison's genuine political power, their authority (at least, their ongoing authority) derives more from their technological achievements than anything else, and their technical ability leads seamlessly to cultural and political authority. Third, he is a ritual leader, forthrightly related to a long genealogy of literary and actual preachers, with Melville's preacher of "The Trap" as one primary model, and old Jonah himself as another. The invisible man is the instantiation of "the Negro leader" which Ellison had created during the war, but is shaped by the

deep influence of Lord Raglan's meditation on ritual and history and by Ellison's particular concept of invisibility..

Rinehart is both ritually and technologically oriented, but rather than being integrated with the masses he preys upon them. Ras the Destroyer is oriented towards ritual, and is arguably integrated with the masses, but he doesn't understand the relationship of the masses and technology. Because both of them fill two of the three roles that the narrator is growing to fill, they are at the forefront of his mind under the influence of the reefer. No other character in the novel clearly fulfills even two of the roles, though; Brother Jack, for instance, is at best a technological leader, but is not integrated with the masses and does not even understand the function of ritual. Franklin and Edison, the tinker-thinkers, are only technologically inclined, neither integrated with the masses (at least not the black masses), nor able to understand and use ritual.

What is at stake in recognizing that the narrator's emerging leadership is equally characterized by integration, technology and ritual? My answer has two levels, one political and the other metaphysical. The political answer is that neither sincerity nor a dedication to rituals (whether old or new) are sufficient for a revamped leadership, one which no longer betrays its constituents. A particular kind of technological orientation is required of the "fixed" or authentic leadership. Mere technology leads to something like the Brotherhood or, worse, Liberty Paints. Mere ritual goes nowhere, possibly remaining tied up in a church, whether that church is sincere or insincere. But the fusion of ritual and technology leads to power or mastery on the one hand, and a realization, on the other hand, that the story of Domination or mechanization, in which the history of technology is an upward spiral of power and subjugation, is false. The invisible man,

like Louis Armstrong and partially through Louis Armstrong, appreciates the power of contemporary techniques, instruments, and mechanical reproduction, while understanding that their origins and directions are complex; by using that power for and through ritual, he escapes from the trap of technology-as-history and history-as-technology.

The invisible man's discovery of infinite possibilities, rooted in Jazz and Blues, is identical with his attacks on Progress and on the concept of technology as human progress: "Of course Louis was kidding, <u>he</u> wouldn't have thrown old Bad Air out, because it would have broken up the music and the dance, when it was the good music that came from the bell of old Bad Air's horn that counted" (581). Or, to return to Raglan's phrasing of a similar thought, "Ritual is far more to millions today than history has ever been to anyone (156)." The music and the dancing will go on, despite all the abominations of history; to throw out old bad air would be to end ritual, which is the Brotherhood's way.

The narrator finds freedom and possibility by imagining technology without eschatology, that is, by freeing time from progress, which makes him able to find freedom, rather than the promise of eternal enslavement, by acknowledging himself as a mechanical man, by permitting ritual time and mechanical time to collide without final resolution. This is not an abandonment of a changing world in favor of a static one; given the novel's roots in the ever-shifting nature of jazz, and Ellison's framing of the novel in terms of Blues and Jazz, Ellison <u>advocates</u> an ever-changing world. It is, rather, an abandonment of a world in which there is any "forward" or "back," especially where technology is concerned (as in Bergson, time is irreversible, despite boomeranging); technological change represents a specific adaptation, not a general improvement, while American forms of oppression are not embedded within (and therefore

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necessitated by) the story of America's upward spiral; American oppression, rather, is a particular form of tyranny which nonetheless is contiguous with many other forms of tyranny. Technology, rather than being subordinant to or determinate of the teleological movement of history, is an ongoing yet changing aspect of human life, affiliated with or even connected to ritual. The affirmation of technology-as-ritual rather than technology-as-teleology is, strangely, an affirmation of the individual, who attains a degree of freedom, and even power through the ritual use of technology. Curiously, it's far easier to humanize technology than to humanize history.

Ellison's thought bears significant resemblance to what David Nye calls "the electrical sublime," which is contrasted both to the Kantian sublime and the technological sublime, both of which are, at best, complicit with institutional racism:

> Kant's sublime made the individual humble in the face of nature, the technological sublime exalted the conquest of nature. The electrical sublime represented a third kind of experience, as it dissolved the distinction between natural and artificial sites. In blurring or even erasing this line, it created a synthetic environment infused with mystery. (152)

Nye's electrical sublime does not quite describe the narrator at the end of his development, however, although it <u>does</u> beautifully describe the extraordinary life and church of Rinehart, the "spiritual technologist" who can show "unknown wonders" (495). Nye describes a re-entry of mystery (which we can link to ritual), into life, specifically technological life, with the appearance of the electrical sublime, which is also Mumford Neotechnics. But the invisible man, although he learns from Rinehart, does not <u>merely</u> dwell in or partake of the electrical sublime, but politicizes it, radicalizes it, turns it into a schooling for leadership. For he recognizes the

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thing which Rinehart does not recognize (or is indifferent to): that time as we know it, that is, history as technological progress, is political. Ellison understands the terrors of technological Domination as well as any of the other major philosophical and literary figures who meditated upon it; like many of the rest of them (and this point is downplayed in the criticism), he owes much in this area to Lewis Mumford. But Ellison, who is trying to imagine the possibilities as well as recounting the failures of black leadership, knows better than to indulge in the nostalgic yearning for rural community shared by figures from Heidegger and Marcuse to Cleanth Brooks; in his case, that means a return to Domination, not to the "middle state." Instead, he illustrates the continuity of life as ritual and as technology. Technological domination is an ongoing element of life, and "faith" in its "progress" is a political belief, contingent on a particular conception of history.

I. CONCLUSIONS

"Our technology was vernacular," Ellison writes (Essays, 369). That is, technology, like language, is lived life, rather than an alien force from the outside. Which is not to say that it is benign – only that, like language, it must be mastered and that, as with language, we can never get out from under its mastery. Ellison marks an extremely important moment in what I take to be a central intellectual struggle of the last two centuries: the struggle over the reality of progress, that is, over whether we should understand the universe teleologically. Too often, Ellison's critics have failed to recognize the thoroughness of his assault upon progressive history

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(motivated in part by the recognition that an abstract understanding of time has everything to do with American and European forms of oppression). My particular contribution to the study of Ellison's work is to emphasize, by way of a thorough discussion of Ellison's simultaneous relationship with the thought of Mumford and Raglan, that he attacks "progress" as radically in his time as the most cutting edge historians of technology and philosophers of biology do today, and that this attack on progress is an attempt at an authentic liberating politics, based on a fusion of black experience and technological reality.

Ellison's attempt to recoup technology on behalf of the oppressed and anonymous, while tossing aside the ideologies of progress which have circulated around technology, is, in part, an explicit development of Melville's similar project, which was also eventually taken up by Lewis Mumford; it is also a response (conditioned by oppression, again) to Faulkner's metaphysics of despair. The howl of the idiot at the end of Absalom, Absalom need not be a source of despair if we understand his howl to be rooted in anonymity and invisibility, including technical anonymity and invisibility. Ellison, Melville, Faulkner and Mumford, especially Ellison as the heir of the other three, offer a powerful political and intellectual antidote to the technological eschatons which swirl around us, almost always as a given.

The question is not "how can we survive the technological eschatos, the coming of the mechanical man as the rider named faithful and true"? The question is, rather, how do we survive, at any particular moment, the ongoing reality of our struggle against automatonization and the particular dilemmas associated with it? We might ask, finally, how can we do better, by substituting change for progress towards a telos in our ideologies? My own attack on progress as opposed to change is linked to Stephen Gould's, which helps to distinguish the two in general:

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Darwin's revolution will be completed when we smash the pedestal of arrogance and own the plain implications of evolution for life's nonpredictable nondirectionality – and when we take Darwin's topology seriously, recognizing that Homo Sapiens, to recite the revised litany one more time, is a tiny twig, born just yesterday on an enormously arborescent tree of life that would never produce the same set of branches if regrown from seed. We grasp at the straw of progress (a desiccated ideological twig) because we are still not ready for the Darwinian revolution. We crave progress as our best hope for retaining human arrogance in an evolutionary world (Full House, 29).

The displacement of progress by change is, at least metaphorically, a rigorous application of the consequences of Darwinism (far more rigorous than Darwin could manage, of course) to all areas of human thought. Ellison's assault on progressive history comes from a different direction than Gould's, but is equally if differently important, and also connected: both are critics (Ellison less directly than Gould) of pseudo-fascist history and biology, in which particular assertions of racial and individual superiority rest on a generalized retention of "human arrogance in an evolutionary world."

I have continually argued that contemporary historians of technology and philosophers of biology, including Arnold Pacey, George Basilla, Stephen Gould and R.C. Lewontin offer an understanding of time, technology and history which is better than the traditional understanding, and that in doing so they follow, wittingly or unwittingly, an important proleptic genealogy in American literature. This way of understanding the world is better first, because it is more accurate, but also because it offers better prospects for survival: Ishmael and the Invisible Man, in surviving the reality and the idea of the eschatos, teach us how to survive.

In this spirit of aspiring to survival and to change, which is not progress, I will turn to a brief meditation on Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Charles Darwin, Richard Dawkins, Donna Haraway and Octavia Butler, which will serve as something of an informal coda and as a prologue to things to come.

VI. TELOS, BIOS, TECHNE

In this dissertation, which is both a meditation on how the relationship between time and technology has insistently been constructed as teleological and eschatological (especially on the American scene, although American thinking on this subject is best understood as representative of Western thought rather than aberrant from it), and a mapping of ways in which U.S. literary works have re-conceptualized the relationship between time and technology, rejecting or at least destabilizing the dominant teleological, eschatological visions, I have offered up the beginnings of a revisionary understanding of the relationship between time and technology within (and inspired by) American literature. This chapter is both a coda to this project in literary criticism and history, and also a tentative prolegomena to two possible future projects: a more theoretical work on time and technology, and an exploration of anti-teleological science fiction. I will begin with two related ideas: that technology is in some sense inhuman and that all life is in some way essentially technological, using Richard Dawkins' The Ancestor's Tale and Jean-François Lyotard's The Inhuman. The eschatological dread of technology emerges from the anthropocentric assertion that technology once served humanity, but no longer does so. This leads me, in turn, to Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer (with passing reference to The Open), which is focused on the distinction between human, political life, bios, and bare life, zoē; the

issue at stake is whether human life can somehow be rescued from reduction to bare life. I argue that techne is the missing term in Agamben's discussion: thinking of life in terms of technology, technique, is a way of finding a way through the bios/zoē divide. I then discuss Shelley's Frankenstein as a work which briefly imagines a way out of the divide between life and technology, which leads into a brief discussion, using the work of science fiction theorist Darko Suvin, and Donna Haraway's reading of Octavia Butler, of the work which can be done by anti-teleological science fiction.

What I advocate is a thorough rejection of the idea and ideology of progress in all its forms. Change is real, and particular changes – for instance, the melting of the polar ice cap, or the development of the microprocessor – may be analyzed as positive or negative (although we should recognize that the effects of real change tend to be irreducibly complex), but the idea of progress, while it is an ideological lodestone, is nonetheless a chimera. This argument is suggested by my analysis of "modern" technology (which is mostly an analysis of analyses), which is, after all, the point from which ideologies of progress theoretically originate.

I have consistently emphasized both the age and centrality of technology in human (but not only human) life. Any attempt to establish a moment at which humanity enters into a space-devouring, time-annihilating mechanical crisis from which it requires deliverance is deeply flawed and historically dishonest. This is not to say that we do not continually find ourselves in crisis, nor that this crisis is anything other than a crisis in the nature of time and space. But any attempt to look backwards towards nature while simultaneously looking forward – with a sensation of vertigo – to the machine that ends time is nothing but a projection of a feeling into

the outer world. We are threatened, even haunted, by automatism, by the threatened deadening of all possibilities; a machine threatens to cut off <u>our</u> time and therefore, all time.

The threat of the automaton persists. It is real for us, it was real for Ralph Ellison and William Faulkner and Herman Melville. It was real – perhaps most real of all – for Thomas Hobbes. It is the <u>persistence</u> of this crisis which is absent from nearly all philosophical and theoretical accounts of mechanization, with the notable exception of Bergson's, and which is powerfully present, albeit sometimes hidden at great depths, in the literary figures whom I have discussed in this dissertation. But what to <u>do</u> with the long history and the great persistence of the notion of the mechanized self?

First, we must recognize that there is no question of salvation; at the least, we should suspend such questions, leaving them to the theologians. The hope of salvation is a trap, an invitation to imagine and then enact a capstone to history – "grand [architects] leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything," Melville writes (<u>Moby-Dick</u> 145; ch. 32). The hope of salvation either from or through the machine, which will finalize or solve history, as if time were a puzzle, is a greater danger than automatization of the self as such; the need to fix history – "What's wrong with this world is, it's not finished yet," proclaimed Faulkner – especially in order to make it "natural" once more, is paradoxically a back door into the willing mechanization of the world and self, as we see most profoundly in Heidegger (Faulkner, <u>Speeches</u> 135).

This is not to say that our particular culture, or even human life in general, is not threatened. We are, of course, always threatened. Within his provocative book, <u>The Inhuman</u>, which includes an essay which might more properly be called a science fiction story, "Can

Thought Go on Without a Body?" Lyotard sarcastically demands that philosophy confront the true end of the world: "But after the sun's death there won't be a thought to know that its death took place. . . .   That, in my view, is the sole serious question to face humanity today" (9). The death of the sun serves Lyotard's purposes well, but statistically, of course, we have every reason to believe that humanity will be extinct long before then. There have been numerous mass extinctions in the history of the earth, which destroyed most existing species, including the most dominant; there is no particular reason to trust in our immunity to this process, which tends to weed out large surface-dwelling species first. I would like to note in passing that there is strong genetic evidence that <u>Homo</u> <u>Sapiens</u> nearly did go extinct some 70,000 years ago. Richard Dawkins explains that despite our vastly greater population, humans are less genetically varied than chimpanzees:

> We can explain this human uniformity by guessing that our ancestors, but not the chimpanzees', passed through a genetic bottleneck not very long ago. The population was reduced to a small number, came close to going extinct but just pulled through. There is evidence of a fierce bottleneck – perhaps down to a population of 15,000, some 70,000 years ago, caused by a six-year 'volcanic winter' followed by a thousand-year ice age. (405)

Humanity will (we have every reason to think) have its end, whether in eighty years or in ten million. But when we end, even if that end is a result of our own technical ingenuity, as so many science-fiction authors have brilliantly envisioned, it will not be as a result of any sudden mechanization of the self. We will, rather, die <u>with</u> a mechanical self, as we have lived <u>with</u> a mechanical self. For it is not that <u>we</u> <u>alone</u> turn the world into a machine or a mere system of

information, despite how well contemporary biologists and computer scientists, especially working together, perform the latter task. To return to a moment from much earlier in this project: "Organisms do not experience environments. They create them" (Lewontin 109). We experience little in the world which is not made or profoundly influenced by life. Lyotard acknowledges as much in his essay/story:

> You know – technology wasn't invented by us humans. Rather the other way around. As anthropologists and biologists admit, even the simplest life forms, infusoria (tiny algae synthesized by light at the edges of tidepools a few million years ago) are already technical devices. Any material system is technological if it filters information useful to its survival, if it memorizes and processes that information and makes inferences based on the regulating effect of behavior. . . (12)

I do not fully endorse Lyotard's understanding of technology as information processing – I, like Bergson, associate technology with action, with the deliberate shaping and mastering of the world which, as a vast array of organisms, is directly or indirectly also acting upon us – but I would like, nonetheless, to extend or explicate it. Bios cannot be readily distinguished from Techné, for all life has techniques, and all life shapes the world. "It is perfectly possible to say that the living cell, and the organism with its organs, are already teknai, that 'life', as they say is already technique. . ." writes Lyotard, in the essay "Logos and Techné, or Telegraphy," also in The Inhuman (52). For Lyotard, who imagines humanity (and the Inhuman which follows it; I would say, with Bergson, that the Inhuman actually haunts the human) as, in some sense, the logos of techné, technology, or technologos, which he defines as:

remembering, and not only habit. Its self-referential capacity, reflection in the usual sense, 'critical' reflection if you like, is exercised by remembering its own presuppositions and implications as its limitations. And by the same token, the technologos opens up the world of what has been excluded by its very constitution, by the structures of its functioning, at all levels. This is how new denotative linguistic genres are invented: arithmetic, geometry, analysis. This is how science is generated . . . (53)

We are distinguished, as the logos of techné, by language, self-referentiality, reflection: philosophy, in short, although Lyotard does not invoke that term. Fair enough: we do seem to be the only philosophical animal. The other animals (and plants) are also technical, but characterized by "habit" or "breaching," not by scanning or philosophy – we are characterized by a reflective technologos, called scanning, rather than the "received technologos of breaching" (53). Lyotard's hope is that this self-reflection will reach a higher pitch, enabled by the "new technologies," enabling

resistance to clever programmes and fat telegrams. The whole question is this: is the passage possible, will it be possible with, or allowed by, the new mode of inscription and memory that characterizes the new technologies? Do they not impose syntheses, and syntheses conceived still more intimately in the soul than any earlier technology has done? (57)

Lyotard looks to the "new technologies" for the ability to allow new insight, a new ability to stand up to the "clear mirror, through the breaking" (56). He hopes, in a kind of concretized Heideggarian vision, that modern technologies (information processing has, incidentally, replaced the locomotive) will lead to a kind of psychoanalytic break with the past. There is

considerable subtlety in this approach; the breach between nature and culture has become a matter of the psyche and its history, rather than "actual" world history. Lyotard reveals as much again in the final essay (which is, yet again, a story) of The Inhuman, "Domus and the Megalopolis." He imagines a domestic scene, a manor or an estate, where all is ordered, all is "right": it is the middle landscape at its purest. "It is the sphere of reference of the estate, a monad. A mode of space, time and body under the regime (of) nature. A state of mind, of perception, of memory confined to its limits, but where the universe is represented" (192). Again: "The past repeats itself in work. It is fixed, which is to say it is held back and forgotten, in legends. The Domus is the space-time of this reiteration" (193). But "something remains untamed in the domination, and capable of interrupting the cycles. The domestic monad is torn, full of stories and scenes, haunted by secrets. . . . In the lowest depths of the domus, rumour of anti-nature" (195). Lyotard argues that only "the thought suggested by techno-science" was capable of thinking the end of the domus (198). Why? Because a bigger monad, one capable of great complexity, of programming and mediation, was necessary. And thus the Inhuman looms, in this science fiction story of our innermost selves:

> The control is no longer territorialized or historicized. It is computerized. . . the big techno-scientific monad has no need of our terrestrial bodies, of passions and writings that used to be kept in the domus. What it needs is 'our' wonderful brains. When it evacuates our dying solar system, the big monad, which is cosmically competitive, will not take the untameable along with it. (199)

This is too brilliant a tale, too much of a poem (rather than only philosophy), for me to wholly reject it. But I must make two skeptical notes.

First: we assume too easily (based on an easy familiarity with Greek philosophy and a casual anthropocentrism) that language is the true and progressive carrier of information, and that because we are the only "true" users of language, that it is our future, our destiny as Human or Inhuman which determines the destiny of all earthly information. But the gene, for all of our tentative gestures towards understanding it, has not been reduced to <u>human</u> (or inhuman) language, even if we have successfully conceptualized it as language. We are, all of us, utterances in a language that remains nearly incomprehensible (we have learned the genetic alphabet, and have learned to transcribe particular texts, but their <u>meaning</u> is another matter). Even if we should succeed in "understanding" that language, whatever that would entail, we would remain an utterance in it; our inhumanity is as inescapable as our humanity.

Second: Lyotard does ambiguously backtrack on the question of the historical reality of the <u>Domus</u> as history: "Domesticity is over, and probably it never existed, except as the dream of the old child awakening and destroying it on awakening" (201). In this, at least, he has an advantage over his more flagrant intellectual ancestors, including "Baudelaire, Benjamin, Adorno," who asked "How to inhabit the megalopolis" and answered "By bearing witness to the impossible work, by citing the lost <u>domus</u>" (200). Lyotard asks us, following Benjamin and Adorno, to "at least bear witness . . . to thinking as disaster, nomadism, difference and redundancy, even in the full awareness that "Attested, suffering and the untameable are as if already destroyed" (203-4).

The untameable is both "anti-nature" rising against the <u>domus</u> and the witness against the megalopolis. This insight is important, whether it is subtle or merely accidental. Historically, even Lyotard admits, the <u>domus</u> may never have existed; as I have detailed at length, to pin a date

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on the megalopolis (automatonization, the locomotive's arrival) is impossible. The horror of the

megalopolis is in the way that it turns a person against him or herself, makes even rebellion into a

resource for the megalopolis' exploitation. That is, the Megalopolis is a sophisticated form of

slavery (call it Domination, mechanization, or automatonization), which is so ancient that it is

not merely human: ants and termites practice it more perfectly than we, in Megalopolises of their

own. Like all life in some sense, but especially like ants and termites, human life – a particular

genetic utterance – imposes a new "final" order on its environment.

Abandoning all claims to the historical reality of the <u>domus</u> should lead to doubts about

the imminence of its twin the <u>megalopolis</u>. Life which is not enslaved, which is not exploited as

a raw material, is no life. The inhuman megalopolis does not <u>now</u>, in particular, threaten to

overtake human life, but it continuously, like the mitochondria and other incompletely

assimilated "alien" life that our ancestors absorbed without ever assimilating, dwells within it.

We have been, for many hundreds of millions of years, appropriated as a resource by

mitochondria. And so, also, with the legions of bacteria that inhabit us: are we their resource or

they, ours? We can say that our relationship with them is peaceful symbiosis, nature, the <u>domus</u>

internalized – and yet, we can rest assured that the colonization of our ancestor's bodies was no

painless or trivial matter; much raw material was destroyed to make our current bodies/machines.

There is no stable way to divide <u>zoē</u> from <u>techné</u>. Any such division, if it should prove to

be useful, will necessarily be pragmatic and ad hoc (oriented towards action, without

epistemological or ontological claims), although we need not, like Hobbes, simply understand

<u>zoē</u> <u>as</u> techné. We might, instead, propose that we should always see the <u>zoē</u> pervading techné,

and vice versa.

Lyotard's horror and awe in the face of the Inhuman is a significant and representative historical response. But it is not the only possible response. Other science fiction writers have anticipated the coming of the inhuman with considerable zest: Isaac Asimov, Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany (both black science fiction novelists who wrote novels directly in response to Asimov) in particular have exposed the fact that our fear of being turned into automatons is continuous with our response to the institution(s) of enslavement and Domination, which have always been with us. Lyotard, again, acknowledges this only by implication: his domus, while being opposed to the anti-nature which rises up against it to form the great monad, the Inhuman, is named domus for a reason. The name invokes Horkheimer and Adorno's Domination, which is nothing other than the Inhuman. The Inhuman is not separate from the human, any more than "we" are independent from all the lifeforms which have colonized "us."

I have argued that it is dangerous to conceive of either technological development or biological evolution as progress; it is most especially dangerous to imagine a turning point in either one, after which everything is different; insistence on thinking in terms of division, departures, and differing concepts of time (which were sometimes held to be cultural differences but sometimes biological) maintained scientific racism in a species remarkable, although not quite unrivalled (cheetahs, for instance, are even less diverse) in its genetic uniformity. Our own techniques have peculiar characteristics, as do, presumably, our genes, but our techné is as continuous (to the point of impressionistic blending) with inhuman techné as our genes are continuous with inhuman genes.

I may seem to have wandered far afield, but to the contrary. This has been a project on the relationship between time and technology, and I have come to the critical theoretical moment.

The techniques of mitochondria blur into our techniques; we might, to stretch a point, be regarded as their techniques. After all, they shape us (we could not exist without them), and they use us as vehicles for their own survival. But they do not own us, we might add. But neither do we (wholly) own the dogs we have bred for millennia, as the Australian dingo shows. To alter Lyotard's story of the escape of the Inhuman into space: isn't it easier, and more resonant with the history of zoē as we understand it, to imagine human life mutually appropriating and appropriated by the Inhuman which it creates? The human and the inhuman, nature and anti-nature are useful, if dangerous metaphors for the conflicts which define life and its techniques. But they are also an illusion; not only can we not strip a human of technique, but we can't strip a dog, an octopus or an ant of technique.

We can imagine ourselves, or even all life, extinct. We can also imagine the survival of human techniques in a kind of mitochondrial coexistence, as a component of some future system. This is just another science fiction story, one as much under the spell of Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis as under Lyotard's, but to a point. Various forms of life blur into one another, such that we can actively regard ourselves as unities or colonies; technologies, techniques, are properly attributes. And although technology in a narrow sense (say, tools consciously sculpted from hard materials) are readily identified, more useful definitions of technology – those which, following Lewis Mumford, allow for techniques and containers as well as tools proper – blur into definitions of life itself. Life is haunted by automatism, and automatism by life, with no sudden breach separating them, for they are not properly distinct. Time is not threatened, but always already penetrated, by the automatism of life.

Teleology and eschatology drop by the wayside; the copestone is never added. Life and

its techniques (those which it uses and those which use it) are unstable and continually changing,

but there is no moment when life (or technology) suddenly becomes technology (or life). We

experience those moments, but we experience them, properly, as myth, the same as we

experience the remembered embrace of the domus: the locomotive's arrival, like the domus's

being, was always there, and yet has not happened. Now returning to Lyotard, on a more positive

note: we are, indeed, witnesses of the arrival of megalopolis or the inhuman, an arrival which has

not yet happened, and yet which also dates, at the latest, to the arrival of our second cousins the

ants and termites (and yet, is not all multicellular life also megalopolis?). This is not to deny any

realities: global oppression has been a reality, slavery has been a reality, and so forth. Some

reality, at some point, will presumably provide a bottleneck too tight for humanity to pass

through (unless, perhaps, as the equivalent of mitochondria), but none of these realities is a crisis

in time. The crisis is real enough, but it is a condition of life as such and not of a particular,

privileged historical moment. Nor is it a merely human experience. Once again, I draw on

Richard Dawkins' brilliant and tone-deaf The Ancestor's Tale, specifically, upon the beaver's

tale.

Opening his discussion of the beaver, Dawkins defines phenotype as "that which is

influenced by genes," or as the "external and visible manifestation of the hidden genotype" (186).

Thus, a Giraffe's phenotype would include its long neck and coloration. But the beaver's

phenotype, the external manifestation of its genotype, is not limited to the confines of its own

body: "Beavers have lake phenotypes, caused by dam phenotypes. A lake is an extended

phenotype [Dawkins has also written an entire book of that title], the extension of the phenotype

from the body out into the world" (187). More dramatically than with most animals, the manifestation of the beaver's genes extends far beyond its own body. For Dawkins, the beaver is a machine of tremendous complexity. Although Dawkins may not realize it, Descartes' shadow is long over his work:

> Dam-building behavior is a complicated stereotype, built into the brain like a fine-tuned clockwork mechanism. Or, as if to follow the history of clocks into the electronic age, dam-building is hard wired in the brain. I have seen a remarkable film of captive beavers imprisoned in a bare, unfurnished cage, with no water and no wood. The beavers enacted, 'in a vacuum', all the stereotype movements normally seen in natural building behavior when there is real wood and real water. They seem to be placing virtual wood into a virtual dam wall, pathetically trying to build a ghost wall with ghost sticks, all on the hard, dry, flat floor of their prison. One feels sorry for them: it is as if they are desperate to exercise their frustrated dam-building clockwork (189).

The beaver, then, is to be pitied in its automatism, for its insistence on a re-enactment or dramatization of its "natural" behavior in captivity. But our pity for the beaver is surely pity for ourselves, too, trapped in megalopolis or under Domination, despite all of our "superiority" to the Beaver; the mastery of human movement to which such figures as Frederick Winslow Taylor aspired (to say nothing of the military mastery of motion long before then) surely resembles the beaver's automatism. I return once more to a moment in Bergson's Creative Evolution: "Our freedom, in the very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort: it is dogged by automatism. The most living thought becomes frigid in the formula that expresses it. The word turns against the idea" (127).

The beaver's phenotype, which is the expression of its genotype in the world, includes or implies pure and hopeless automatism. Dawkins' comparison to "the history of clocks in the electronic age" is telling; as Michael Adas, following Foucault and others, has documented, the developing clock and the temporal structure of the railroad which it enables have been central tools in the construction and teaching of western ideologies; "Time became a factor to be controlled by the ascendant middle classes" (226, 251). Is the beaver, then, in its frustrated clockwork moments, middle-class, or perhaps under middle-class tutelage/oppression? The question, if amusing, is not trivial: although we might protest that our impositions of order upon the world are more flexible and "self-aware" than the beaver's, this would seem to be a question of degree and not of kind; we are very different from the beaver or the squid, but the differences are, uttered in genetic language, rather subtle. We might, surely, compare the beaver's caged automatism to the automatism to which the prison system has always aspired. But, Dawkins might protest, the beaver is, unlike us, only a genetic machine.

Surely. And yet the beaver enacts a ritual; it takes part in a drama, a backwards look at the <u>domus</u>, before the arrival of the megalopolis (that is, the human and the human's cage). It expends energy in hopeless, pathetic protest (as political prisoners are apt to do). The beaver's resistance to its mechanization, the re-inscription of its meaning in the cage (or, if you will, the prison camp), is mechanical in turn. But techné and <u>zoē</u> are a continuum. If the beaver's ritual, drama and protest are only mechanical, then ours is also in danger of mechanization. Conversely, an attempt to save some fragment of human freedom from the consequences of biology, as in Lewontin's work, must also erode the pure hopelessness of the beaver's situation.

Take Darwin's description of the hopeless resistance of black Brazilians to slavery early in The Voyage of the Beagle, the foundation of his work:

This spot is notorious from having been, for a long time, the residence of some runaway slaves, who, by cultivating a little ground near the top, contrived to eke out a subsistence. At length they were discovered, and a party of soldiers being sent, the whole were seized with the exception of one old woman, who, sooner than again be led into slavery, dashed herself to pieces from the summit of the mountain. In a Roman matron this would have been called the noble love of freedom: in a poor negress it is mere brutal obstinacy. (19)

One wonders, perhaps idly, what techniques the escaped slaves developed on top of their mountain. How did they adapt their agricultural techniques, for instance? Darwin is silent on these matters, for the "brutal obstinacy" of the "negress" is hopeless automatism, not thought; it is a beaver's empty ritual in a cage with no escape, to be pitied and despised, but not analyzed. The march of Western man has overtaken and eclipsed her. It's easy to hate or pity a prisoner, but the prisoner's automatism haunts us; under the gaze of the slave and the beaver, "our" own clockwork gives an automatic twitch of recognition, and "we" struggle, flies in the web, to escape the automatism "we" see in "them."

The sailor, the slave and the beaver, though, perhaps see things differently. After the end, after one's own automatism has been revealed, much remains to be done. Something may come of this masquerade, at least once the story of progress has been destroyed. But we have seen that the story of progress, of eschatological change, insistently returns. I turn to Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer and, briefly, The Open, for an example of contemporary thought which is able to thoroughly demolish the notion of a true barrier between nature and culture (between beaver and

human, between negro and Darwin), and yet remains, finally, enmeshed in eschatology; as with

Donna Haraway, Agamben reinscribes the eschatos even as he destroys it.

In Agamben's Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, an interpretation of Western

culture and politics which ranges from Hobbes to Heidegger and from Rome to Dachau, we find

the double assertion that, first, the sovereign power of the state is rooted in a particular

understanding of a state of nature, and second, that this state of nature, following Hobbes, "did

not necessarily have to be conceived as a real epoch, but rather could be understood as a principle

internal to the State" (36). The state of nature against which the state justifies itself need not

exist as such, but exists theoretically, in order to create and justify the state of exception through

which sovereign power is exercised:

> Insofar as it is sovereign, the nomos is necessarily connected with both the state of nature
>
> and the state of exception. The state of exception . . . is not external to the nomos but
>
> rather, even in its clear delimination, included in the nomos as a moment that is in every
>
> sense fundamental. At its very center, the localization-ordering link thus always contains
>
> its own virtual rupture in the form of a "suspension of every law." But what then appears
>
> . . . is in fact not the state of nature (as an earlier stage into which men would fall back)
>
> but the state of exception. The state of nature and the state of exception are nothing but
>
> two sides of a single topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the
>
> state of nature) now appears, as in a Möbius strip or a Leyden jar, in the inside (as state of
>
> exception), and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between
>
> outside and inside, nature and exception, physis and nomos. (37)

"Not simple natural life, but life exposed to death (bare life or sacred life) is the originary political element," Agamben argues, in an analysis of Rome (86). Bios, political life, is rooted in, contrasted too, and always threatened with reduction to bare life (which both is and is not zoē). In The Open, Agamben takes his argument further: "In our culture, the decicive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origins Western politics is also biopolitics" (80). With the reduction of the human to the animal has come the end of history, which terminated roughly with Heidegger: "post-history was beginning to knock on the doors of a concluded metaphysics" (75).

Agamben is concerned with the crisis of the state and the crisis of philosophy, a crisis in which the camp (that is, the concentration camp, the equivalent, I would argue anti-teleologically, of the beaver's cage) "decisively signals the political space of modernity itself" (174).

> If the structure of the nation-state is . . . defined by the three elements land, order, birth, the rupture of the old nomos is produced . . . at the point marking the inscription of bare life (the birth that thus becomes nation) within the two of them. Something can no longer function within the traditional mechanisms that regulated this inscription, and the camp is the new, hidden regulator of the inscription of life in the order – or, rather, the sign of the system's inability to function without being transformed into a lethal machine (175).

Although Agamben struggles to avoid discussing the crisis of modernity in terms of literal mechanization (although, following Foucault, he depends on the metaphor of the "anthropological machine" in The Open), he inevitably falls into this language as he fully develops his arguments. The camp is created at the moment when the inscription of bare life into the political order fails; it is created as a machine for destruction, a machine which is equated

with modernity itself. Inevitably, once the specter of the machine has been conjured the shade of

nature must appear along with it, despite Agamben's earlier critique of the "state of nature":

> Just as the biopolitical body of the West cannot be simply given back to its natural life
>
> [my emphasis] in the oikos, so it cannot be overcome in a passage to a new body – a
>
> technical body or a wholly political or glorious body – in which a different economy of
>
> pleasures and vital functions would once and for all resolve the interlacement of zoē and
>
> bios [one surely must think of Donna Haraway here; Agamben refutes, among other
>
> things, the science fictional New World of the cyborg] that seems to define the political
>
> destiny of the West. This biopolitical body that is bare life must itself instead by
>
> transformed into the site for the constitution and installation of a form of life that is
>
> wholly exhausted in bare life and a bios that is only its own zoē. Here attention will also
>
> have to be given to the analogies between politics and the epochal situation of
>
> metaphysics (188).

Once we had a natural life in the oikos, but we can neither return to it nor replace it with a new,

technological body; we have arrived at a political and metaphysical telos, in which the natural

order of the oikos has been replaced by the mechanical order of the camp.

It's a curious ending for Agamben, who first successfully points out, in returning to

Hobbes, that the state of nature (and therefore also the state of exception) is a theoretical and not

a historical category, one which is imposed on history. Better still, the declaration of the story of

civilization as movement from state of nature to mechanized and mechanizing nation-state (and

beyond), from arche to telos, is precisely the imposition which is history. But Agamben falls,

eyes wide open, into the trap, and re-inscribes the teleological story of the technological nation-

state, the locomotive which has, yet again, arrived at our very moment, the _telos_, the hinge upon which history turns.

For Agamben, brilliantly following Benjamin's brilliant performances, we cannot escape Messianic thinking, which is connected to the state of exception and the formation of the state on the most intimate level, and yet defies it.

In monotheism, messianism thus constitutes not simply one category of religious experience among others but rather the limit concept of religious experience in general, the point in which religious experience passes beyond itself and calls itself into question insofar as it is law (hence the messianic aporias concerning the Law that are expressed in both Paul's Epistle to the Romans and the Sabbatian doctrine according to which the fulfillment of the Torah is its transgression) (56).

One of the paradoxes of the state of exception lies in the fact that in the state of exception, it is impossible to distinguish transgression of the law from execution of the law, such that what violates a rule and what conforms to it coincide without any remainder. . .   This is precisely the situation that, in the Jewish tradition (and, actually, in every genuine messianic tradition), comes to pass when the messiah arrives. The first consequence of this arrival is that the Law . . . Is fulfilled and consummated. But this fulfillment does not signify that the old law is simply replaced by a new law that is homologous to the old . . . What is implied instead is that the fulfillment of the Torah now coincides with its transgression (57).

Agamben's parenthetical reference to Paul's epistle to the Romans is almost too subtle. It might take a whole dissertation to unpack the relationship between Agamben's text and Paul's, but I will make the beginning of a beginning, at least. Agamben refers, most directly, to Romans 10:4. "Telos gar nomou kristos eis dikaiosunē panti tô pisteuonti." In the New Revised Standard Translation: "For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." The translation is perfect, but also incomplete, for it necessarily fails to capture the complexity of telos: Christ is the end-as-cessation and end-as-fulfillment of the law. The law dooms us, devours us, and yet it is just, and yet we can only escape the law through the law. "For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 6-8). Thus, the frustrating ambiguity of Paul's relationship to the Roman state, which he both endorses and surely hopes to see pass away. For Paul, life is a conflict between kinds of slavery: "with my mind I am a slave [douleuô] to the law [nomos] of God, but with my flesh [sarki] I am a slave to the law of sin [amartias]" (Romans 7:26). To understand Agamben's implicit theology, it is of great importance to note that when Paul affirms that with his flesh he is a slave to the law of sin, the word for the flesh is the same word (albeit in a different form) used in John 1:14: "And the Word [logos] became flesh [sarx] and lived among us, and we have seen his glory [doxan], the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth [aletheias]." One might even speculate that the author of John intended this as a development of Paul's theology (Paul's letters being chronologically earlier than the Gospel of John): the precise flesh which is a slave to the law of sin is the precise flesh which the logos becomes. Thus the extremity of the messianic transgression of which Agamben speaks; abused and abusing, enslaved and brutalized matter is the very messiah. There is a difficulty in the relationship which Agamben establishes between bios and zoē (regrettably, my

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Greek is far from sufficient to explore it in depth): given that this is work which engages with the history of Judaism and Christianity as well as the history of philosophy, where is sarkis (or sarx) in this transaction? This is a whole theological dimension of the text which speaks only through its absence (Paul is already familiar, I submit, with bare life).

My attempt to force Agamben from Paul to John is significant to my own text, although this is not a work of theology. But as I have demonstrated, the history of attitudes towards "modern technology" is a history of eschatology, an eschatology which makes Darwin's Negro into a savage and a slave, the beaver into clockwork, the sailor into a pendulum and so forth, and which leads to the eschatological dread of the arrival of the mechanical man (in part, because the master sees his own mechanism laid bare in the slave), which helps lead, to pick an example, to Heidegger's Nazism. Agamben asserts that "there is no return from the camps to classical politics," as there is no return from technics to a pre-technical existence (188). But the experience of Dawkins' beaver is already the experience of the camp; one need not be human to both be an automaton and to struggle wildly against automatism. There never was a bios or a zoē which was not already techné and sarkis.

Which is to say that the eschatos has always already come. I have presented this argument from my readings of Melville, Faulkner and Ellison, and now more theoretically; the technological crisis which threatens life is the crisis which, following Bergson, constitutes life as the vital force which struggles to escape from the automatism which must inevitably overcome it. Or, to put it more simply: life struggles. It shapes the life around it (not to mention the inorganic "world"), and is shaped by it. If it shapes wrongly or is shaped wrongly, it dies. Life is nothing but change, which is nothing but the exercise of technique.

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How, then, do we survive an <u>eschatos</u> which has always already happened, which renders us as <u>techné</u>-<u>sarkis</u>-<u>zoē</u>? Lyotard's answer is that we do not survive, but that we witness – but then, he anticipates an <u>eschatos</u> yet to come. The answer in Faulkner, Melville, and Ellison is that we find a new way of understanding time, one in which the erasure of our original innocence of the machine (or freedom from it) renders it unsurprising that we have survived the "eschatos" which in reality constitutes us. Refusing a technological Eden, we undermine the technological <u>eschatos</u>. The masquerade continues, on the steamboat most of all.

I turn to the words of Victor Frankenstein, under the care of his father as he is transported from colonized, brutalized Ireland, where he has lost Henry Clerval, to Switzerland, where he will lose his sister-wife and his father.

> My father, who was watching over me, perceiving my restlessness, awoke me; the
>
> dashing waves were around; the cloudy sky above; the fiend was not here: a sense of
>
> security, a feeling that a truce was established between the present hour and the
>
> irresistible, disastrous future. . . (188; Vol. 3, Chap 4)

What Victor doesn't know at this moment, when the threat of inhuman anti-nature looms on the <u>domus</u>'s horizon, is that the monster, has grown sick of violence, and has declared a unilateral truce, which he will ultimately violate because Victor dares to return to the compulsory heterosexuality of union with Elizabeth. It is only Victor's absolute rejection of the monster, and his absolute obligation to marry his sister-wife, which keep the truce from being permanent. In other words, Victor's "irresistible, disastrous future" is brought on by his insistence on the absolute divide between nature and artifice, as demarcated by him, <u>no matter how loathsome he finds the obligations of a nature which he has already proven, by making the monster's body, not</u>

to exist. It is his insistence on seeking the embrace of the "natural" oikos/domus, after having himself totally annihilated any claim to the existence of "nature" as such through his creation of the monster, which brings the irresistible, disastrous future into being. Frankenstein's disastrous future prefigures those of Ahab, Sutpen and the Brotherhood, which can only be survived by slaves and confidence men, for whom the oneness of the oppression of the oikos/domus and of the technologies which constitute them as confidence men and slaves is apparent. Technology does not destroy Victor Frankenstein, nor blackness (or slavery) Sutpen, nor violent nature Ahab. Frankenstein is destroyed by his own border war, his insistence on the border between nature and culture which he has also annihilated; the same applies, with differences, to Sutpen and Ahab, who also insist on the same bounderies that they have erased. The Confidence Man, Ishmael and the invisible man endure, however. They have witnessed the "the breaking-up of the icebound stream of Time", in which teleology exists in the teeth of chaos, and all things are subject to change, as well as to destruction, but not to any end (Moby-Dick 13; ch. 3).

Science Fiction is the field, for all of its failures, which may further enact this masquerade; the field of art most mesmerized by technical progress is the field in which progress (although not technology) may be assassinated. Darko Suvin argues in The Metamorphoses of Science Fiction (1979) that one task of science fiction is to think of history without endings, without a final thought or ideology:

> [cognitive] validation for SF [is] based on science as an open-ended corpus of knowledge, which argument can now be seen to be ultimately and solidly anchored to the bedrock fact that there is no end to history, and in particular that we and our ideologies are not the end-product history has been laboring for from the time of the first saber-toothed tigers and

Mesopotamian city-states. It follows that SF will be the more significant and truly

relevant the more clearly it eschews final solutions, be they the static utopia of the Plato-

More model, the more fashionable static utopia of the Huxley-Orwell model, or any

similar metamorphosis of the Apocalypse (let us remember that the end of time in the

Apocalypse encompasses not only the ultimate chaos but also the ultimate divine order).

(83)

What we need is a replacement for the temporality of Revelation, which Suvin here argues is the

dominant model of temporality, even in secular SF; even Agamben and Lyotard reproduce this

temporality. But Suvin does not go quite far enough, for he does not eschew generalized

progress along with final solutions; the abandonment of generalized progress is what enables

Stephen Gould and R.C. Lewontin's biology (as opposed to the mainstream ideology of biology,

which they critique) to escape from the eschatology which, in the case of biology, is related to

fascism. I find the potential for a broader abandonment of progress, though, in certain works of

science fiction, particularly in Octavia Butler's, which I will discuss by way of Donna Haraway's

work.

Although Haraway's work insistently reinscribes the salvation history which it attempts

to overthrow, it remains a point of reference for me: Haraway's continual recognition that an

acknowledgement of the continuity between humanity, animals and machines (particularly in the

problematically messianic figure of the cyborg) is necessary for an alternative to salvation history

(teleological history, in my phrasing) is vital to my project. One of the origins of this project is in

Haraway's brief commentary in her greatest book, Primate Visions (1989), on Octavia Butler's

Xenogenesis, consisting of Dawn (1987), Adulthood Rites (1988), and Imago (1989). This

commentary is the end of Haraway's book, and my commentary on it is the end of my

dissertation, but also the beginning point for another project. My turn towards Haraway's

commentary on Butler is not simply a sentimental return to the origins of this project (although it

may also be that), but is a new beginning. My assertion is that Haraway, for all of her insight in

her commentary upon Butler, errs by referring to Butler's work as salvation history. Butler

begins, rather, with a satire of all salvation history; the remainder of <u>Xenogenesis</u> concerns

humanity's struggle to think beyond it.

In other words, where Faulkner imagines a world post-<u>eschatos</u>, and Melville imagines

meaningful life (Ishmael and the confidence man) beyond the <u>eschatos</u>, and Ellison imagines the

tinker-thinker-hero who has begun to create a liberating post-eschatological politics through an

embrace of technology, Butler struggles with the hard question: what do life and politics look

like, when stripped of <u>telos</u> and <u>eschatos</u>? What do we actually look like, when we have

abandoned our <u>ends</u>? Her answers, although only a beginning, go farther than even Ellison and

Melville's. A detailed exploration of that answer and its importance must wait for another

project, but I will make an initial gesture now, by way of Haraway.

<u>Dawn</u> begins with a masquerade, a false <u>eschatos</u>; humanity has seemingly been

annihilated by nuclear war. But, "coincidentally," the Oankali, a "species" which is

characterized by their ability – indeed, their need – to manipulate their own genes and the genes

of others, ambiguously rescue the remnants of humanity. As Haraway succinctly explains, "their

nature is always to be midwife to themselves as other" (379). The Oankali make only the most

limited use of "machines" in the sense of metal and plastic artifacts. Rather, they sculpt life to

shape their every need. Their purpose is to "trade" with humanity, which means that humanity

will both become Oankali and raw material for Oankali exploitation: we are simultaneously freed for future (genetic) projects and turned into perfect automatons by the very process which rescues us from the eschatos.

Haraway, characteristically, both accepts and rejects Xenogenesis as salvation history. Traditional messianism is eschewed, but something else is substituted for it.

> Butler writes not of Cain or Ham, but of Lilith, the woman of color whose confrontations with the terms of selfhood, survival, and reproduction in the face of repeated ultimate catastrophe presage an ironic salvation history, with a salutary twist on the promise of a woman who will crush the head of the serpent. Butler's salvation history is not utopian . . . (378)

The first book, Dawn, is essentially a chronicle of humanity's discovery of itself as standing-reserve for the Oankali, combined with the ongoing reality of intra-human conflict. The second book, Adulthood Rites, is the story of the first male human-Oankali "construct," who convinces his elders that humanity ought to be given a chance to survive, genetically unaltered, and to reenact their telos, if they can do nothing else (the image of the future nuclear war that haunts this remnant of unaltered humanity seems like a ritual, a boomeranging, in Ellison's terminology). This would seem to be a victory for humanity-as-humanity, and for the continuation of teleological history. But the third book, Imago, is the story of the first human-Oankali construct ooloi (a third sex, which manipulates genes but does not otherwise pass its own genes on), who in something like a messianic moment confronts the most intransigent of purely human settlements; these resisters fall over themselves to be seduced by it into inhumanity. The repeated, disastrous future for an unaltered humanity which was offered in the

second book is withdrawn in the third, in favor of humanity's willing embrace of the inhuman; humanity chooses to become other than it is, to become standing-reserve and thus to survive.

Pure humanity wills itself out of existence. Its future as the Oankali, now partially human, spreading across the galaxy, is to continually breed with other forms of life. But, for the Oankali as for the humans (although transparently for them) life is nothing but technique. Their changes and adaptations are endless. All of the Oankali may eventually die, but they will die one by one, on different sides of the galaxy, for endlessly varied reasons. There is no scent of ideology, of "progress," in what the Oankali do. Their drive to change, to adapt, is essentially sexual, as is our own need to adapt to our environment through technique.

Like Ellison and Melville, but also meditating on the same consequences of contemporary biology which have spawned Lewontin and Gould's rejection of evolutionary progress, and parallel to Pacey and Basilla's rejection of technological progress, Butler presents the Oankali as the unshamed and exaggerated mirror of earthly life, which is nothing but change, adaptation, and appropriation of life as standing-reserve.

In Butler's novels <u>Parable</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Sower</u> and <u>Parable</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Talents</u>, the main character, a young black woman who passes through the destruction of her family, the death of her husband, the loss of her child, rape and slavery to establish a powerful new religion, builds that religion on a single, simple premise: "God is Change." This is, interestingly, among Bergson's assertions in <u>Creative</u> <u>Evolution</u>: the only prescription against automatism is change. Butler, though, unlike Bergson, refuses to make that change into progress. It is, instead, merely life, but not, I would venture, <u>bare</u> life, but life as <u>process</u>, although process is not progress.

American literature has been marked, as Leo Marx and Lewis Mumford noted most prominently, by the conflict between nature and culture. The genuine contrast between what was easily understood as frontier on the one hand (despite the fact that it, too, had long been shaped by human hands) and intensive mechanization on the other hand has made this contrast prominent in American literature. But in contrast with the metaphysicians, various American artists have successfully seen that the eschatological confrontation between nature and culture, between human and machine, is theoretical and not historical, which enabled them to conceive of life (and technology) as process as opposed to progress, in advance, even, of the historians of biology and technology.

I reject salvation history; there is no "crisis in modernity," no Domination or its equivalent which particularly characterizes or privileges our historical moment. We confront no crisis in time, other than that which constitutes us and all life. Technology has not suddenly become ascendant over life; life is technological, and time is uninterrupted.

Abandoning all teleology and eschatology does not imply abandoning the fact that we will all die, both individually and collectively. The nature of bios as techné is not a metaphysical problem, but it opens up endless pragmatic ethical problems. This is the business of life, but also the business of science fiction, which is – not only in our age of the cyborg, as Donna Haraway argues, but in all ages – really the same thing.

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