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The oscillating subject in Don DeLillo's White Noise

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The Oscillating Subject in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Anne Howell, B.A (University of Sydney), B.A (University of New South Wales).

School of Creative Arts

2013

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Certification

I, Anne Howell, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Creative Writing, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Anne Howell

12 October 2013

Contents

Abbreviations	iii
Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
Context and Frame: The Scholarship	11
<i>White Noise</i> in Context: History and DeLillo's Oeuvre	11
Postmodern Interpretations of <i>White Noise</i>	14
Modern or Romantic Interpretations of <i>White Noise</i>	16
Hybrid Readings of <i>White Noise</i>	19
Scholarship on Modernism and Postmodernism	22
Theories of Modernism	22
Theories of Postmodernism	26
Postmodern Challenges to the Subject	32
Postmodern Challenges to the Modernist Subject	35
Gladney's Modernist Elements	56
Gladney's Individualised Consciousness	56
Gladney and Modernist Authenticity	59
Gladney and the Search for Transcendent Meaning	63
Gladney and Language	74
Gladney's Epiphomercial	77
Gladney's Manoeuvres Towards Postmodernism	83
Gladney's Consumer Embrace	85
Gladney and Baudrillard's Simulacrum	87
Gladney's Simulation Thinking	88
Gladney's Identity Appropriation	90
Conforming to (Postmodern) Room Behaviour	95
From Conformist to Clone: a Comparative Study of Gladney and Clément	103
Gladney and Clément: Interiority Masking Media-generated Subjectivity	107
Gladney and Clément: The Abject	112
Clément and Gladney: Merging With Consumerism	113
Gladney and Clément: Diminished Transcendence	116
Questions of the Subject: Jack Blight and Jack Gladney	122
Blight, Gladney and the Theory Wars	123
Blight and Gladney: Manoeuvres Towards Postmodernism	124
Thesis Conclusion	128
References	132

Abbreviations

Frequently cited texts are represented by the following abbreviations.

All references are taken from these editions.

WN: DeLillo, D, 1985, *White Noise*, Penguin, New York.

P: Joyce, J, 1992, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Seamus Deane (ed.), Penguin Books, London. First edition 1914-15.

SH: Joyce, J, 1991, *Stephen Hero: Part of the First Draft of A Portrait*, Paladin, London.

A: Houellebecq, Michel, 1999, *Atomised*, trans. F Wynne, Vintage, UK.

OED: *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press.

1984 DNTP: *1984 Did Not Take Place*, 2013, Novel by Anne Howell, written as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, University of Wollongong.

Abstract

The dossier of work associated with my doctoral research comprises a creative component in the form of a novel, *1984 Did Not Take Place*, and this thesis. Both projects address debates about the subject under the influence of postmodern theory, which arose during what Douglas Kellner calls the 1980s “theory wars” (1995, p 23). In this thesis I conduct an investigation into how the protagonist of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, Jack Gladney, is depicted as reacting to the pressures of these ‘wars’ and how his “maneuvering for advantage” leads to his oscillation between subject positions associated with cultural canonical modernism and postmodernism. In order to determine Gladney’s characterisation in relation to modernist and postmodernist notions of the subject, I draw on key properties established by a range of fictional authors and theorists who have written on what typifies artistic modernism and postmodernism. I argue that *White Noise* depicts 1980s theoretical preoccupation with mass conformist consciousness, Baudrillard’s “precession of simulacra” (1983a), the dominance of mainstream media, consumerism and the decline of the transcendent subject, and that these themes play out within Gladney’s characterisation in challenging the hegemony of modernist preoccupations with authenticity, originality and individual agency in relation to the subject. I coin the term *epiphomeric* to demonstrate that Gladney represents the subject caught in between these conflicting cultural paradigms.

This thesis compares Gladney’s characterisation with the modernist artist-hero Stephen Dedalus from James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1992) and with postmodern hedonist-pragmatist Bruno Clément in Michel Houellebecq’s *Atomised* (1998) to identify a continuum within the canon of the literary subject in relation to the postmodern challenge to ideas of transcendence. This thesis shows that Gladney occupies a transitional place in this continuum, oscillating between canonical modernist and postmodernist positions. In a final study, I compare Gladney with Jack Blight, the protagonist in my novel *1984 Did Not Take Place*, whose role as emerging postmodern artist is represented as a strategic game of survival played in collusion with his peers. Both *White Noise* and my novel draw thematically on the strong

influence of Jean Baudrillard in the period and explore his concerns with the impact on the subject of an increasingly media-saturated consumer culture.

While there are significant similarities in the treatment of the themes explored in this thesis, it is demonstrated that the key differences between DeLillo's work and my own are, firstly, that DeLillo does not treat these themes explicitly, and secondly that my own work was penned in what is arguably the aftermath of postmodernism, rather than contemporaneously with the height of the theory wars. Some implications of these differences for the representation of subjectivity are considered.

Introduction

Both projects comprising this doctoral research, the novel *1984 Did Not Take Place*, and the thesis, address 1980s debates about the subject under the influence of postmodern theory. In this thesis I conduct an investigation of the protagonist of *White Noise*, Jack Gladney and explore the proposition that he is depicted as an emblematic 1980s character transitionally caught between cultural modern and postmodern subject positions. My argument is that the debates about the subject within what Douglas Kellner has called the 1980s “theory wars” (1995, p 23) of the time are played out in his characterisation. My novel addresses similar matters in a very different way, and I was drawn therefore to study *White Noise*, within which, I argue, the theory wars are embedded structurally, but especially in Gladney’s portrayal. In contrast, my novel explicitly highlights and names this conflict between what, for convenience’s sake, can be labeled the modernists and the postmodernists in the 1980s.

My interest in writing a novel about the 1980s ‘postmodern’ artworld in Australia, and studying *White Noise* in relation to it, is partly due to my background; firstly as a university student of the Visual Arts, Philosophy and Literature in the mid-80s, and secondly as a journalist who wrote on the Arts from 1986 to the early 1990s in Sydney magazines and newspapers. In both capacities I observed at firsthand how cultural debates responding to the emergence of postmodern theory played out institutionally. I also came to write about several artists as they emerged in the postmodern Sydney art scene and, in this capacity, to varying degrees operated in the role of what Mike Featherstone calls postmodernism’s “intermediaries”: someone who helps to broker writings about postmodernism from the intelligentsia into the public sphere (Featherstone, 2007, p 40).

Another impetus for this study was my interest in the contradictions involved in postmodernism as a movement in terms of its complex relationship with consumerism. Linda Hutcheon says that on an ideological level, postmodern fiction is “both critical of and yet complicitous with the cultural dominants of our time: liberal humanism and mass consumer culture” (Hutcheon in 1988a, p 2). My interest in exploring Gladney as a character in *White Noise* enabled me to focus on this contradiction in relation to postmodernism and theories of the subject as reflected in fiction of that time.

This set of factors led me to the question this thesis explores: What does *White Noise* say about ‘the subject’ as a theoretical concern in the 1980s period? This is linked to a further query explored in the thesis: How can we account for Gladney’s ambivalent and oscillating subjectivity? My research presents an alternative reading of Gladney as a subject, to those offered in the scholarship to date, and in particular to the leading study of Leonard Wilcox (1991) on ‘Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise* and the End of Heroic Narrative’, which draws on extent definitions of the modernist and postmodern subject. The thesis responds to the statement Wilcox makes in this essay that “Gladney is a modernist displaced in a postmodern world” (2001, p 348), and notes its influential role within a school of humanist-inspired readings of Gladney (Bloom, Kavadlo, Nel, Bonca and Packer) that the thesis refutes. I address certain contradictions within Wilcox’s essay, and the novel itself, to demonstrate that Gladney is no “modernist displaced in a postmodern world” but rather oscillates from modernist to postmodern subject positions throughout the novel.

This oscillation mirrors historical phenomena in the era of the novel’s setting, in which the debate dubbed “the death of the subject” raged. Gladney’s character serves to illuminate the polar positions that characterised this historical debate, while itself resembling neither pole. In Chapter Four it is demonstrated that in contrast to the modernist epiphany associated with James Joyce, Gladney instead experiences what I have termed an *epiphomercial*, in a scene that represents both Gladney’s divided allegiance to modernist notions of transcendent meaning, and his divergence from canonical modernist subjectivity into postmodern terrain.

My thesis question responds to the way that scholarship on *White Noise*, for example in the major DeLillo readers, from Viking and Cambridge, posits either/or positions on Gladney as modernist or postmodern creation, also reflected in the very substantial body of scholarship dominated by tendencies either to humanist or non-humanist readings, as Peter Boxall (2006) acknowledges. As Boxall notes, after the publication of *White Noise* in 1985, a series of postmodern-oriented readings emerged, dominating the literature from the mid-80s, and well into the 90s, which then gave way to a counter-movement offering a number of unequivocally humanist readings, aligning the novel to Modernism or Romanticism.

In contrast, I argue that, rather than positioning *White Noise* within the categories Modernism and Postmodernism, it can be read as a work that is neither

wholly modernist nor postmodern but one that shows cultural modernism and postmodernism in conflict, its characters likewise being neither modernist nor postmodern creations. Furthermore, I identify the tendency in Gladney's characterisation to provide a commentary on the role of postmodern theory in the 1980s, in Western culture generally. Gladney is depicted as operating strategically, his "maneuvering for advantage" (WN, 1985, p 317) in the face of postmodern theory being integral to his character. I identify this element of his character as the central logic propelling his uneasy oscillation in subject positions; this sheds light on new ways in which *White Noise* can be read, and on how the 1980s period can be understood.

Towards the end of the novel, after Gladney has attempted to murder Willie Mink, he is portrayed as recognising this self-serving strategist within himself. He is speaking to a German nun in hospital:

I asked my nun her name. Sister Hermann Marie. I told her I knew some German, trying to gain her favour, as I always did with medical personnel of any kind, at least in the early stages before my fear and disgust overwhelmed my hope I might have had maneuvering for advantage (WN, p 317).

I suggest that Gladney's "maneuvering" is not restricted to seeking advantage with medical personnel, but operates also in relation to anyone in a position of authority. Often, those in authority offer him 'postmodern theories' just as the nun offers him religion as marketing, Gladney is often depicted as "maneuvering for advantage" in the face of all that postmodernism, and its emerging alliance with consumer culture offers.

This "maneuvering for advantage" plays out throughout the novel as oscillates from modernist to postmodernism subject positions as he plays a game of strategic life moves for survival's sake. Another, related term that describes Gladney's mode of operating in relation to the 'theory wars' is 'mercenary'. Narrowly defined, a mercenary is "a person who receives payment for his or her services. Chiefly and now only: *spec.* a soldier paid to serve in a foreign army or other military organisation" (OED, 2010). However, more broadly a mercenary is "a person primarily concerned with material reward at the expense of ethics", and Gladney appears pragmatically, opportunistically willing to enlist in whatever side he thinks will benefit him the most during the cultural skirmishes taking place in his world.

The manoeuvring is enacted in the novel not only psychologically, at the plot level, but also formally; Gladney exhibits the properties and tendencies both of the modernist and the postmodern character. For he is not merely the passive product of his cultural context, as Baudrillard's postmodernism would have it, nor is he the self-creating subject of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, exemplified in *Portrait*, but a character who oscillates between the two, creating a state of high dramatic tension in the novel. I argue that *White Noise* explores, and satirises through contrasting modernist and postmodern formations of irony, the preoccupations of an era in the throes of a dramatic cultural shift, due to the advent of postmodernity and of postmodern theoretical ideas.

This study takes into account, three decades after its publication, a large body of scholarship on *White Noise*. Within this scholarship many leading scholars, by viewing *White Noise* either as a novel that represents modernism *or* one that represents postmodernism, fail to acknowledge its commentary on the debate between these two 'isms'. Today, the heightened intensity of purpose surrounding the acts of defining and discussing what constitutes postmodernism as opposed to modernism has passed. Some of the movement's most prominent proponents no longer write on postmodernism. Hutcheon pronounces the end of postmodernism in 2002: it "may well be a twentieth century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past. Now fully institutionalised, it has its canonised texts, its anthologies, primers and readers, its dictionaries and its histories" (2002, second edition, p 165); one implication is that postmodernism is no longer the fledgling body of radical theory that Hutcheon herself helped to articulate.

Prior to outlining my approach to this thesis in greater detail, the nature of the "theory wars" is enlarged upon below.

The 1980s Theory Wars

There was an explosion of postmodern theory in the 1980s, the driving force emerging not from mainstream culture directly but from intellectual and artistic spheres. It did however reflect the broader 1980s culture's emphasis on accelerating consumption. It was in the 1980s that the term Yuppy (Young Urban Professional) was coined, to

mark the rise of a sector of consumer-driven, inspirational young professionals. The “Greed is Good” motto, mouthed by Gordon Gekko in Oliver Stone’s film *Wall Street* (1987) was emblematic of the decade. As acknowledged by Brassey and Barber:

During the 1980s, Reaganomics in the United States and Thatcherism in the United Kingdom not only celebrated greed and individualism, it told us that it was through greed that the economy worked best. We were told that the state had a limited role and that society (were we to accept its existence) should be somewhat sanguine about inequality (2009, p 80).

Therefore, while to some extent absorbing the spirit of the mainstream conformist 80s on the one hand, on the other, postmodernism was based on highly philosophical foundations, an enquiry into theoretically challenging the Enlightenment project, its focus on reason, *logos* (truth), essentialism, and other humanist notions. In the 70s however, postmodernism was a fledgling. “Postmodern theorists challenge modern conceptions of society, history, and politics, while advocating new approaches, discourses, and practices” (Best and Kellner 1991, p 639). The forerunners of Postmodernism included Susan Sontag and the early writings of Hassan and Baudrillard. Prominent theorists, often from France, were influenced by Nietzsche’s critique of humanist philosophy and Bataille’s emphasis on excess, and posed challenges to modernist notions of the subject. In the view of Best and Kellner, postmodern theorists began to:

criticize the ideals of representation, truth, rationality, system, foundation, certainty and coherence typical of much modern theory, as well as the concepts of the subject, meaning, and causality (1991, p 256).

In the 1970s and 80s, theorists who considered that postmodernism formed a full break with modernism, demanded a different language, mode of thought and ways of living in the name of the new postmodern order.

Kellner notes that the mood of the era began with a form of ‘theory fever’, which developed among academics and intellectuals in the wake of the revolutionary spirit left over from the student uprising in Paris 1968, in particular spurred by widespread dissatisfaction with Marxist theory. In the 1980s this intellectual ferment was heightened, especially in France, and took on the tone of full-scale theory wars. By the beginning of the decade, this was already an international phenomenon.

By the 1980s, the new global discourses of theory provided languages for communication across borders, but they also disseminated the globalization of theory fever and wars.

Theory fevers continued to proliferate and from Berkeley to Bombay, from Austin to London, new syntheses of Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and postmodern theories emerged, while claims were being made for a new discourse of theory which drew on the new critical theories, producing ever-spiralling and complexified theoretical discourses and syntheses. Theory wars intensified between discourses seeking hegemony and dominance (Kellner 1995, p 23).

Theorists became ‘rising stars’ of the postmodern movement, what George Alexander satirically dubbed “planet postmodernism” (1986). For those who championed it, postmodernism had a post-*avant-garde* sensibility and offered the promise of salvation from what postmodernists claimed to be the stagnation of the prevailing cultural order. New aesthetic and artistic practices were proposed in the name of postmodernism.

A range of “intermediaries” helped to broker the writings of the intelligentsia, often dense and theoretical, into the public sphere, assisting with the break-down of the high/low cultural divide, which postmodernists championed (Featherstone 2007). These intermediaries included “gallery owners, publishers, TV managers”, and other “agents of the market” (Featherstone, 2007, p 40). Thus the idea of the market and marketing was not only theoretically meaningful, but was incorporated into the postmodern system of institutional production itself. Featherstone says:

[I]f we want to understand the social generation and interpretation of the experience of postmodernity we need to have a place for the role of cultural entrepreneurs and intermediaries who have an interest in creating postmodern pedagogies to educate publics” (Featherstone, 2007, p 5).

What began as theories developed in the name of a radical cultural break with modernism underwent absorption into mainstream culture through a process of *institutionalisation*, to become postmodern pedagogies.

Mainstream marketing had a role in the formation of a cultural star system emerging from postmodernism. Featherstone suggests that in the 1980s New French Theory was taken up internationally, becoming a kind of intellectuals’ Hollywood:

Each new theory was proclaimed by its advocates as the supertheory, as the key to culture, society and the subject. Discoveries of thinkers like Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and the other stars of "new French Theory" were enthusiastically taken up by followers who took each new theory as the finally discovered oeuvre that would lead the way to theoretical and political salvation.... (Kellner, 1995, p 23).

This is not to say that there was theoretical consensus in the period; indeed, the theory wars involved skirmishes not merely between different strains of emerging non-humanist theories but also between those who upheld ideas based on what I term here *canonical modernism*, with humanist underpinnings, and those who proposed various forms of non-humanist postmodern and poststructural thought. Kellner remarks:

The postmodern is thus a contested terrain and a force-field of struggle between those who would define and occupy it, and those who would discredit or demolish it (Kellner, 1999, p 639).

I address Kellner's take on postmodernism as a "force field of struggle" quite directly in my novel, and although this is not explicit in *White Noise*, in this thesis I examine Gladney as a subject caught in the midst of this combative theoretical context. Gladney works at a fictional university, College-on-the-Hill, in rural North America. His colleagues, especially those from New York, represent a fashionable new order invading College-on-the-Hill's rural milieu with more sophisticated ways. These academics promote the B-grade elements in media representation promote a love of cartoons and advertisements. The bickering in Gladney's staff room satirically represents a microcosm of the 80s theory wars.

Thus, *White Noise* depicts an era in transition, characterised by the demise of the Marxist theoretical influence over many Humanities fields and the rise of thinkers like Baudrillard and Lyotard, who posited a complete break from modernism and many of its concerns. It was a time when 'theory' and those who wrote it, while critiquing consumer culture, became commodified as celebrities. A classic case of the celebrity theorist is Baudrillard. His theory of the "precession of simulacra" (1983a) operates as a thematic thread in *White Noise*, as noted by a host of scholars (Lentricchia 1998; Schuster 2008; Ebbesen 2006; Knight 2008; Wilcox 1991). The ideas articulated by Gladney's colleague Siskind, in particular, act as a mouthpiece for simplified, satirised, comic-book representations of Baudrillard's views on simulacra, simulation and hyperreality. I draw on Baudrillard's theories, not to argue that his influence makes a postmodernist of Gladney, nor a postmodern novel of *White Noise*, but rather to suggest that his theory of the "precession of simulacra" is thematically central to the novel's battle of cultural ideas.

Thesis Approach

This thesis pursues a selective literature review, contextual research and some close reading of *White Noise*, together with comparative textual analysis of contrasting novels. The literature review (Chapter One) addresses scholarship on *White Noise*, on modernism and postmodernism that has a particular focus on, or implications for, the subject. Since the terms modernism and postmodernism are greatly contested, it is important to establish what *this* thesis intends when using these terms. Various fields, such as art theory, cultural theory, philosophy, and literary criticism are drawn on to elucidate other terms associated with the theory wars and the subject: chief among them Baudrillard's "precession of simulacra" (1983a) and Foucault's death of the subject or man (1979, p 386-87).

The study deals with Kellner and Best's genealogical approach to historical analysis (adopted after Foucault), to evaluate ideas related to historical debates and shifts in discourse of this time. Kellner mounts a case for the relevance of a multi-disciplinary Cultural Studies approach (1995, p 23):

Cultural studies ... operates with a transdisciplinary conception that draws on social theory, economics, politics, history, communication studies, literary and cultural theory, philosophy, and other theoretical discourses (Kellner, 1995, p 27).

While the disciplines his study draws on are broader than mine, the multi-disciplinary or *transdisciplinary* approach as Kellner calls it is of assistance in engaging with theories of modernism and postmodernism in a sociohistorical context. Thus, the textual analysis of Chapters Three and Five and the comparative analysis of Chapters Four and Six engage with the textual implications of language, plot, structure and other elements at work in the novels under scrutiny, against primary contemporary sources of theory about modernism and postmodernism.

This thesis unfolds in seven chapters, followed by a brief conclusion.

Chapter One. This chapter gives an overview of the relevant scholarship on DeLillo in relation to *White Noise*: in particular studies positioning the novel's protagonist Jack Gladney in terms of modernism and/or postmodernism. I offer an overview of the schools of thought that position Gladney as a modernist, as postmodernist, or as a character demonstrating elements of both. I engage in a close

study of Wilcox' (1991) influential essay that claims Gladney is a modernist character displaced in a postmodern world, an idea which is drawn on throughout the thesis. An overview of the literature on theories of cultural modernism and postmodernism raises some of the methodologies that are used to define them.

Chapter Two. This chapter is dedicated to a closer focus on theories relating to 'the subject': including humanist underpinning notions of what constitutes the subject common to canonical artistic modernism, the background to Jameson's claim that the 'death of the subject' took place thanks to postmodernism and poststructuralism. The subject is then analysed across a comparative schema of five overarching properties of canonical modernism, and five properties of canonical postmodernism.

Chapter Three. This chapter identifies that modernist elements within Gladney's characterisation, are both strongly depicted and effectively challenged. The chapter also identifies some contradictions in Wilcox' depiction of Gladney as a modernist character (1991), and introduces a countervailing issue central to this study: the fact that Gladney's characterisation also evokes, while at the same time undermining, the modernist search for transcendent meaning.

Chapter Four. This chapter presents a comparative analysis of Gladney with Stephen Dedalus from *Portrait* (1992), also drawing on the novel's earlier draft version, *Stephen Hero* (1944). Dedalus is representative of a modernist beholden to the notion of transcendent meaning. He can transform, into Art, the raw material from the world around him into the 'truth' that in the novel's schema captures the essence of what Woolf calls "life itself". I argue that Gladney's visionary moments are divided between modernist epiphany and postmodern denial of access to transcendent meaning. Gladney oscillates between modernist and postmodern positions during the Steffie's Utterance scene, as he does throughout the novel.

Chapter Five. This chapter conducts textual analysis of certain passages of *White Noise* to present ways in which Gladney is depicted as operating strategically, or "maneuvering for advantage", in relation to postmodernism's ideas. His tendency to conform towards postmodernism is linked to his desire to assuage his fear of death and to survive power struggles. On the professional front, his colleague Murray J. Siskind operates as a mouthpiece for the Baudrillardian theory of precession of simulacra then coming into fashion. Under Siskind's influence, Gladney's allegiance to the postmodern side of the underpinning theory wars struggle which the novel depicts, is

expressed through Gladney as uncritically absorbing the messages the mainstream media culture offers him in the form of ‘brand chants’: the jingles and brand names from the consumer culture he adopts for personal salvation.

Chapter Six. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of Gladney and the postmodern character Bruno Clément, a protagonist in Houellebecq’s *Atomised*. In *Atomised*, Clément’s desire for sexual gratification operates in a similar role, structurally and thematically, as the desire for language-centred meaning that is pivotal to the modernist element in Gladney. I compare Gladney and Clément in relation to notions of the transcendent subject in a state of demise, with Clément’s role as a non-transcendent subject expressed in certain postmodern literary strategies.

Chapter Seven. This chapter presents a final comparative study between Gladney and the protagonist Jack Blight from my creative project *1984 Did Not Take Place*. Gladney and Blight represent similarly humorous renditions of characters with varying degrees of conformist or pragmatic response to the advent of postmodernism.

The Thesis Conclusion offers a summary of my argument, that Gladney oscillates between canonical modernism and postmodernism, and that this complex mechanism can be partially explicated by the unstated yet evident satirical references to the 1980’s theory wars in *White Noise*. I outline the ways in which this thesis offers a novel understanding of Gladney and of *White Noise* as a whole, and how it assists in repositioning it as a text that elicits a portrait of subjectivity under pressure in a historical context marked by a paradigmatic cultural shift.

Chapter One

Context and Frame: The Scholarship

This chapter, and the following one, together set the context for detailed discussion of modernist and postmodernist notions of ‘the subject’. In this chapter I survey a selection of scholarship on *White Noise* which focuses on arguments that revolve around Gladney as a subject in relation to modernism and postmodernism. The second section of this chapter offers a brief summary of the relevant scholarship on cultural theories of modernism and postmodernism.

White Noise in Context: History and DeLillo’s Oeuvre

White Noise highlights a society undergoing transition, and yet in the dominant schools of thought on *White Noise* scholarship, this essential context is not discussed at length in these terms. It is however, acknowledged in the literature that many of DeLillo’s other novels explore this theme. For example, *Underworld* (1997), *Libra* (1988) and *Falling Man* (2007) are seen to reflect a focus on notions of cultural transition (Olster, 2011). DeLillo opens *Underworld* with a fabricated account of a historical baseball game in which the New York Giants play the Brooklyn Dodgers and the ball is lost in the middle of play. Discussing the impetus for the novel, DeLillo says he saw on the front page of a newspaper from October 3 1951, not only a report of this ball game, but an item with the news that the Soviet Union had exploded its second Atomic bomb. For DeLillo this offered a remarkable “sense of the power of history ...” (DeLillo in 1998). He considered it marked a transitional moment between the end of World War Two and the beginning of the Cold War.

Another novel, *Libra*, spans the era leading up to and directly after the John F. Kennedy assassination. *Falling Man* traces the lives of a group of characters prior to and after the fall of New York’s twin towers. Both *Libra* and *Falling Man* thus explore ideas of the before and after, periods marked by cultural change in America.

In *White Noise* we have Siskind offering a Baudrillardian vision, which represents emerging postmodern theory as a whole, as *White Noise* is a novel about cultural change. I argue that it represents a cultural period in a state of transition, an established cultural order impacted by theories of postmodernism and the actuality of postmodernity, which together changed the cultural logic of an era.

Furthermore, in the literature on DeLillo's *oeuvre* it is well documented that his protagonists are often lone men, whose relationship to survival and self preservation he explores. DeLillo's characters frequently adopt strategies to approach the matter of staying alive, something they do not always achieve. Assassin Glen Selvy in *Running Dog* (1978) is tracked down by intelligence agents for whom he once worked, and walks into an attack in which he is decapitated. Writer Bill Gray in *Mao II* (1991) does not take the measures required to keep alive after an accident, and curls up and dies unceremoniously, alone. As a writer out of his usual place of refuge, he has lost his connection to his habitual stance of "exile and cunning", he loses sight of the skills required to stay alive. This can be read literally as a form of death of the modernist subject, with its reference to the quote by Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait* (1992, p 269) in relation to what it takes for Dedalus to be an artist working in isolation. In *Libra*, Lee Harvey Oswald ignores his intuition and walks unprepared into his assassination by Jack Ruby.

While Olster acknowledges in the introduction that "not the least of the paradigm shifts to concern DeLillo have been from modernism to postmodernism" as explored in *White Noise* in his 2011 study that focuses on DeLillo's interest in paradigm shifts and historical eras in transition, as its title testifies: *Don DeLillo: Mao II, Underworld, Falling Man*, offers no major study on *White Noise* as the title indicates.

Yet Gladney, as I demonstrate in later chapters, is another of DeLillo's survival-driven, but failed, strategists. Despite his intense will to live, he walks directly into the very thing that will cut his life short. That is, defying, all warnings and common sense, Gladney willfully leaves his car while in dangerous proximity to the Airborne Toxic Event, a deadly chemical spill. This contrary and unconsciously driven behaviour perhaps relates to the modernist influence of Freud's 'death drive', Critic Cornel Bonca's humanist reading suggests Gladney is driven by "death fear" and exhibits "a strange and genuinely awe-inspiring response to the fear of mortality"

(Bonca, 1996, p 27). The survival of the *subject* then, in an entirely literal sense, is all-pervasive in DeLillo's *oeuvre*, and is a theme that will help us to understand Gladney's pragmatic responses to postmodernity.

White Noise is well-established in the literary canon and is often placed on university readings lists as an entry point to the study of postmodernism and postmodernity. As David Cowart notes: "*White Noise* appears on many syllabi, and has already joined *Dubliners*, *A Portrait* (1992) and *Sons and Lovers* in the small but elegant collection of casebooks published by Viking/Penguin" (2002, p 71). However, while scholars agree that the book focuses thematically on postmodernity, opinion is divided about whether *White Noise* is actually a work of postmodern fiction or not, and a range of conflicting arguments have been mounted in relation to this. Peter Boxall documents how postmodernist readings emerged strongly from the mid-80s and dominated well into the 90s. More recently, there has been a predominance of humanist readings aligning the novel, and Gladney's characterisation, to Modernism, or Romanticism, or a combination of both.

There is a vast range of interpretations of *White Noise* in essays and books. Editors have diversely situated collections of studies under a range of categories, such as *White Noise* and: death, the environment, post-9/11, masculinity, and whiteness theory. For the purposes of this thesis the categories of greatest interest however are the headings of modernism and postmodernism and topics that fall under these umbrella categories. For example, studies that focus near-exclusively on simulation, the subject as a mediated or textual construct, the domination of the mass media, TV culture, garbage and mass consumption, tend to fit into the postmodernism category, while studies that focus on DeLillo and magic, the power of language, the epiphany, or that align him with writers such as Hemingway and Faulkner, fit into the modernism category. The fact that the novel can be read so differently, that it contains proofs for either of these contrasting arguments, is suggestive that *White Noise* does not fit fully in either camp and should perhaps be seen to occupy an uncomfortable zone between modernism and postmodernism.

I first discuss some studies that read Gladney's character primarily through postmodern themes, theories and lenses, and focus on the prevalent discussion of the subject as a construct. I then treat certain studies that claim *White Noise* is, on the contrary, a work foremost aligned to modernism, or romanticism, and that a humanist

notion of the subject as a unique entity underpins it. Finally, some studies, like my own, that do not place Gladney or *White Noise*, in either category are surveyed, thematically rather than chronologically. As the literature is substantial, I highlight only scholars who represent a school of thought, rather than attempting to list all the proponents involved.

Postmodern Interpretations of *White Noise*

A leading writer on DeLillo and *White Noise*, John Duvall pronounced that the core properties associated with modernism have vanished from Gladney's representation: notions of "origins and authentic identity seem to have disappeared" in *White Noise* (2006, p 121). DeLillo writes with "a parodic spirit" associated with postmodernism (p 124). In an earlier study Duvall (1998) controversially argued that *White Noise* provides a warning against the Nazi-style fascism inherent in consumer culture. While Gladney is like a modernist character in his state of alienation, unlike a modernist character he is "happy" with his alienation. Despite his drawing on the modernist trope of alienation, Duvall's is a postmodern argument that draws strong links between *White Noise* and Baudrillard's simulacra (1983a), a strong trend in the scholarship that continues to this day. According to Mark Osteen (1998, p 3), John Frow was the first to identify the connection with Baudrillard, by suggesting that the novel replaces originals with simulations, both to pervert and "preserve American myths of origin and authenticity". Frow's analysis is drawn on further, later in this thesis (see Chapter Five).

Christoph Lindner, another critic to note the thematic link of *White Noise* to the "precession of simulacra" also ties in Gladney's fetishisation of consumerism and Siskind's 'postmodern' speeches (2003). Again in pursuit of the Baudrillard connection are Jeffrey Ebbesen (2006), Peter Knight (in Duvall 2008) and Mark Schuster (2008). Laura Barrett (2001) claims "the simulacrum, 'a copy without an original', is the most salient metaphor of *White Noise*" (2001, p 97). Knight takes the postmodern view of the 'subject as construct' when he says that in DeLillo's work "individuals no longer have an unmediated access to an authentic self and perhaps no longer even have an authentic self" (p 31). Knight says the Most Photographed Barn is

a scene mediated through its own built-in analysis (in Duvall 2008, p 39). Knight also discusses the novel's recycling of literary genres in accordance with Jameson's analysis of postmodern fiction.

There are of course postmodern lenses other than Baudrillard, through which to approach *White Noise*. Tim Engles (1999; 2006) for example reads the novel under the rubric of whiteness theory. His studies note ways in which Gladney's unconscious seems to position his identity in a way that aligns him with the mainstream views of the culture he inhabits. Engles argues that Gladney sees himself, unconsciously, though consistently, as a white, middle-class male who is superior to other characters in his path. Postmodern notions of the Other are evoked, Engles's study suggests, as Gladney positions an array of characters (those with blue collar jobs, those of non-Caucasian ethnic and cultural backgrounds, women and children) as lesser in status than himself, in ways that are inscribed into his thinking through his absorption of mainstream values. A further area of postmodern investigation related to the subject is opened up by Ruth Helyer (2008), whose feminist reading highlights Gladney as a character who represents a crisis in masculinity.

More pertinent to the present research however, is Frow's analysis of Gladney as a conformist in the face of his media-saturated culture. Frow discusses the ways in which mainstream media values are depicted at work both on conscious and unconscious levels of Gladney's characterisation. This argument also brings into focus the extent to which postmodern notions of the subject as a copy, as opposed to the subject as an individualised original,¹ operate in Gladney's representation. Referring to the non-stop mainstream media sources Gladney encounters daily, Frow argues that Gladney stereotypes those around him in ways that mirror normative commercial media values; Gladney's thinking adopts a style of *typification*: a way of perceiving the world that reduces everything to media clichés that Frow calls Gladney's habit of "pinning down the type" (1990a, p 418). I enlarge on this matter in Chapter Five.

While Frow aligns Gladney's characterisation to arguments of constructed subjectivity associated with postmodernism, he is among the many leading scholars who, as well as highlighting the postmodern properties in Gladney's characterisation

¹ A full schematic representation of the postmodern subject and its challenges to the modernist subject is offered in Chapter Two of this thesis.

are also attuned to the contradictory humanist-inspired elements the novel evokes. In this regard, Frow's writing can be compared to the early influential essays of Tom LeClair (1987), which referred to the work as 'a systems novel', as well as noting that its language inspires a sense of magic and wonder.

Modern or Romantic Interpretations of *White Noise*

A range of studies align DeLillo and his creation, Gladney, with the Modernist or Romantic tradition, with humanist notions of essential truth and the universal, original, authentic subject. Harold Bloom claims DeLillo "despite his supposed Post-Modernism" as "a High Romantic Transcendentalist" (2003, p 2), thus discounting postmodern claims of his move away from transcendence. Jessie Kalvado sees in *White Noise* the language of a humanist reading: "DeLillo does nothing less than locate and expose fear, love, and evil in the world" (Kalvado, 2004, p 170). Phillip Nel explicitly uses the term modernism in seeing *White Noise* as a modernist critique of postmodernism and DeLillo in the continuum of modernist writers. DeLillo is a modernist because he sees "the epic in the mundane", "embraces a modernist avant-garde", writes "tightly controlled prose", layers his novels (in Duvall 2008, p 13) and like Joyce and Woolf, highlights a sense of radiance in the everyday (2008 p 17). Non-modernist elements in the novel are dismissed in saying that DeLillo's modernism is "different to earlier modernisms", that it highlights his "oppositional stance" and "deeply oppositional impulse" (Nel in Duvall, 2008, p 17). Rather, DeLillo complicates traditional distinctions between modernism and postmodernism. In other words, the postmodern elements in *White Noise* are absorbed into DeLillo's 'different modernism'. Nel illustrates the point by comparing Gladney with Dedalus from *Portrait* and suggesting that Gladney has Joycean epiphanies (Nel in Duvall 2008, p 23).

This study typifies one strain of thought in *White Noise* scholarship, which claims that *White Noise* has underpinning humanist elements and that these elements outweigh any postmodern non-humanist elements. In later textual analysis I will take up the point Nel's assumption that Gladney has epiphanies, by contrasting DeLillo and Joyce. Cornel Bonca (1996) is another critic who considers that Gladney has

epiphanies, and gives as an example his reaction of radiant transformation upon hearing the words ‘Toyota Celica’ within the scene I term *Steffie’s Utterance*. Bonca argues that the content of Gladney’s ‘epiphanies’ is not what is important, but that in DeLillo’s work, any sort of human utterance has the potential for epiphanic radiance; a stance that is challenged in my textual analysis (Chapter Four).

Likewise, Bonca’s assessment of DeLillo’s fascination with a type of “‘pre-linguistic’ language” (p 28) is not unproblematic. Bonca argues that *White Noise* is concerned with the mystery inherent in utterance, in the same way that the idea is presented in DeLillo’s novel *The Names*. This novel is a dramatic work about a cult who ritualistically murders strangers based on correlations between their names, geography and alphabetical coincidences. However Bonca fails to consider that *The Names* both asserts the power of language and critiques those who imbue language with false mysticism. Likewise, Gladney’s ‘radiant’ experiences do not fully align with Dedalus’s in *Portrait*, but appear to alternate between modernist epiphany and postmodern mediated experience, as in Gladney’s ‘epiphomercial’. Chapter Four is dedicated to this idea.

An influential work in the field of *White Noise* scholarship is Leonard Wilcox’s essay ‘Baudrillard, DeLillo’s *White Noise* and the End of Heroic Narrative’ (1991), which contributed to my desire to investigate Gladney’s portrayal. I provide an extended commentary on it here. Wilcox states that Gladney “is a modernist character displaced in a postmodern world” (p 348), yet some of the leading scholars who have drawn on this quote (Packer; Nel [in Duvall] 2008) to substantiate that Gladney is a humanist-based character, have taken the quote at face value, without considering the implications of the entire Wilcox essay. In particular, the essay addresses some of the complexities of the ways in which both postmodern and modernist elements feature prominently in Gladney’s characterisation, albeit without naming the postmodern elements as such.

Indeed, Wilcox points to the ways in which DeLillo in *White Noise* is interested in exploring “a new form of subjectivity emerging as the modernist order is eclipsed by the postmodern world” (Wilcox 1991, pp 347-48), although what this new form of subjectivity is, Wilcox does not state explicitly. His analysis does however demonstrate that contradictions are at work throughout the text.

Jack Gladney, the narrator of *White Noise*, is a modernist displaced in a postmodern world. He exhibits a Kierkegaardian “fear and trembling” regarding death and attempts to preserve earlier notions of an authentic and coherent identity by observing the tribalistic rituals of family life. Gladney attempts to “shore up the ruins” of an older order, ironically by chanting advertising slogans as if they were sacred formulas (1991, p 348).

In the above passage, two key definitive points associated with modernism are highlighted in Gladney’s characterisation. The first is that Gladney exhibits a modernist fear of death, the second is that he attempts to preserve authentic selfhood. In the novel these two elements of Gladney’s character do appear, yet not consistently. For instance, the fact that the essay highlights issues relating to simulation in relation to Gladney’s character, as well as his role in ideas about the death of the modernist ‘heroic’ indicate that there is more to Gladney than unmitigated modernist character properties. In fact the title of Wilcox’s 1991 essay, which includes the phrase ‘the End of Heroic Narrative’, points to a third definitive factor in Gladney’s modernist characterisation: the heroic. Gladney’s heroism, like the other modernist properties Wilcox has noted so far, while strongly present in the novel, is frequently undercut and undermined by equally powerful postmodern elements. As Wilcox’s essay demonstrates, the culminating moments in each of the heroic threads in the plot, lead to an end point. There is no room for innocent revenge or innocent acts of murder, as prior media representations have exhausted both; ideas extended in the thesis to follow. Thus, in Gladney’s characterisation heroism has been played out, entering the realm of cliché.

A fourth crucial point in Wilcox’s analysis is Gladney’s ‘search for transcendent meaning’, that Wilcox calls the act of “gleaning meaning from the surrounding noise”, which is strongly linked to modernist notions of the heroic and authentic. Wilcox says: “In modernist fashion, he [Gladney] struggles in an almost Sisyphean way to glean meaning from the surrounding noise of culture and is drawn toward occasions of existential self-fashioning, heroic moments of vision in a commodified world” (Wilcox, 1991, p 349). Gladney does indeed pursue a search for transcendent meaning, and that this involves him drawing on the language he inherits from his culture is significant. This does in fact link him, by *association and style*, to a long line of canonical romantic or modernist texts that operate along the theme of the

visionary moment: Wordsworth and his “spots of time” (Wordsworth 1850)², Joyce’s depiction of Dedalus and his epiphanies in *Stephen Hero* (1944), and Woolf’s “moments of being”.³ However, Wilcox’s Gladney, despite his seemingly full blown modernist search for transcendent meaning, is also subject to destabilising postmodern forces. One can infer from the evidence of Wilcox and from reading the text itself that Gladney does not mount a modernist search for meaning to its end point, nor present as a *consistent* modernist character, formally or thematically.

Consequently, Wilcox’s modernist Gladney is in certain respects, also a postmodernist. This is not to say that modernism and postmodernism are one and the same. One clue to elucidating this paradox may be to note the emphasis in the title of Wilcox’s essay on ‘...the End of Heroic Narrative’, for one of Gladney’s defining modernist traits, heroic gesture, comes to its demise during the climactic scene involving Gladney’s attempted murder of Willie Mink. Wilcox’s analysis of the attempted murder scene demonstrates that Gladney’s coherent formation of self dissolves utterly in this scene, and Wilcox suggests this marks an end to ‘the heroic’ in literature itself. The clear, yet unstated implication is that Gladney’s subject position moves from modernist to postmodernist terrain in this one scene. One can infer from this, and it is the case that Gladney does not have a stable character formation in relation to understood ideas of modernism but is subject to alternations from one to the other, and thus can only be viewed partially when read through the lenses of *either* modernism *or* postmodernism.

Hybrid Readings of *White Noise*

While Wilcox is considered a forerunner of the Gladney as modernist view, his argument, as has been demonstrated, is decidedly more complex. Other leading scholars who propose a more inclusive reading of Gladney and *White Noise* include Frank Lentricchia (1991) who, while noting the influence of Baudrillard in the novel,

² “There are in our existence spots of time
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence . . . our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired.”

³ For an analysis of the typology on the literary epiphany see Wim Tigges, 1999, "The Significance of Trivial Things: Towards a Typology of Literary Epiphanies," *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany*, Editions Rodopi, Atlanta, pp 1-16. However, as my interest in the epiphany is historical I focus on the earlier PMLA debate surrounding the epiphany.

claims it has a modernist form, and Frow (1990) who also offers an inclusive reading. Scholars such as LeClair (1987), Cowart (2002), Stacey Olster (2011, and in Duvall 2008, p 74-96) and Osteen (2000) offer readings of Gladney's characterisation, and *White Noise*, as a blend of modernist and postmodernist elements, to differing degrees. Osteen argues that DeLillo satirises postmodern cultural forms, not from a privileged position outside the culture, but from within those very forms; DeLillo's work mimics the argot of cultural forms such as violent thrillers and conspiracy theories, "pop music, advertising, science fiction, military tactics, film and television—that he anatomizes" (2000, p 3). In his discussion of the relationship between consumerism and religion, between individuals and collectives, Osteen treats DeLillo's work as an exploration of myriad magical antidotes to postmodern dread (2000, p 2). Due to this strategy, DeLillo has been read both as denouncer and defender of postmodern culture. In my argument however, DeLillo neither defends nor denounces postmodern culture but rather, represents the problematic that emerged as a consequence of the dueling of discourses in the 80s.

Cowart, while positioning DeLillo as a postmodern writer aligns him in a continuum with modernism's writers of allusion, as opposed to postmodernism's writers of appropriation:

Few readers, that is, look to DeLillo and company for anything like the foregrounded intertexts of a Joyce, Eliot, or Pound. Yet DeLillo's allusiveness represents an important point of continuity with his modernist predecessors (Cowart, in Peter Schneck and Philipp Schweighauser, 2010, p 227).

DeLillo is a postmodernist on the one hand but "makes it new" as a modernist, on the other: "This writer 'makes it new'—indeed, makes it postmodern—without feeling obliged to conform or defer to the more tendentious pronouncements of critics and theorists" (Cowart, in Schneck and Schweighauser, 2010, p 228).

Stacey Olster (in Duvall 2008, pp 74-96) who notes the postmodern links between *White Noise*, Baudrillard's "precession of simulacra" (1983a) and Jameson's analysis of the postmodern, also focuses on Gladney's modernist qualities, such as his search for lost origins. In relation to the triads of brand name consumer products that Gladney starts to utter as mantras, Olster remarks that he "verbally fingers them like rosary beads" (Olster in Duvall 2008, p 6) thus suggesting she identifies a religious flavour to Gladney's search for meaning in his use of brand chants; a theme this thesis explores at length. Yet the more inclusive argument of Olster and others, while closer to my

own than exclusivist accounts of modernism or postmodernism, does not engage with Gladney's character formation in relation to contemporary cultural debates about the nature of the subject; a gap that my own research seeks to address.

A study that, like my own, notes the division and inconsistencies in Gladney's characterisation is that of Theron Britt, who considers the very site of the individual to be under question as a source of value. "[T]he autonomy of the individual is figured in *White Noise* not just as constraining the self, but as something closer to annihilating the self" (Britt, in Engles, 2006, p 109). Further, Gladney represents a "schizophrenic self" that is involved in "switching centers". Britt's argument does invoke the postmodern position of the de-centred subject to some extent, and is distinct from many others in attempting to acknowledge apparent inconsistencies in Gladney's characterisation, but in doing so adopts the language of mental illness, which implies an unnecessarily narrow analytical focus. There is an implication of the modernist quest for a character's 'inner selves' in conflict to be reconciled with one another, so as to restore a unified selfhood, but this is primarily a psychological rather than sociohistorical question, and does not satisfactorily address the cultural "war" of the 1980s.

Finally, more recently, and sometimes in association with the idea of, what is being termed here, postmodernism, *White Noise* and Gladney have also been read in the context of contemporary themes: terrorism, globalisation, post 9/11 culture. Of interest, and offering some support to the present research, a paper by Julian Hennerberg, who while refraining from what he refers to as "epochal categorisations" and evading issues of modernism and postmodernism per se, mounts an argument on the technological sublime:

Jack [Gladney] is a character that oscillates between media- and technology-savvy cultural semiotician and self-delusional modernist dupe, trumped by the proliferation of signs and technologies in a postmodern age. (Hennerberg, 2011, p 57).

While Hennerberg employs similar language to my own analysis of Gladney in observing the 'oscillation' of his character, he does not engage with the tension and dialogue of such a split characterisation between contradictory elements relating to one the one hand modernism and on the other postmodernism. In this respect, this is a markedly different analysis to mine. For example, in agreement with my own research

Hennerberg concludes that Gladney is caught between two cultural periods: “The book’s antihero is also a liminal figure, caught in between two historical periods and two models of understanding the world” (2011, p 57). However, Hennerberg does not address the implications of postmodernism as an episteme eclipsing modernism, but rather focuses on this notion of the technological sublime and does not, for example, discuss Gladney in relation to the conflict between humanist and non-humanist elements in his characterisation, as his own reading is situated within a post-postmodern theory of ‘global culture’: “If claims of an increasingly global culture fuelled and shaped by an internationally operating capitalist system are accurate, DeLillo’s book is no less relevant today than it was twenty years ago” (2011, p 52). Having summarised some key scholarship on Gladney’s characterisation and notions of modernism and postmodernism, I now turn to discussion of theories relating to these cultural orders themselves.

Scholarship on Modernism and Postmodernism

In this section I discuss the way the terms *modernism* and *postmodernism* have been used by a range of writers, including those who produce fiction, theorists and cultural critics.

Theories of Modernism

The term *modernism* is complex, for the reason that it covers vast historical ground and is defined according to different strategies. Furthermore, modernism in literature operates differently to modernism in the Visual Arts, architecture, the social sciences and other fields. There are, as the title of Peter Nicholls’ *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (1995) testifies, many *modernisms*. Early and contributory forms of modernism emerge from different historical epochs. Nicholls’ study combines artistic personalities, movements, historical shifts and themes, to cover a broad range of writers. He notes the strong influence of the French Symbolist poets and of the ‘French scene’ in general, and also the UK modernists, from whom he picks ‘the men of 1914’, including Joyce, to focus on specifically. He portrays modernism as

particularly vibrant at the turn of the century as it became an international phenomenon, with a multitude of related mini-movements emerging in quick succession. “Movements surfaced with loud fanfare and then disappeared almost without trace” (1995, p 76.) Nicholls highlights the importance of the cross-continental fertilisation of ideas, including the strong influence of the ‘Paris scene’, and the Italian Futurists, and notes that Henri Meschonnic lists 50 ‘isms’ invented in the period between 1886 and 1924.

Best and Kellner consider that modernism began in the 19th century, with art that “articulated new artistic styles and techniques and new ideologies about the function of art and the role of the artist in society” (1997, p 127). Some originating impulses of the modernist movement are indicated by influential early exponents. Baudelaire called for a modern poetics to capture the uniqueness of modern experience, while Rimbaud demanded that art be absolutely modern. Ezra Pound insisted, in his 1935 essay, that artists “make it new”. Modernism aimed to produce “continual originality” and “creative destruction” in all spheres of life (Best and Kellner, 1997, p 127). Hence, proponents of modernism saw themselves as ushering in a new aesthetic, and setting into motion a new primacy for the artist as a prophet of the spirit of modernism. Says Kermode:

The artist who is vouchsafed this power to apprehending the Image—to experience that ‘epiphany’ which is the Joycean equivalent of Pater’s visionary moment—has to pay a heavy price in suffering, to risk his immortal soul, and to be alone, “not only to be separate from all others but to have not even one friend” (Kermode, 1957, p 4).

I acknowledge this emphasis on the primary role of the artist as a modernist subject, by selecting artist-hero Dedalus to represent my canonical modernist protagonist.

There are various modernisms, depending on the different methodologies adopted to define it. A famous periodising approach is Virginia Woolf’s saying: “[O]n or about December 1910 human character changed”. This has led many to speculate on the reasons for this specific date and some have decided it is due to the post-impressionist exhibition held then. And yet:

The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910. The first signs of it are recorded in the book of Samuel Butler, *In the Way of All Flesh* in particular; the plays of Bernard Shaw continue to record it (Woolf, from L. Woolf, 1966, p 421-22)

We should not then take this date too literally, since change is neither sudden nor definite.

Featherstone places various identities and sub-movements under the modernist umbrella and argues that it “refers to the styles we associate with an artistic movement, mounted at the turn of the century”, with its proponents including:

Joyce, Yeats, Gide, Proust, Rilke, Kafka, Mann, Musil, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf in literature; Rilke, Pound, Eliot, Lorca, Valery in poetry; Strinberg and Pirandello in drama; Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Cezanne and the Futurists, Expressionists, Dada and Surrealism movement in painting ; Stravinski, Schoenberg and Berg in music (Featherstone, 2007, p 7).

Other theorists of modernism offer similar lists featuring their choice of modernism’s starring figures and sub-movements, but definitions vary. Key literary figures associated with high degrees of ‘experimentation’ such as late Joyce, Beckett, Gustav, and Stein are contentious in that scholars may consider some of their works are more postmodern than modernist, despite the periodising anomalies.

Phases within modernism included the modernist vanguard or *avant-garde* (Greenberg, Krauss), high modernism (Jameson, Charles Altieri,) and late modernism (Alan Wilde 1981). While Featherstone aligns Dada with modernism, Hassan puts Dada into his postmodernism category (1985, p 123). Some critics split an artist or writer’s *oeuvre* between different cultural categories. For instances suggestions that Nabokov’s novel *Pale Fire* fits into a sub-modernist category such as late modernism is made by Bertens (1995), while Kirkby (2006) considers it to be a postmodern work. For McHale, Joyce straddles various categories within the one work, *Ulysses*: ‘normal modernism’, ‘avant-garde modernism’ and postmodernism (McHale, 1992, p 44-48).

While modernism entailed a radical and widespread questioning of culture, it was underpinned by the sovereign subject. Clement Greenberg notes:

Modernism includes more than art and literature. By now it covers almost the whole of what is truly alive in our culture. It happens, however, to be very much of a historical novelty. Western civilization is not the first civilization to turn around and question its own foundations, but it is the one that has gone furthest in doing so. I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant (1961, p 1).

For Greenberg it is Kant who offers the prime moment in philosophy, with the subject posited as sovereign; that is, a subject answerable to “no other laws than those he

gives to himself” (Kant, in Guyer, 1998, p 142). Kant’s subject is coherent, self-governing by a style of reason, and self-creating. Further:

The self-criticism of Modernism grows out of, but is not the same thing as, the criticism of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment criticized from the outside, the way criticism in its accepted sense does; Modernism criticizes from the inside, through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticized (Greenberg 1961, p 1).

This emphasis on self-reflexivity in art is one of the ways modernism began to critique the coherent enlightenment subject, which was also challenged by Freud’s theories of an individualised, psychologically created ‘self’ divided between ego, super-ego and Id, driven by unconscious motives such as the “death drive” (1920). A further influence was Nietzsche’s challenge to the West’s religious and Enlightenment traditions, his necessity for “chaos in oneself” (1883, pp 3-5) thrusting against the internal unity of the subject. The ‘divided subject’ is explored in such novels as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* (1920)

Margarie Perloff’s 14 points about modernist poetry are also mostly applicable to the novel. Modernism involves:

The replacement of representation of the external by the imaginative construction of the poet’s inner word via the mysterious symbol; (2) the superiority of art to nature; (3) the concept of the artist as hero (4) the autonomy of art and its divorce from truth or morality (5) the depersonalization and “objectivity” of art; (6) a logical structure, or what Joseph Frank called “special form” (7) the concrete as opposed to the conceptual; (8) verbal ambiguity and complexity; “good” writing as inherently arcane; (9) the fluidity of consciousness: Woolf’s “Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (Modern Fiction 287-88); (10) the increasing importance attached to the Freudian unconscious and to the dream work; (11) the use of myth as organizing structure, the calling up of the Jungian collective unconscious and of archetypes; (12) the emphasis on the divided self, on mask versus inner self (Yeats), conduct versus consciousness; (13) the malaise of the individual in the ‘lonely crowd’, the alienated self in the urban world, the ‘Unreal City’ of the Wasteland or Ulysses: and, finally, (14) the internationalism of modernism (Perloff in Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992, p 158).

In response to Perloff, Michael Whitworth offers a set of points on *modernist styles*: some of those pertinent to this study are as follows: “(1) Modernist literature depicts modern life, especially urban life and shows ambivalence towards it. (2) It is difficult:

it makes use of a wide and sometimes unexpected range of references. (3) It contrasts an orderly past with a chaotic present. 4) It also presents the notion that art can transcend the disorder of life. 5) It experiments with time. . . . 8) Modernist literature displays an awareness of the complexity of the mind and the self. It is aware of the ‘fluidity of consciousness’, often using free-indirect speech. 9) It offers a contrast between the individual and the herd or mass (Whitworth, 2007, pp 11-15.) Whitworth elaborates: “[a] contrast between the individual and the ‘herd’ or ‘mass’ is commonly a feature of modernist literature; another version is a contrast between the elite and the masses” (2007, p 14). This final point, drawn from Perloff’s point 13 above is central to this study.

An influential writer on the idea of the individual distinct from the mass was Søren Kierkegaard, who was concerned as early as 1847 with the single individual as opposed to the crowd, which he aligned with *untruth*. His concern was that the chance of achieving a style of *authentic selfhood* was diminished by the social production of stereotypes. Trilling adopts certain ideas associated with his terms *sincerity* and *authenticity* (1972), and applies them to evaluate a range of literary characters. The term authenticity is applied to the evaluation of visual art as it:

has become part of our moral slang of our day and points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual experiences. An eighteenth-century aesthete states our concerns succinctly—‘Born original’, Edward Young said, ‘how come it to pass that we die Copies?’ (Trilling, 1972, p 95)

The suggestion is that fictional characters can be evaluated, like works of Art, in terms of these dichotomous terms ‘original’ and ‘copy’. I suggest that the subject of classical modernism has been aligned with the former, and postmodern characterisation with the latter; a dichotomy central to this study. In determining to what extent a character is authentic, Trilling refers not merely to the character’s actions, but also to their thought processes and consistency of portrayal. A literary character is authentic if he/she is rendered as consistent and as passionately attached to a singular idea.

Theories of Postmodernism

Turning to the cultural category *postmodernism*, its meaning has altered dramatically since the period of my focus, the 1980s: at the time, when it was a forceful term, used to delineate a growing movement comprising a broad range of interconnecting theories. Today, cultural commentators do not tend to open a discussion on postmodernism without commenting on the term's overuse. Prior to engaging in a book length study on postmodernism, Featherstone says: "As the 'Modern-day Dictionary of Received Ideas' confirms, 'The word has no meaning. Use it as often as possible'" (1988, p 1). Norman Denzil's definitions of the terms postmodern and postmodernism reveal the broad ground the terms cover:

The terms postmodern and postmodernism simultaneously refer to ... four interrelated phenomena: (1) a movement called postmodernism in the arts (2) a new form of theorizing the contemporary historical moment (3) historical transformations that have followed World War II: and (4) social, cultural, and economic life under late capitalism (1991, p 3).

Thus Denzil's definition combines the theoretical with the periodisation.

Bertens (1995) takes a thematic approach in relation to a list of key figures considered to be part of the postmodernist canon. Postmodernism is a move "away from narrative representation" (1995, p 4) a movement that draws within its broad sphere the writers (drawing on John Barth's term) of the "literature of replenishment" (1995, p 4), including exponents of the *nouveau roman* like Alain Robbe-Grillet⁴ (1963) and Beckett's 'literature of silence'. He includes in his canonical list the writers Pynchon, Barth and Barthelme. Nabokov is included in his list of postmodernists, as well as the self-reflexive work of the later Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* (1935) as postmodernism is a move towards radical aesthetic autonomy, towards pure formalism.

In Featherstone's view postmodernism offers: "the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture", (Featherstone, 2007, p 64). What he calls "a stylistic promiscuity favouring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche", and importantly, "irony" (Featherstone, 2007, p 7). While Eagleton criticises postmodernism for the feature of depthlessness, Featherstone proposes, in positive terms, that the postmodern celebrates "playfulness" and "the surface

⁴ While Robbert-Grillet did not coin the term *nouveau roman*, the essays in his work *Pour un Nouveau Roman* form part of the movement's theoretical background.

‘depthlessness’ of culture; the decline of the originality/genius of the artistic producer; and the assumption that art can only be repetition” (Featherstone, 2007, p 7). It is this emphasis on the decline of the original artist genius as both original producer of the artwork and the representative of an autonomous individualised entity, that I pursue in relation to Gladney, as compared to the artist-hero Dedalus from *Portrait* on the one hand, and the mass consumer hedonist Clément from *Atomised* on the other.

According to David Lodge, postmodernism is characterised by randomness, contradiction, discontinuity, excess and short circuit (1977, p 220-45). Friedman describes postmodernist texts as involved with “flaunting their scaffolding and seams rather than hiding them” (1995, p 267), which is another way of saying that they reveal their own textuality. Lyotard says that the techniques employed to disrupt the unity of the text, in art and literature, in the process of establishing the sublime, determine the move into the postmodern from the modern; but he also believes the postmodern is a repetition of the modernist movement. Additionally, in terms of the modernist tendency to use allusions and references, it is broadly acknowledged, as in the work of Rex Butler (1996) that postmodernism takes this one step further by heading into the terrain of artistic and literary *appropriation*.

Due to disavowal of the idea of the grand narrative, there is often a focus on the play of language, and less of a focus on language as conduit to unmediated meaning. The term grand narrative or master narrative was introduced by Lyotard (1979), and refers to the view that considers there is system at work behind historical events, creating a progression that is rational or logical. Lyotard called these narratives, typified by Marxism, the ‘emancipatory narratives’ of modernism. These master narratives give way in postmodernism to mini-narratives, narratives that do not offer an overarching systematised view of historical progression. Regarding the postmodern tendency to consider language more in the light of a field of play than a field of closed meaning, Best and Kellner note:

Spurning “originality”, postmodern writers draw on past forms, which are ironically quoted and eclectically combined. Instead of deep content, grand themes, and moral lessons, .. postmodernists like Barth, Barthelme, and Nabokov are primarily concerned with the form and play of language and adopt sportive, ironic, self-reflexive, “metafictional” techniques that flaunt artifice and emphasize the act of writing over the written word (Best and Kellner, 1997, p 132).

Thus, postmodern fiction changes emphasis from meaning-based works on modernist redemptive themes, to a focus on surfaces and artifice, language games, self-consciousness, and a sense of the randomness of life.

In terms of chronology, post-World War II is often considered the starting point of postmodernism, while the 1980s is clearly a crucial decade. The 1980s, says Bertens (1995, p 9) was a decade in which international debate in the form of ‘theory’ became associated with the postmodern of the West. Many who write on the state of postmodernism in the 1980s comment on its international flavour, noting the prominence of the French influence in particular (Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guatarri, Bazin, Lacan, Kristeva). Bertens cites the “grand theorists” of postmodernism as Lyotard, Baudrillard and Jameson, each coming under the increasing influence of Foucault. This, he says, caused a “major reorientation in the mid-1980s”, which in turn was influenced by “Derrida’s refusal of origins” and of “the coherent subject” (Bertens, 1995, p 9).

The theorists who consider postmodernism operated as a complete break or rupture from modernism, that it was a cultural order of its own, are the theorists I associate with postmodernism and postmodern theory in this study. Though critical of postmodernism as a close ally of capitalism, Jameson shares with Lyotard and Baudrillard the view that it poses a complete break with modernism. By and large, these are also the same theorists who adopt a non-humanist stance in relation to the subject, and challenge the modernist idea of the authentic autonomous subject outright,⁵ for this view of postmodern theory as forming a complete break from modernism was particularly marked by ideas about ‘the subject’. Jameson’s approach to postmodernism however, is to offer a list of key artistic figures to stand in as proxies for defining strategies:

The enumeration of what follows then at once becomes empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous: Andy Warhol and pop art, but also photorealism, and beyond it, the ‘new expressionism’; the moment, in music, of John Cage, but also the synthesis of classical and ‘popular’ styles found in composers like Philip Glass and Terry Riley, and also punk and new wave rock (the Beatles and the Stones now standing as the high-modernist moment of that more recent and rapidly evolving tradition); in film, Godard, post-Godard and

⁵ Despite her prominence as a theorist of literary postmodernism, Hutcheon’s definition of postmodernism incorporating feminism, postcolonialism, queer and race theory (2002, p 1), is not my central concern, compared to those that Best and Kelner consider the founders of postmodern theory.

experimental cinema and video, but also a whole new type of commercial film ...; Burroughs, Pynchon, or Ishmael Reed, on the one hand, and the French *nouveau roman* and its succession on the other, along with alarming new kinds of literary criticism, based on some new aesthetic of textuality or *écriture* . . . The list might be extended indefinitely; (Jameson, 1991, p 1).

He also has a tendency to draw on key postmodern terms: by mentioning *écriture* here he alludes to the influence of Derrida, Barthes and others who follow after Saussure.

As part of the conception of his postmodern challenge to modernism, in 1985 Hassan offered a list of contrastive properties to elucidate these challenges. One of the most prolific writers on postmodernism in this era, Hassan conceptualised it as a movement that offered, not only a complete break from modernism, but a positive one. He wrote of it as a shift that offered a sense of multiplicity and expansion, against the limited and closed set of ideas of modernism proposed. His list is as follows:

Modernism	Postmodernism
Romanticism/Symbolism	Pataphysics/Dadaism
Form (conjunction, closed)	Antiform (disjunction, open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Change
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Mastery/Logos	Exhaustion/Silence
Art Object/Finished Work	Process/Performance/Happening
Distance	Participation
Creation/Totalization/Synthesis	Decreation/Deconstruction/Antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centering	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext
Semantics	Rhetoric
Paradigm	Syntagm
Hypotaxis	Parataxis
Metaphor	Metonym
Selection	Combination
Root/Depth	Rhizome/Surface
Interpretation/Reading	Against Interpretation/Misreading
Signified	Signifier
<i>Lisible</i> (Readerly)	<i>Scriptible</i> (Writerly)
Narrative/Grande Histoire	Anti-narrative/ <i>Petite Histoire</i>
Master Code	Ideolect
Symptom	Desire
Type	Mutant
Genital/Phallic	Polymorphous/Androgynous
Paranoia	Schizophrenia
Origin/Cause	Difference-Différance/Trace
God the Father	The Holy Ghost
Metaphysics	Irony
Determinacy	Indeterminacy
Transcendence	Immanence

(Hassan, 1985, p 123)

This schema, with its binary structure, for which Hassan was criticised by Hutcheon (2002), indicates, whether intentionally or not, the oppositional spirit of what became a contentious site of debate in cultural circles in the mid-1980s.

At the beginning of this chapter I offered an overview of the scholarship on *White Noise* that addresses the characterisation of Gladney as a subject in relation to modernism and postmodernism. This provides one context through which to position my research. In the following chapter we turn to a more detailed examination of the subject in modernism and postmodernism.

Chapter Two

Postmodern Challenges to the Subject

This chapter opens by foregrounding modernist and postmodernist ideas about *the subject*. It then provides a schematic representation of the postmodern (non-humanist) challenge to the (humanist) modernist subject, particularly as they apply to the 1980s theory wars.

Descartes' *Cogito* (*Cogito ergo sum*: 'I think, therefore I am') (this edn, 1998, orig. 1637) provides the theoretical ground from which canonical modernism draws its notion of the singular consciousness as subject. Descartes posits the self-reflexive subject, a singular subject that enquires into the nature of itself and finds proof of its existence through this enquiry. Additionally, modernism drew on Kant, with his focus on transcendence: the rational subject's consciousness has access to a universal truth that lies above, and beyond, itself. What is of chief relevance here is that Kant's aim in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998) involves a process called transcendental deduction, which counters both empiricists and skeptics. It is applied in order to provide a proof of objectivity, and considers that proof lies outside the human mind, but can be processed by it. Another influence on modernism was the romantic poets, with their emphasis on the 'soul' that resides beneath the individual's surface, a mark of their singularity and essential being. It is these ideas of the rational autonomous subject that underlie canonical modernism, and against which the postmodernists will rebel.

Taking up these theories of the subject as a self-enquiring entity, the novels of Proust, Conrad, Fitzgerald, Lawrence, Woolf, Melville and some, but not all of Joyce, raise a particular style of human consciousness to a central position in their work. The emphasis is on a singular, as opposed to a mass or group consciousness. The subject in modernism is associated with ideas of 'authenticity', 'transcendence' and 'self-irony'; each of these terms is discussed in this chapter.

The subject of the literary protagonist is represented as a 'self', with a 'soul', or essential hidden core, particular to the subject. This style of subject is given a specifically modernist flavor through the influence of Freud and his focus on what he termed the "science of the unconscious mind" (Freud, 1923, p 252), but despite his introduction of the unconscious, of the complex split topography of the subject (the

Ego, Superego and Id), through which the self does not wholly control or know itself, Freudian theory nevertheless upholds the notion of a unified subject. These ideas of the nature of the subject in canonical modernism operate as inbuilt assumptions rather than being directly theorised by the novelists or the first waves of critical writing on modernism. Not until the linguistic and postmodern turns, was there intense scrutiny on what constitutes the modernist subject.

One of the central figures involved in the postmodern challenge to the essential modernist subject was Michel Foucault. In the history of this new construct 'man', the *Cogito*, Foucault argues, operates with the subject using 'proof' based on reason to substantiate the subject's existence. Foucault says: "the transition from 'I think' to 'I am' was accomplished in the light of the evidence, within a discourse whose whole domain and functioning consisted in articulating one upon the other" (1970, p 311). Foucault draws on Descartes' *Cogito* "as the first crucial marker one represents to oneself" (1970, p 311). Like Derrida, Foucault was not a postmodern theorist, but his ideas are central to postmodern theory. Foucault speaks of the development of the modernist subject in terms of *epistemes*: the historical discourses that in a particular epoch create its fields of knowledge. Foucault considers that one historical *episteme* fully supplants the next. Within two of his major studies, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970) and *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault claims that bourgeois 'man' or 'the subject' is a result of the historical Classical *episteme* giving way to the Modern *episteme*. The era in which 'natural history' dominated, the Classical era, did not offer the concept of the subject as a separate entity of enquiry from nature. With Descartes came the Modern era, and with it the emergence of the social sciences which, he argues, posits humanity as both the object of knowledge, and the subject of that enquiry:

When natural history becomes biology, when the analysis of wealth becomes economics, when, above all, reflection upon language becomes philosophy, and Classical *discourse*, in which being an representation found their common locus, is eclipsed, then, in the profound upheaval of such an archeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows... (Foucault 1970, p 312)

According to Foucault this 'subject that knows' is at the same time "the object of knowledge", a situation in which a person is both object and subject, due to the application of the scientific method to itself and that marks a profound upheaval in the

history of thought, heralding the appearance of ‘man’. Deleuze calls Foucault’s work in this respect *subjectivation*: the process of becoming a subject (1987).

Foucault’s series of statements on the creation of ‘man’ within the last 200 years also proposed that the disintegration of the subject was imminent. In his view, postmodernism is an *episteme* that creates a complete rupture with modernism. It follows, he argues, that if ‘man’ is an invention, due to a changing *episteme*, postmodernism will bring about man’s erasure. To conclude *The Order of Things*, Foucault says:

As the archeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea (1979, p 386-87).

Here Foucault poses that the subject is, in effect, invented by an *episteme*, and is also likely to be destroyed by one.⁶ Foucault’s move to discuss man in terms of erasure was one of many poststructuralist and postmodernist strategies to critique the assumptions underpinning the ‘rational’ subject of the Enlightenment and the elements of it that were adhered to by canonical (humanist) modernism. This was famously termed ‘the death of the subject’ or ‘the death of man’.

Foucault thus, in the course of several works, dismantles the modernist subject, proposing that it is a construct of power and knowledge. In effect, his genealogical and/or archeological studies of the prison and criminal apparatus, human knowledge, the psychiatric apparatus and discourses and apparatus involving (human) sexuality in western culture, together create a thesis about the subject as a construct of the external forces and language strategies employed by them. He claims that throughout history, in relation to these apparatuses, language operates through strategies of exclusion and inclusion, dominates and controls the subject and in effect, also creates and determines the nature of the subject. Thus, the subject is determined through external processes, is a construct of power and knowledge.

⁶ It is notable that Foucault’s later work, on the care of the self, which modified this extreme position on “the death of man”, emerged in the late 80s but was not influential in the same way as the earlier *Order of Things*.

Despite this widespread assumption among structuralists, poststructuralists and postmodernists of the “death of the subject” (Jameson 1998, pp 5-7), ‘the subject’ as a topic of enquiry has remained relevant even in contemporary cultural theory, and has been prominent in discussions about what comes after postmodernism. Prominent cultural theorists over the last two decades, including Cadava and Nancy (1991) and Žižek (1999), have dedicated books to the subject after its proclaimed death. Thus, as in Eagleton’s assessment, postmodernism did not, as a movement, mistake the disintegration of traditional notions around the subject for its “final disappearance” (1985, p 70).

Postmodern Challenges to the Modernist Subject

As the preceding discussion has made clear, a great deal of literature that addresses notions of the modernist and the postmodern subject has been published. In the following sections I offer a distillation of the most relevant themes and theories that serve to encapsulate the postmodern challenge to the canonical modernist subject. Not all of these were necessarily articulated in the 1980s. Figure 1 offers five properties of the modernist subject and five contrasting properties of the postmodern subject. The approach is thematic and draws on Hassan’s methodology (1985) because it was influential in the era, and replicates the spirit of theoretical opposition.

The modernist properties themselves are a combination of points offered by Wilcox in his 1991 essay and considerations from Perloff (in Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992, p 158) and Whitworth (2007, p 14) and relate specifically to modernist and postmodern literary characterisation. The schema is necessarily highly selective. For instance, in discussing the challenge to modernist ‘authenticity’ by postmodern theory this study highlights the work of Krauss and Baudrillard, but could equally have offered Theodor Adorno (1973), or Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980). The schema is as follows:

Modernism (humanist)

1. Human consciousness
2. Authentic subject
3. Access to the transcendent
4. Individualist/lone hero
5. Self-ironising

Postmodernism (non-humanist)

- Consciousness as construct
- Media-generated or copy
- No access to the transcendent
- Conformist/operates *en masse*
- Non-individualised irony

Figure 1

1. Modernist human consciousness is challenged by the postmodern subject as construct**M 1. Modernist human consciousness**

Modernist writers, particularly novelists, share the desire to represent a human consciousness, one that springs from within a singular human subject. Furthermore, the representation of this human consciousness in all its detail and complexity was highly prioritized in literary fiction, far surpassing the importance of external viewpoints. Novelists such as Conrad, Lawrence, Joyce, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Proust, Woolf and others revealed in their novels various interpretations of what was interesting about the human consciousness, and what was relevant for their artistic focus. For instance, Melville offers a study in grandiose consciousness in *Moby-Dick* (1851); Lawrence represented the desiring consciousness in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928); and as Trotter notes as well as Fitzgerald, Hemingway portrays the post-war wounded consciousness in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). The self-creating artist as hero consciousness is typified in *Portrait*, where Dedalus sets the terms of his existence, by separating from his broader culture, and defining himself as an emerging artist. His portrayal as self-creating modernist subject is central to Chapter Four.

Perloff acknowledges that modernism afforded increasing importance to the Freudian unconscious and to dream work (in Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992, p 158). Freud's focus on mining the depths of the human unconscious, through what he termed the "science of the unconscious mind" (1923 b, p 252) prompted a fashion

towards interiority, and depth representation of human psychology became a modernist preoccupation. Woolf wrote that her interest is in “the dark place of psychology” (1925 b). For example, the representation of the thought processes of the suicidal Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) exposes his singular consciousness to the reader moment by moment. Woolf’s aim is to represent the inner workings of the individual subject’s mind:

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small (1919).

Despite the fragmentary nature of these impressions, there is a sense of cohesion overall, that the individual self is an integral unit. Woolf describes her process of representing the consciousness of the *self* through recording observations, memories, sense impressions as if she is actually recording an unmediated *truth* that emerges from these characters. Maltby addresses the notion of self as an unquestioned underpinning written into Woolf’s language, linked to the rendering of her visionary moments, which he describes as possessing shades of mysticism:

[T]he mystical cast of Woolf’s language frames Clarissa Dalloway’s intuition of her (repressed) lesbian identity as an encounter with an elusive spiritual truth: a fleeting intimation of the healing, transfigurative power of some ultimate . . .
Self (2002, p 14).

Maltby, on discussing the visionary moment in modern literature generally (see Maltby 2002) highlights that in literature’s visionary moments, including those identified as epiphanies, propose that revelatory ‘truth’ is something arrived at suddenly by a character, in an instant, not obtained due to a lengthy process of inquiry.

In relation to the general notion of the modernist focus on human consciousness, literary techniques to convey this new understanding of a specific consciousness as associated with an internalized separateness included the ‘stream of consciousness’, which may emerge as a character’s internal monologue, or in free indirect speech. The subject as an individual entity thereby depicts itself directly through the narrative, presenting their exterior and interior worlds from their subjective perspective. Whitworth highlighted the ways in which modernism reveals a tendency to prioritise the interiority of the singular self’s consciousness over external

viewpoints (2007, p 13). Eagleton refers to modernist interiority, somewhat ironically, as that “pathological itch to scratch surfaces for concealed depths” (1985, p 11).

Various themes can be associated with this modernist interiority: for example, the alienated loner in the city, the *flâneur*, and the subject who has a sense of the imminence of death. This latter may be the result of the sense of cultural morbidity that arose as Christian religions gave way to a secularisation of culture, as predicted in Nietzsche’s pronouncement “*Gott ist tot* (God is dead)” (1887), a process hastened perhaps in the devastating aftermath of WWI. Finally, Freud’s notion of the ‘death drive’ (1920) also impacted some canonical modernists. As Friedman (1995) observes:

Modernist fictional death, no longer tragic and consummatory, the ultimate and timely form of closure, becomes unpredictable, incoherent, often initiatory and pervasive (1995, p 23-24).

This pervasiveness of death in the modernist consciousness, its sense of meaningless incoherence, operates thematically in such works *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Virginia Woolf, Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald frequently presented tropes relating to death, dying, and what Trotter suggests that ‘the wounded body’ is a distinctive factor of modernism, in so far as characters in modernist novels show evidence of physical damage or a frail grip on mortality (Trotter, 2001, p 77).

PM 1. The postmodern subject as construct

The idea of the subject as a construct was not a new concept to the cultural sphere in the 1980s. The linguistic turn had already begun and the influence of Saussurean linguistics was visible in such influential works as Roland Barthes’ ‘Death of the Author’. Furthermore, the work of Derridean deconstruction had gained influence in prioritising textuality and intertextuality, and proclaiming that “*il n’y a pas d’hors-texte*”, or ‘there is no outside-text’ (Derrida, trans. Gayatri Spivak, 1974, p 158). His emphases on intertextuality and the interplay of signifiers in the absence of transcendent meaning, in ‘Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences’ (1970), and his large body of influential work on deconstruction set the stage for 80s debates. However, as Bertens suggests, the 1980s was an era in which Foucault’s analysis of the subject as a construct of power and knowledge was the most

pervasive influence. Foucault sets the ground for what Bertens refers to as ‘the other-determined’ subject taken up by a range of postmodern and related theorists:

[T]he autonomous subject of modernity, objectively rational and self-determined ... gives way to a postmodern subject which is largely other-determined, that is, determined within and constituted by language (Bertens, 1995, p 7).

The subject as self-creating, self-constituting, and considered as operating via the impulses of an inner will, that resides within each subject, is challenged by the idea that the subject is determined by external forces. In an interview in May 1969, Foucault says:

The death of man is nothing to get particularly excited about. It's one of the visible forms of a much more general decease, if you like. I don't mean by it the death of god but the death of the subject, of the Subject in capital letters, of the subject as origin and foundation of Knowledge, of Liberty, of Language and History.⁷

Foucault here specifies that the death of the subject is thus related to a new conception of the subject as an entity without liberty to act independently of the historical and social circumstances in which it is embedded: Foucault challenges the concept of the meaning-producing subject.

In the essay ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’ (1998),⁸ Frederic Jameson specifically refers to the ‘death of the subject’, which he qualifies as “the end of individualism as such” (1998, p 5). He provides a commentary on the position adopted by a host of theorists, who have come to consider the subject as a form of ideology. Modernism, which upheld the notion of the subject, in Jameson’s view is predicated on a “personal or private style” that is “unmistakable as your own fingerprint” (1991, p 17). He describes this modernist self as creator of a unique vision. Modernism, he says, upholds the notion of the “unique” self and private identity (1991, p 23 and p 366). He describes how a number of social critics, psychoanalysts and linguists had begun to claim that this form of individual was “dead”, and that the subject based on the premise of individualism is ideological.

In response to this “death of the subject” Jameson provides two points of view. The first argues that there was indeed an individual subject that emerged in bourgeois

⁷ As quoted in Jonathan Shaffer, *The Irrelevance of the Subject: Against Subject-Sensitive Invariantism*, *Philosophical Studies* (2006). 127-87-107. <http://www.jonathanschaffer.org/irrelevance.pdf>

⁸ This essay was originally a talk, portions of which were presented as a Whitney Museum Lecture in fall, 1982.

society, that no longer exists in the age of “corporate capitalism”, with its organisational man, its state and business bureaucracies. The second, as he puts it, “more radical approach”, taken up by the poststructuralists, is that the individual subject “never really existed”, but is a construct. He says: “[N]ot only is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is a *myth*, it never really existed in the first place, there have never been autonomous subjects” (1998, p 6). That is, he argues, ‘man’ or ‘the subject’ is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification... to persuade people that they ...possessed this individual personal identity.” Therefore, Jameson names “the death of the subject” as a strand of contemporary thought, without actually fully aligning with this ‘radical’ version of the debate. For he articulates that it is not important to decide which of the propositions is the most valid; rather, one must acknowledge that the ‘old’ subjects of Picasso, Proust and T.S. Eliot simply “don’t work anymore” as nobody has that kind of “unique private world and style to express anymore” (1998, p 7). In mentioning the issue of style he evokes ideas John Barth writes about in relation to modernism when discussing the literature of exhaustion.

Baudrillard, with his hyperbolic style, is central to the postmodern dismantling of the modernist subject. In *Simulations* (1983a), Baudrillard elides the concept of the singular subject by writing about the ‘mass’, ‘public’ or the ‘majority’, and how these groups are impacted by the capitalist consumer media machine. In a twofold strategy of firstly, omitting to address the subject as an individual entity, and secondly writing about the obscuring of ‘reality’ by the media, he dismantles the notion that the subject has either agency or a singular identity. In this work, notions of the subject as a conformist entity operate in a number of ways within the text to present the subject as if caught in a gridlock of media messages, networks, systems and external forces. His notion of the “precession of simulacra” is discussed more fully in PM 2.

If the subject Baudrillard depicts is conceptually merged with the ‘majority’ or ‘mass’ in *Simulations*, in a way that indicates the subject can only conform to media views and cannot tell the difference between media representation and ‘actuality’, in a later work, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1983b), while Baudrillard refers directly to ‘the subject’, this subject is even more enmeshed with the consumer order. Baudrillard proclaims a new order in which “interiority” no longer exists. Firstly, he poses that there was a time when the subject “turned to imaginary depths” and had a

“scene”. This subject is that of modernity. However, the contemporary era, saturated by the media becomes a “proteic” environment of networks, one in which the internal merges with the external, and the “body and the whole surrounding universe becomes a control screen” (p 127). Baudrillard writes of the body (of the subject), as merging with other bodies to become a “large soft body”.

Baudrillard reminisces about an era of alienation: the benefit of alienation was that the Other was able to be perceived: “There is no longer the drama of alienation: we live in an ecstasy of communication”, he says. He brings up the metaphor of the schizophrenic, which at first appears to be a psychologising of the subject. Instead, however, it is the schizophrenic’s inability to filter or screen out information on which he draws. There is a forced extraversion of interiority, he proclaims. Suddenly the subject is cast into the world of the external, the world in which there is no interiority. There is no part of the subject that is separate from the external world. He calls this the “total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat’. The subject, in a sense, has no boundaries, it is the outside, it is the machine, it is the car, as he specifically argues:

It is the end of interiority and intimacy, the overexposure and transparency of the world which traverses him without obstacle. He can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself, can no longer produce himself as mirror. He is now only a pure screen, a switching centre for all the networks of influence. (1983b, p 127).

Baudrillard’s ‘subject’ is stripped of what one considers to be the subjective elements of subjectivity and is one and the same as the screening device that offers information from mainstream media.

It is noted by Best and Kellner that postmodern characters in fiction are often created to seem “empty, depthless, and aimless” in an attempt to embody “the waning of affect” (Best and Kellner, 1991, p 131). The characters in works of postmodernism often appear to offer a sense of depthlessness, as their representation does not draw on the conventions of realism, or mimesis, but rather draw attention to the status of a character as a textual creation. Robbe-Grillet’s work is an example whereby “moral, symbolic, or allegorical schemes are often abandoned in favour of surface meaning, or the depiction of the sheer ‘meaninglessness’ of random events and fractured ‘narration’ (Best and Kellner 1997, p 131). Similarly Fokkema and Bertens say that in

postmodern fiction “character, like external reality, is something ‘about which nothing is known’ lacking in plausible motive or discoverable depth” (1984, p 37).

Another version of the externally created subject comes from Julia Kristeva’s theory of *abject selfhood*, which provides a view of the subject that is composed in such a way that its interior offers a complete replica of the external values and attributes of the broader society and culture in which it is located:

If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, is none other than abject (Kristeva, 1982, p 5).

This pulverization of the subject is another way of describing the (modernist) subject’s demise in the light of the postmodern challenge, whereby the human attempts to look within itself. There is nothing separate from the external world to identify it as separate in any way. The subject is thus a construct, and its entry into the abject state is a consequence of the fact that meaning collapses at the site of the subjectivity.

The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is racially excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses (Kristeva, 1982, pp 1-2).

Drawing on the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, Kristeva talks of the individual self in a state of abjection, the result of a subject being drawn towards the place where meaning collapses. Meaning has collapsed in a context where God is not merely dead but has left a vacuum of meaning.

Ways in which the postmodern novel addresses this idea of the subject as construct are addressed by McHale, who identifies for instance, the postmodern tendency to align characters side by side with depictions of their authors as historical figures (1992, p 17). In Steve Katz’s *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince*, the narrator says that his character “knew he was going to die, no doubt about it, and he tossed me such an immense glare of hate that I wasn’t sure what was happening ...” (Katz, 1968, p 257). The narrative might situate the characters as types from a particular historical period, as does Richard Moody in *Ice Storm* (1994). Characters may seem ‘depthless’

as Alain Robbet-Grillet and George Perec's works highlight. Complex external framing strategies that situate the character as externally created can be seen in Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island* (2006)⁹, in which the central character and his clone appear in the parallel narratives that comprise the novel's structure.

2. The modernist authentic subject challenged by postmodernism's media-generated copy

M 2. The modernist subject as authentic

The subject in modernism is associated with ideas of 'authenticity'. The term *authentic* originates from the Greek *authentikos* 'principal, genuine' and according to the *OED*, means "of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine". A key term in the existential literary movement, in this context it relates to an emotionally appropriate, significant, purposive, and responsible mode of human life. Walter Benjamin's influential essay "Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction", (1936), prioritised the term *authenticity* and proposed that the original artwork has an *aura*, which 'withers', or is degraded in being reproduced. He says:

The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical—and, of course, not only technical—reproducibility. Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so vis-à-vis technical reproduction (1936).¹⁰

In canonical modernism the focus is not on the work of Art alone as authentic, but also rests on the status of the artist, who is responsible for the artwork's authentic creation, and is also therefore implicated in these notions of authenticity. By inference, this figure, as well as the artistic product, becomes imbued with notions of the authentic, as opposed to the copy.

Clement Greenberg (1960), writing on modernist painting, uses the term authentic as one of the standards that it is possible to achieve through formal means (1960). For Greenberg, the idea of kitsch, which he poses as contrasting with *avant-*

⁹ Due to the date of its publication some may argue this is a work of post-postmodernism, operates, as a neo-humanist work that challenges modernist ideas of the representation of the subject.

¹⁰ Online: accessed 09/2012:

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

garde Art, offers vicarious experience and faked sensations, which “now and then ... produces something that has an authentic folk flavour” (1939). Greenberg then is one of the critics who brings to the fore the term authentic as an important value in discussions of artistic modernism.

Writing on literary criticism, Trilling draws on the terms *sincerity* and ‘authenticity’ in his analysis of a range of literary texts throughout history (1972). Not only does he use the terms to ascertain the value of texts as a whole, but he also applies them to characters. He asks for instance whether Emma Bovary is authentic, despite her heavy influence from B-grade literature, and answers this question through a range of definitions of what constitutes authenticity. For example, a character is deemed authentic if he/she is portrayed with a constancy of passion or interest. Similarly to Benjamin, but in application to the literature, he proposes that the dichotomy of the original and the copy is central to the reading of literature (p 95), discussing this in relation to modernist texts including *Portrait*. In *Portrait* Dedalus is portrayed as the original artist-hero, who operates in isolation from his peers and defies the strictures of the broader culture. Furthermore, Trilling’s argument associates authenticity with the *elevation* of the hero (1972, p 87). This theme is enlarged on in M 4 below.

PM 2. The media-generated postmodern subject as copy

A range of theorists associated with the postmodern project responds critically to the notion of the authentic modernist subject. Rosalind Krauss, in her influential work *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1986), proposes that the modernist *avant-garde* has been imbued with a myth of originality.¹¹ To support her analysis, one that relies on reproduction’s central role in Art production and that challenges modernist authenticity in a postmodern context, Krauss draws on Benjamin “one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense” (Krauss, 1988, p 153). The key essay that challenges the notion of the original in Krauss *Originality of the Avant-garde* (1986), offers an analysis of an exhibition, titled *Gates of Hell*, by Rodin, the first exhibition of which was posthumous. The sculptures

¹¹ It is worth noting Kraus’s term *avant-garde* includes Dedalus from *Portrait*, whereas I place *Portrait* within canonical modernism

for this work were cast and the layout of the figures was designed after the artist's death. She observes that "the issue of authenticity is equally problematic for each of the existing casts; it is only more consciously so for the most recent". She adds that: "The *Gates of Hell* are examples of multiple copies that exist in the absence of an original" (Krauss, orig. 1986, 1988, p 152).

Therefore, the modernist *original* is challenged by ideas of the copy, and the multiple. The modernism that is based on assumptions of the original and the new, as in Ezra Pound's "Make it new!", reveals to Krauss that it is founded on ideas of representation and recurrence. Further, it is "from a strange new perspective that we look back on modernist origin and watch it splintering into endless replications" (1988, p 17). The totalising modernist grid—for example, Stephen Dedalus's "self-imposed code of the *avant-garde*: 'Silence, exile and cunning'—reveals, she says, the grid's imperviousness to language, and its centrality to vanguard thinking. Thus, for Kraus, postmodernism proposes that the modernist original, applied to Art, gives way to the copy or reproduction, and the totalising modernist grid is combated by the open postmodern approach.

One of the most influential figures to challenge the singular modernist subject and to promote notions of the copy was Baudrillard and in particular with his coinage of the terms *simulacra* and *hyperreality*. Across his *oeuvre* but particularly in *Simulations* (1983a), Baudrillard argues that in contemporary media-saturated society, the omnipresent influence of the mass media has a dominant role on the individual's perception and unconscious. Ultimately, he argues, the individual is not individualised per se, but forms part of an undifferentiated mass where the individual is conformist and uncritically absorbs the ideas that are disseminated in the capitalist consumer cause through a vast media network. There is no possibility of escape from media influence, in Baudrillard's view, for all criticism and rebellion against the domination of mainstream forces in late-stage Capitalism is absorbed, repackaged and regurgitated by that very system.

Baudrillard in introducing this notion of the "precession of simulacra" proclaims the impossibility of the rational, self-creating subject of modernism in a postmodern world. In the essay of this title (1983a) Baudrillard introduced the idea of the perfect simulated event or object that obscures its original completely, referring to Luis Borges' fable, 'Of Exactitude in Science' (original title: *Del rigor en la ciencia*),

(1975). Here a map is so large and detailed it covers precisely the real terrain that it charted. “The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory” (Baudrillard, 1983a, p 2). Baudrillard expands on this, introducing the term hyperreal. The hyperreal is a simulation, or simulacrum, so powerful and convincingly real that the individual could mistake this sign of the real for the real itself.

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. ... It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real (Baudrillard, 1993, p 6).

Baudrillard therefore poses that the sort of subject that is possible in the current simulated world, is one that is offered no respite or exit point from simulation-inspired thinking or external orders. For instance, advertising is not merely some observable curiosity that operates outside the subject but infiltrates mass consciousness, and so is one and the same as mass consciousness. Advertising and other mainstream messages and values thus come to dominate the subject’s inner landscape, or unconscious. Hence, in Baudrillard’s view, the subject has consumer values and has not the agency required to distance from, or escape, these values.

3. The modernist subject has access to the transcendent; the postmodern subject does not.

M 3. The modernist subject has access to the transcendent.

I have already noted above that for Kant, the rational subject’s consciousness has access to a universal truth that lies above, and beyond, itself. The trope of the subject who seeks transcendence, that is, who looks for signs of underlying truth hidden beneath the surfaces of things, is a central element in the modernist paradigm. For Kant the transcendent is that which is unrealisable in, or sits outside of human experience, as opposed to ‘immanence’, in which one seeks signs from within. Hutcheon calls the modernist subject the perceiving subject (1988); this concept draws

attention to the way that the modernist subject is offered access to a form of original meaning. This is not to say that their interpretation of meaning is objective, for modernism begins to acknowledge the subjective nature of the individual viewpoint. Nonetheless it is implied that the author of the modernist text is just such an individual who is able to apprehend and transmit truth to the reader. Woolf calls it the writer's task to depict the actuality and fluidity of 'life itself'; this involves representing not merely the external world but also the intricate workings of the individual subject's consciousness:

Is it not possible that the accent falls a little differently, that the moment of importance came before or after, that, if one were free and could set down what one chose, there would be no plot, little probability, and a vague general confusion in which the clear-cut features of the tragic, the comic, the passionate, and the lyrical were dissolved beyond the possibility of separate recognition? The mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life, receives upon its surface myriad impressions--trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms, composing in their sum what we might venture to call life itself (Woolf, 1919).

In representing her writing as focused on presenting "life itself," Woolf's key characters, like Clarissa Dalloway, intuit the thoughts of others, and note the facts of the external world, thus have a form of perception that enables them to see beneath the surface of things otherwise hidden in her world. Ideas of transcendence in relation to the subject are associated with this style of highly developed individualised perception.

The transcendent modernist subject is exemplified in a highly sensitive character with a certain notion of 'truth' as residing in life. Some characters who engage in such quests include Stephen Dedalus, who in *Stephen Hero* (1944), collects material from daily life and aims to transmute it into poetry, an aim which is, to some extent, played out in *Portrait*; Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925 a), who can see clearly into the emotions and intentions of her party guests, and Nick Caraway in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), who comes to understand the hidden truth of Gatsby's identity. These characters not only share a fierce desire to find the underlying truth hidden below the surface of things in their world but they are represented as perceptive and discriminating in their judgments and understanding. In relation to this, modernism's literary characters are often engaged in a quest for transcendent

meaning. Trotter says that Dedalus “having rejected the Church’s sacred ritual ... makes a sacred ritual out of art” (Trotter, 2001, p 75). In other words, he operates as if art is another grand narrative, and he is the “priest of the eternal imagination” (*P*, p 240), a privileged conduit of that grand narrative.

Additionally, in terms of the transcendent modernist subject, it is noted by many modernist analysts, David Lodge and Frank Kermode among them, that in the quest for transcendent meaning, modernist characters frequently have *epiphanies*. In canonical modernism an epiphany involves not only the search for transcendent meaning through an insight emerging from daily life, but a character’s ability to apprehend and synthesize material obtained from life into *truth*. Core to this notion is the fact that there is underlying truth residing in things in the world, which the character may access and process through their intuitive and perceptive skills, in an unmediated fashion. Indeed, the modernist character’s search for transcendent meaning, the discovery of which becomes a transformative experience, often forms the unifying structure of the work and provides it with narrative order and coherence.

PM 3. The postmodern subject does not have access to the transcendent

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard questions that which he calls the *metanarratives* or ‘grand narratives’ of modernism, which the subject necessarily relies on in order to access transcendent meaning. These grand narratives, he suggests, are the underpinning theories on which Western culture relies to provide it with a sense of universal truth. Lyotard considers that theories such as Marxism’s belief in the inevitable progress of capitalism towards revolution, Hegel’s dialectic and Freud’s unconscious drives are all totalising theories that provide the culture with legitimising narratives that are in essence flawed. Drawing on Wittgenstein, Lyotard—one of the postmodernist theorists who considers postmodernism provides a complete break with modernism—claims that postmodernism heralds in little narratives or *petits récits* that break with grand narratives, offering language games instead of totalising theories.

Postmodern literature adopts a range of strategies to exemplify the move away from grand narrative notions to Lyotard’s *petits récits*. Characters may well embark on a search for meaning, or a form of logic-based truth, as in the case of Oedipa Maas

from *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) who mounts a legal quest, and yet may discover like Mass that there is no singular truth offered her but a range of answers (Lyotard, 1971). When she appears to uncover a conspiracy this is presented not as fact but as a supposition to be read in many ways. The novels of Umberto Eco focus on incidentals and mishaps as intrinsic to plot creation, or ‘meaning’; thus the heightening of minor details within the conventional modernist plot of *The Name of the Rose* (1980). In the face of the entropy of meaning, Hassan notes that the postmodern involves “diffusion of the ego” and a form of irony that becomes radical. He suggests that in postmodernism the focus shifts from the attempt to pin down meaning or truth to self-consuming play (Hassan, 1987, p 41).

The postmodern subject is no longer depicted as in modernist literature—the privileged artist or sensitive individual with extraordinary powers to discern the unmediated truth that underlies appearances in their world. Instead, the post-modern subject is markedly non-transcendent, yet pursues the search or quest for something *other* than meaning. In fact, in a range of postmodern novels, what characters share is that they engage in a quest that exhibits an exaggerated quality, in relation to what seems to be floating desire; for example, in Houellebecq’s *Whatever* (1994), *Atomised* (1995), *Platform* (2002) and *The Possibility of an Island* (2006); in Amis’s *The Information* (1995) and *Success* (2004) and in Brett Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho* (1991) and *Lunar Park* (2005).¹² This search associated with floating desire leads to the depiction of protagonists seemingly without agency, or the autonomy that is ascribed to the modernist character. The subject is represented as having reactive, rather than pro-active behaviour in relation to their desire, and the sense that they are trapped within systems and situations over which they have little control, and from which there is no escape.

4. The modernist subject is individualistic; the postmodern subject is conformist

M 4. The subject in modernism is an individualist

¹² Some critics may argue that some of these novels were written after postmodernism; for the purposes of my argument however they continue to express some postmodern tendencies.

The idea of a subject as “separate from the herd” is central to canonical modernism, as acknowledged by Whitworth and Perloff. Perloff says a modernist character reveals “the malaise of the individual in the ‘lonely crowd’ (in Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992, 158). Whitworth elaborates: “A contrast between the individual and the ‘herd’ or ‘mass’ is commonly a feature of modernist literature; another version is a contrast between the “elite and the masses” (2007, p 14). The character is represented as autonomous, in the sense they act in distinctly different ways from the conventions, strictures and other limitations imposed by society and the historical conditions. Among others who have written on this, Søren Kierkegaard was concerned with “the single individual” as opposed to “the crowd”, which he aligned with “untruth” (1847). The sense of originality associated with this point, is created through the character taking an active, oppositional stance against, or as a turning away from, their dominant culture. A modernist-hero subject in particular is generally portrayed as having the access to autonomy required to direct his life in ways that are significantly distinct from ideas imposed by convention and the expectations of others.

The individualised subject in modernism is sometimes represented in the loner hero, who may be an artist or other privileged individual possessed of visionary sensibility to differing degrees. Kermode suggests that in the modernist figure of the ‘artist in isolation’, in order to attain full authentic selfhood this individualised self must battle the stifling mechanisms of society. Heroism thus is commonly linked to the possibility of achieving forms of aesthetic and conceptual originality. According to the codes of modernism: “the modernist artist was thus driven to create the great work, the masterpiece, and his or her own unique individual style” (Best and Kellner, 1997, p 28), and characters in fictional modernist works represented this notion that the authentic nature of the individual can be expressed in authentic, original artworks or alternatively, in finding an alternative image of truth. *Avant-garde* modernism begins to challenge the notion of the artist-hero, by proposing instead the trope of the anti-hero.

PM 4. The postmodern subject is conformist

One of the key proponents of the postmodern subject as conformist is Baudrillard who argues that ‘the mass’, of which the subject is a non-distinct participant, absorbs media

messages wholesale, to the extent that the subject's consciousness is one and the same with the consciousness of the broader culture. Another way of figuring this is to relate the subject to a network of social relations:

Our private sphere has ceased to be the stage where the drama of the subject at odds with his [her] objects and with his [her] image is played out: we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks (Baudrillard, 1988, p 16)

In a similar vision of the subject as 'cog in the wheel', thus conforming to the system's requirements, Lyotard completely undermines the idea of the modernist 'self' in stating that conceiving of the individual as an island is no longer a valid proposition in a postmodern world:

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. (Lyotard, 1979, p 15).

Consequently, in Lyotard's terms, the idea of an authentic individualised self that dominated the modernist tradition has become a mere "nodal point", or cog in the wheel of a system of social connections, where there are no distinguishing characteristics between selves.

5. The modernist subject self-ironises; postmodernism employs non-individualising irony

M 5. The modernist subject as self-ironising

Christopher Butler considers that modernism adopts "skeptical irony" as one of its most typical ironic strategies. This plays out in skepticism towards received ideas (in Attridge, 1990, p 260). An emblematic modernist character in the respect of irony is Dedalus from *Portrait*. While Stephen Dedalus tests and ultimately rejects the doctrines of his church, his views on literature and language are not primarily portrayed as skeptical in nature. Self-ironising on the other hand, is also prevalent in modernist work. and while such irony may focus on the instability of the subject

entity, it does not undermine the premise that the subject is a singular and whole entity.

Questions about the role of irony, and about what modes of irony are at work, have featured large in the scholarship on *Portrait*. Kermode for example argues that, judging from Dedalus' representation in *Ulysses*, Stephen's dream of flight in *Portrait* is delusional, and thus ironic. Others, like Waith, also hold that Dedalus is an "esthete but not an artist". Waith concludes that instead there is *ironic detachment* at work in the novel: Joyce has "manipulated the material of his own life very freely and with great artistic objectivity" (Waith, p 257). In terms of the other forms of irony, which in the view of many critics lampoon Dedalus and position him as a failed artist, I agree with Waith that it is instead a novel about potentialities. In a later chapter I analyse the particular logic of irony at play in *Portrait*, and primarily the self-ironising tendency. Alan Wilde (1981) offers three modes of irony in relation to postmodernism and its precursors: the first relates to pre-modernism, which he calls *mediated irony*, in which harmony reigns, despite man being portrayed in a fallen state, in the second mode *disjunctive irony* appears, "disconnected and fragmented": it substitutes aesthetic wholeness for lost harmony in life. His third mode leads into a definition of postmodern irony.

PM 5. The postmodern subject is represented through non-individualising irony.

Theorists of postmodern irony tend to consider that in the postmodern era everything has been done before, both in action and Art; meanwhile, the "precession of simulacra" works its stranglehold on originality. Ultimately, postmodern irony challenges the notion of the singular subject in a way that modernist irony does not. Wilde calls postmodern irony *suspensive irony*; it "abandons the quest for paradise altogether, and accepts within it 'multiplicity, randomness, contingency, and even absurdity'" (Wilde, 1981, pp 8-10). 'Paradise' here suggests a unified, totalizing view of the world, which the postmodern ironising process has abandoned.

One of the most prolific writers on irony in relation to postmodernism is Hutcheon. The postmodern:

“... is parodic or ironic in its relation to the past—both moral and social, aesthetic and ideological. In fiction, the postmodern is what I would call “historiographic metafiction,” self-reflexive yet historically grounded. And there are equivalent manifestations in painting, video, film, dance, and other literary forms, as well as in contemporary theory (1988, p 4).”

Thus the parodic or ironic for Hutcheon is central to the definition of postmodernism (Hutcheon 1988, p 4), and postmodern irony operates as an integral strategy that works subversively in a play of plurality rather than singularity:

Instead of seeing irony as setting up a literal meaning which is to be discarded in favour of what is called the "ironic" one, what would happen if we thought of irony in terms of a dynamic relationship, a communicative process? What if we saw irony as the interaction not only between ironist and interpreter but between different meanings, where both the said and the unsaid must play off against each other (and with some critical edge) in order for such a process even to be recognized as ironic? (Hutcheon, 1992, p 220)

Consequently, Hutcheon’s view is that postmodern irony is adopted as a radical strategy. Hence, she describes it with the term “critical edge”, as opposed to modernist irony, which is representative of “both closure, and single, centralized meaning” (1988, p 127). Postmodern irony’s interactivity and dynamic nature is, therefore, part of a broader vision of postmodernism as emancipatory. This, however, is mitigated by various critical remarks drawing attention to the contradictions involved, including her proposition, mentioned earlier, that postmodernism is both critical of, and complicit with, consumerism (Hutcheon 1988, p 4).

According to Jameson, while modernists adopt a style of referencing or quoting from other texts, this does not dominate the structure of their work. Consequently, the modernist work retains its individual integrity. However, the postmodernists draw on the technique that Jameson terms *pastiche*, which offers a sense of blank parody of the text, as opposed to what he calls the ‘blank irony’ of modernism (Jameson, 1991). When postmodern *pastiche* is at work, texts do not merely quote from other texts, but incorporate them within their structure.

The postmodernists have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole “degraded” landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader’s Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder

mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply “quote”; as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance (Jameson, 1991, page 2).

According to Jameson, the boundaries between the postmodern text and the quoted’ or appropriated text are often difficult to draw. There is also ‘a cannibalisation of modernist styles’ in postmodernism (1991, p 44). According to Jameson, postmodern *pastiche* draws not merely from high literature, but also from the previously unprivileged world of mass media and B-grade texts. This may also contribute to the sense of disrupted unity in the postmodern text.

For Eco postmodern irony is discussed in terms of postmodernism’s stance in relation to prior representations:

The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently. I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her ‘I love you madly’, because he knows that she knows (and that she knows he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say ‘As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly’. At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated; both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony... But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love (Eco, 1994, p 67).

Here Eco addresses the characteristic postmodern practice of double-coding, to allow for that which is thought to have been already said. The realm of cliché, uttered in the postmodern era, is evoked at the same time as it is ironised. This strategy of letting one’s interlocutor know that what one wants to say has been said before, offers a different style of ironic register to that of modernism. The modernist form of irony still supports the singular, authentic subject; it is self-aware irony. Postmodern irony announces the awareness of the art-producer that there is no possibility of singular individuality, that no original statement is possible in the postmodern era.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a way to encapsulate large bodies of theory on modernism and postmodernism in terms of a series of contrasting themes affecting the subject, as expressed by some theorists and writers in the debates of the 1980s. While the relationship between modernism and postmodernism can be conceived of as a continuity, and has been so by a range of scholars, my aim is to represent historical postmodernism as a rupture or complete break from modernism, as Baudrillard and others have proposed. It is in relation to this break that the notion of the modernist subject as an individualised, authentic, human is challenged. The specific ways that the modernist subject is challenged in the name of postmodern theory are outlined here, and I argue that the tension created by these two positions in relation to the subject plays out within the characterisation of Gladney in *White Noise*. With this broad comparative schema in mind, this study proceeds to a textual analysis of Gladney's character within *White Noise*, in charting Gladney's oscillation between modernist and postmodern subject positions.

Chapter Three

Gladney's Modernist Elements

This chapter focuses on the extent to which Gladney can be seen as a “modernist displaced in a postmodern world”, in the words of Wilcox (1991, p 348). Many scholars commenting on *White Noise* have drawn on Wilcox’s statement to demonstrate that Gladney is either a fully modernist creation with a humanist basis, or a romantic character. Alternatively, as Nel writes: “We might ... identify DeLillo as a modernist writer who writes about postmodernity” (in Duvall, 2008, p 16). It is the contradictions within Wilcox’s essay, and within *White Noise* itself, that in part instigated my interest in challenging this view of Gladney, and DeLillo, as unequivocally modernist, since *White Noise* is a multi-layered and complex work with strong components of both modernism and postmodernism. It is as if modernism and postmodern elements are fighting it out for dominance within the characterisation of Gladney.

This chapter addresses the elements in Gladney’s depiction that most notably align his characterisation with modernism. It is demonstrated that in fact, each modernist element of Gladney’s characterisation is significantly undercut, even deposed, by postmodern properties, as is further explored in Chapter Five. Similarly, the postmodern elements of Gladney are challenged, and undermined, by the strongly modernist features outlined here.

Gladney's Individualised Consciousness

White Noise portrays Gladney as a living entity, separate from other entities, and with a singular consciousness that draws on codes of representation from humanist-based literary traditions, including modernism (Fig 1, M 1). That is, in Gladney’s representation, DeLillo does not overtly alert the reader to his own role as mediator or author-creator, or to Gladney’s status as a textual creation, as one might expect in an unremittingly postmodern work. In other words, DeLillo offers himself as a relatively

invisible author in the modernist vein, similar to Dedalus' description of the artist as "like the God of creation, [who] remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork ... paring his fingernails" (*P*, p 233).

Several narrative devices associated with modernism are employed in Gladney's first person narrative, such as the exploration of the extraordinary in ordinary life. The novel features a slice of the life of Gladney as both family man and small town academic. He is not particularly famous, promising nor gifted, but neither is he particularly failed. He is however interested in what might be considered to be some of the banalities of ordinary contemporary life, such as media language and the supermarket.

The narrative comprises a combination of Gladney's detailed thoughts, conveyed through inner monologue, seamlessly woven into a record of his external sense perceptions, and depicts his actions and interactions with the world at large. In the face of postmodernity, Gladney delves into the nature of things in his day to day existence, and the narrative presents finely honed details of the commonplaces he encounters. This is reminiscent of the technique Woolf refers to, of recording "the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall" (1919) and for the reader provides a sense of close experience of Gladney's consciousness as an individual grappling with his world.

Gladney experiences the world profoundly, and the reader is drawn into his moment-by-moment experience as if the novel is taking place in the present moment. These features, the close first-person singular narrative, the invisible author, attention to the minutiae of daily life, and the intensity of his individualised experience, all imbue Gladney with a sense of modernist depth and singularity, which is however challenged in numerous ways throughout the course of the novel. Nonetheless, from the opening page the premise is established, that despite his different historical circumstances, Gladney is like the modernist creations of Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait*, Nick Caraway in *The Great Gatsby* and Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925 a), he is on one level, a sensitive, unique individual with direct access to the whatness of things in the world.

This intimate access to Gladney's viewpoint, and the individualised style of poetic language he employs, offer a sense that Gladney is a character brimming with life, someone able to capture a sense of what Woolf called "life itself", translated in an

unmediated way through the lens of his unique consciousness (1919). He resembles the lone individual mounting a journey of discovery in an alienating world (Fig 1, M 4) and is positioned in the novel as the sole and unmediated link to the ‘truth’ in the world around him. The significance of such a role is underlined by the fact that this is an often alienating world that he portrays to the reader, as is evident for instance in his impressions on arriving at the place called Iron City: “A tall old Moorish movie theatre, now remarkably a mosque. Blank structures called the Terminal Building, the Packer Building, the Commerce Building. How close this was to a classic photograph of regret” (WN, p 89). The wry irony of modernist individualised regret hangs in his words, at the same time as the notion of Baudrillardian simulation is evoked in the reference to the photographic portrayal being Gladney’s mode of thinking about his lived experience.

The nature of Gladney’s heightened preoccupation with his own death also aligns him with modernism. We have already noted how, in Wilcox’s reading, Gladney frequently and obsessively mulls in a state of Kierkegaardian “fear and trembling” about the prospect of dying. Early in *White Noise*, when the theme of Gladney’s fear of death is introduced, one also learns that he is a North American academic, the head of a department and lives in a large house in relative affluence and financial ease. His musings on the nature of his death suggest that his fear is out of proportion with his comfortable circumstances, and he shows no signs of sickness or physical illness. Thus one *does* get the sense early in the novel of Gladney as a modernist displaced in a postmodern world, as he anguishes about his own and his wife Babette’s inevitable demise, while his existence is framed by the safe confines offered to the professional class in the most prosperous nation of the era.

DeLillo at times presents Gladney’s anguished consciousness in chorus form, offering the simple phrase repeatedly: “Who will die first?” (WN, 1985, p 30, p 100): Gladney or his wife Babette. Here Gladney is cast, at least initially, in the light of a lone individual, as if direct from the humanist literary tradition, who delves into his conscious and unconscious fears.

Another salient feature of this patterned theme is that Gladney’s fear of death appears within a structure of three staccato questions that are employed in the pursuit of transcendent truth. For example, consistently puzzled by the meanings embedded in the details of daily life, meanings that seem just outside his grasp, Gladney asks:

“Who decides these things? What is out there? Who are you?” (WN, p 103) and “What did it mean, what was she really saying, why did she seem to expect me to respond in kind?” (WN, p 95). This triplicate structure throughout the novel, drawing, as noted by Olster (2011), on the Catholic trinity typifies Gladney’s inner thoughts. Olster locates *White Noise* among a range of DeLillo novels that present “Dedalian artistic surrogates” (2011, p 3). Yet while I situate Gladney similarly in relation to a literary continuum with strong links to Dedalus’s search for transcendent meaning, Gladney is no artist hero, but a not particularly innovative academic. Some of his queries, articulated in threes, are devoted to pondering his dying process, while others query the meaning of things he faces in his daily life. Whether Gladney’s laments are actual examples of an alienated modernist consciousness in which DeLillo is practising Joycean writing, or whether this is a case of appropriating modernist tropes to satirise modernism, is a question so layered in the writing, and so leavened with shifting irony and humorous associations, that just when one is sure of the answer, a tone shifts, and the answer remains elusive.

Gladney’s relation to death changes dramatically however, after the Airborne Toxic Event, the life-threatening chemical spill that he encounters. This human-made disaster alters both his fear of death and the way his fear is represented, and brings with it some countering postmodern elements; in particular, the merging of his consciousness into mass consciousness; I elaborate on this in Chapter Five.

Gladney and Modernist Authenticity

For many writing on *White Noise*, such as Bloom, Nel, Bonca, Kavaldo and Wilcox, Gladney evokes notions of modernist authenticity (Fig 1, M 2). Their arguments, directly or indirectly, suggest that his character draws on notions of originality, as opposed to the copy, and evokes such terms as *sincerity*, *depth* and *profundity*, particularly in regard to his search for meaning. However, in his depiction there is also strong evidence that Gladney in many ways operates along lines that are in-authentic; rather, he is instead associated with ideas of the media-generated subject or the copy (Fig 1, PM 2). For instance, he is obsessed with acts of mass consumption (shopping at the mall is one of his favorite pastimes), he wears dark glasses he doesn’t need, he

pretends he has mastered the German language when he is a novice, he is impressed with Hitler's marketing strategies, and so forth.

This raises the question: how is it that a character with such evident traits of conformism and sham can appear to be an emblem of modernist authenticity? A clue is offered in the tendency remarked by Nel, that DeLillo writes with an oppositional impulse (in Duvall, 2008, p 17). My suggestion is that DeLillo manages to both present and critique modernist authenticity, just as he presents and critiques a range of modernist and postmodern properties and tropes in this work.

Drawing on one of Trilling's definitions of authenticity, the character's adherence to a singular passion or idea, Gladney is authentically afraid of death, and he authentically prioritises the act of delving into his individual consciousness. Most significantly, he is authentically committed to mounting a search for transcendent meaning, which dominates the novel thematically and structurally. Gladney's particular combination of theme and language sees him represented as tightly associated with the modernist tradition from the outset of the novel. However, these details in themselves are not enough to sustain the idea that Gladney is consistently aligned to modernist authenticity.

This sense of Gladney's authenticity is created, in part, through the use of language in the novel. From the opening page, the reader associates the vitality of the prose with Gladney as a perceiving subject: a character whose view of the world is finely honed. It is well-documented that when asked about his influences, DeLillo replies that these were Joyce and Faulkner, rather than postmodern writers. He says that "it was through Joyce that I learned to see something in language that carried a radiance, something that made me feel the beauty and fervor of words, the sense that a word has a life and a history" (interview by Adam Begley, 1993)

One sees his affiliation with Joyce, not only in the focus on the attention paid to the extraordinary in the everyday, but in the refined way in which these impressions are recorded. As has been noted by Nel, Bonca, Cowart and others, the poetic language in *White Noise* and the ideas embedded in the themes about language itself, are tightly bound to modernism. The perceptions in the text are Gladney's perceptions, but the richness and poetics of the language reveals DeLillo's style of writing, which imbues the minutiae of that which he describes with a sense of vibrancy and radiance, reminiscent of high modernism. The opening line of the novel reads: "The station

wagons arrived at noon, a long shining line that coursed through the west campus” (*WN*, p 3). One phrase which resonates with a modernist sensibility is “the long shining line”, an image of epiphanic radiance and light. The word “coursed” that follows, adds the additional sense of a powerful surging-forth, as if the line of vehicles were a charged, living force. The language associated with Gladney’s consciousness is frequently charged in this vein, or is nuanced with a form of wry self-deprecating irony; thus, the language resonates with a modernist sensibility throughout.

However, on scrutiny, Gladney’s consciousness, in every scene in the novel, is not that of an original thinker or a character whose consciousness, in Perloff’s terms, separates him from the herd. In fact, the foundation of Gladney’s authenticity, on this score, is challenged on many levels by the fact that his thoughts are strongly determined by media culture’s stereotypes and styles of typification. Ultimately, for each of the ways in which Gladney’s character evokes ideas of authenticity, the counter idea of a simulated, non-original subjectivity is offered within his characterisation. To prioritise Gladney’s authentic over his inauthentic attributes is to overlook the tension that is built into the text, as the two paradigms are posed as competing in Gladney’s character.

My argument not only suggests that Gladney is divided between modernist and postmodernist, but that, in terms of the plot, he manoeuvres for advantage in relation to these two cultural paradigms. As Wilcox notes, in terms of his alignment with modernism he is intent on “preserving a sense of authentic and coherent selfhood by engaging in the rituals of family life”. However, in the following passage, what at first appears as Gladney operating as an authentic modernist in relation to his role as patriarch in family life, is undercut by some countering postmodern ideas and associations, some within this scene itself and some within other scenes in the novel.

For example, Gladney and his son Heinrich are in a car, as it rains outside. The conversation superficially shows Gladney offering sensible paternal guidance on the subject of trusting one’s sensory perceptions above the voices of external authority, such as the media:

“It’s going to rain tonight.” [Heinrich said]

“It’s raining now,” I said [Gladney].

“The radio said tonight.”

I drove him to school in his first day back after a sore throat and fever. A woman in a yellow slicker held up traffic to let some children cross. I pictured her in a soup commercial

taking off her oilskin hat as she entered the cheerful kitchen where her husband stood over a pot of smoky lobster bisque, a smallish man with six weeks to live.

...

“Look at the windshield,” I said. “Is that rain or isn’t it?”

“I’m only telling you what they said.”

“Just because it’s on the radio doesn’t mean we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses.”

“Our senses? Our senses are wrong a lot more often than they’re right. This has been proven in the laboratory...” (*WN*, pp 22-23)

Gladney’s advice to his son prioritises notions of the individual as authority and takes prominence over mainstream media versions of actuality. He is aligned to modernist notions of authentic selfhood, and poses an argument that upholds the idea that the subject has access to truth (Fig. 1, M 4), and yet his advice seems ineffectual and is actually contradicted by Heinrich.

There is also the question of Gladney’s authenticity in this stance. Just ten pages prior to this, as the Most Photographed Barn in America scene (*WN*, p 12-13) unfolds, Gladney agrees, quietly, but without question, to an idea that Siskind articulates, about acknowledging the importance of prioritizing the copy of a thing, or a mediated version of it, over the original.

Yet here, Gladney, in the presence of his son, aligns with the contrary modernist idea that the individual can access truth by drawing on the self as a resource, in the face of conflicting mediated information. From their view through the windscreen they can see it is raining, so Gladney’s modernist position, in this case, assists him, at least in terms of facts, to win the argument. This is no small point, as throughout the novel, it slowly becomes apparent that Gladney alters his views in relation to modernist and postmodern standpoints, for expediency’s sake. This plays out thematically, with the result that Gladney is depicted as altering his subject positions to fit with ideas about what constitutes the modernist subject in one instance, and what characterises it in relation to postmodernism in the next. He is a character who in this scene and other scenes, “maneuvers for advantage” towards modernism as a cultural order in order to obtain either authority, status or some other form of power in a given situation.

Furthermore, while Gladney says he wants Heinrich to be suspicious of the media as an authority, his own thought processes within this same scene reveal that his own thinking is dominated by mainstream media values. As noted by Frow, when Gladney

sees the woman in the yellow slicker cross the road his mind codifies his perception as if she were an actor in a television soup commercial (1990, p 417). This undermines his verbal articulation of alignment with modernist authenticity, and the transcendent subject. In other words, Gladney's stance as authentic modernist is undercut by the reality that he is in fact, a subject who instead evokes notions of the copy, by drawing in his thinking on media-generated clichés (Fig 1, PM 3). This undermining of Gladney's modernist authenticity, intermittent in the novel, is explored further in Chapter Five.

Gladney and the Search for Transcendent Meaning

Gladney's search for meaning, which draws on the key canonical modernist property of the subject as transcendent (Fig 1, M 3), is central to the novel. Gladney's search for meaning, like that of Dedalus, is transcendent in impulse, as he seeks meaning from the world around him, which he attempts to process for its truth component. As Gladney's tendency is to seek answers in the form of external 'signs' in the world around him, his search fits the transcendent, rather than the immanent model. Gladney's search for meaning is of a familiar tenor for the reader versed in literary works that draw on the modernist trope of the visionary moment.

Both Dedalus and Gladney seek meaning from their urban environments, scour the material of external to daily life for meaning, for signs and messages in the language of the quotidian that can lift them into a higher state of awareness. Gladney's search for transcendent meaning draws on modernist tropes in the following ways: first, it is a search that isolates him from others, as he heroically embarks upon a private quest. Second, it is a search that aims to find the underlying truth hidden beneath the surface of things. It is a spiritually charged search, like that of Dedalus: Gladney's language evokes religiosity, a sense that his journey for truth is conducted in the wake of the Catholic religion in particular. His use of three questions flung into the universe evokes the Christian symbolism of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

However, despite the many ways in which Gladney's search evokes the transformative epiphanies characteristic of the search for meaning by Dedalus in *Portrait*, the culminating moments in Gladney's search for transcendent meaning are neither transformative nor modernist in tenor. Rather, these passages in *White Noise*

reveal how Gladney oscillates between modernism and postmodernism. Gladney is not depicted as having epiphanies in the modernist sense of the term, but rather has experiences that appear in part to invoke the modernist epiphany at the same time as the narrative enters contrary postmodern terrain. I refer to this ambiguity in calling Gladney's experience at such moments the epiphomercial. A comparative study of the epiphany of Dedalus and the epiphomercial of Gladney is conducted in Chapter Five.

In summary, this chapter has explored Gladney's complex relationship to notions of the canonical modernist subject. It has established that while Gladney's character appears aligned to modernist properties of singular consciousness, authenticity and transcendence, simultaneously his is cast as a strategist who draws on modernist positions inconsistently and expediently in "maneuvering for advantage" in a changing cultural order. To expand on this first point, this chapter has explored the ways in which Gladney is aligned to the modernist property of singular consciousness, represented most dramatically in the nature of his modernist sensibility's heightened fear of death.

Further, notions of modernist authenticity are also evoked through the style of interiority that represents Gladney's thoughts and perceptions, as well as the language in the novel overall, which expresses a poetics of the minutiae of ordinary life that is reminiscent of canonical modernism. Gladney's consistent desire to mount a search for transcendent meaning by scouring the details of his daily life produces a link to the modernist text structured along the theme of the visionary moment.

Furthermore, in analysis of the scene in which media weather forecasts are discussed by Gladney and Heinrich, Gladney argues for the importance of the singular subject and for the senses as sources of truth. However, in the broader context of the novel, Gladney only aligns with this position for expediency's sake and even as he offers the *theory* of modernist self-reliance to his son, his subject position in the text reveals that as a subject he does not uphold a modernist stance, as postmodern elements undermine him at an unconscious level.

Ultimately, while drawing on these modernist elements, *White Noise* does not present Gladney as a consistently represented modernist subject; a range of postmodern pressures challenges each modernist property in turn, as is explored in subsequent chapters. The next chapter demonstrates this argument in a comparison of

Gladney with Dedalus from *Portrait* in relation to modernist notions of the subject as transcendent.

Chapter Four

From Epiphany to Epiphomercial: a Comparative Study of Gladney and Dedalus

In this chapter I investigate Gladney's characterisation by comparing it with that of Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait*, specifically in relation to the transcendent subject of modernism (Fig 1, M 3). I establish that in *White Noise* Gladney embarks on a search for transcendent meaning that is analogous to Dedalus's search in *Portrait*. Yet, at the culmination of Gladney's search, his character dramatically diverges from classical modernist properties.

This argument requires some establishing background, and is then furthered in textual analysis of the scene in *White Noise* that I call Steffie's Utterance, a scene that hinges on some words Gladney's daughter utters in her sleep. Gladney's search for transcendent meaning is compared to that of Dedalus, whose modernist search culminates in a visionary moment or epiphany. I elaborate on what constitutes a Joycean epiphany and highlight the attributes that align it specifically to modernism, before studying the ways in which Gladney's character operates in relation to his search for meaning, and specifically in relation to the impact of postmodern theories on him. This involves the seductions of the language and messages derived from consumerism, advertising and the mass media. In contrast to some arguments that consider Gladney a modernist character (Nel, in Duvall 2008, Bonca 1996), I explore the proposition that Gladney cannot be read as experiencing an epiphany in the same way as a modernist character. Rather, while the narrative and language evokes strong associations and elements of epiphany, ultimately Gladney is representing the alternation between modernism and postmodernism, vacillating from one position to the other within the one scene.

In terms of the search for transcendent meaning, a comparison of the characterisation of Dedalus and Gladney offers some central similarities: they seek meaning from their urban surrounds, scouring the minutiae of daily life for transcendent meaning, which they believe resides beneath the surface of appearances,

or within the sounds they hear. Yet, while Dedalus undertakes a process of epiphany gathering and transmutation, Gladney does not in the same way engage in the act of transmutation, so that his search for meaning does not climax in the experience of epiphanies in the modernist way. Rather, while his depiction echoes the epiphany process in structure and impetus, at crucial points the modernist flavour is undercut by postmodern pressures on his access to meaning.

Rather than addressing the vast body of Joyce scholarship, including what is called the ‘epiphany debate’ associated with the journal *PMLA*, I attempt to base my argument primarily on my reading of *Portrait*, and in consideration of the earlier version of this novel, *Stephen Hero*. I consider, as does Richard Ellmann (1982, p 83), that *Stephen Hero* (published posthumously in 1944) was a draft work that informed *Portrait* (1992). Many scholars have studied the relationship between Joyce’s Epiphanies, the prose vignettes he wrote in diaries and notebooks from observing his own daily life, and his works of fiction. As demonstrated by Robert Scholes and Richard Kain in *The Workshop of Daedalus* (1965), epiphany gathering was contributory to the planning of *Portrait*. Their centrality to the novel helps validate my argument that Joyce represents Dedalus as a serious artist-to-be. For the purposes of this research, I focus exclusively however on Joyce’s *aesthetic concept* of epiphany, rather than on the actual published Epiphanies that he gleaned in the years 1902-04.¹³

The term epiphany was familiar to Joyce from Catholic tradition in relation to Feast Day. Its etymology is in the Greek, *epipháneia*: “manifestation of a supernatural being ..., appearance of a divinity (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*). The Feast of the Epiphany commemorates “the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi or the three wise men who brought gifts to the infant Jesus” (*Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins*). Joyce’s usage altered the term’s meaning in applying the religious aspect of the epiphany metaphorically:

The epiphany did not mean for Joyce the manifestation of godhead, the showing forth of Christ to the Magi, although that is a useful metaphor for what he had in mind. (Ellmann, 1982, p 83).

¹³ For further explorations on the epiphany and its relation to the broader term ‘visionary moment’ in literature see Morris Beja, 1971, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and also Paul Maltby, 2002, *The Visionary Moment, a Postmodern Critique*, State University of New York Press, Albany..

Ellmann says that for Joyce the artist “was charged with such revelations” (p 83). This highlights the active role of the apprehender in the Joycean epiphany.

The term epiphany as Joyce used it, operated as a theory and practice of transformation. In *Stephen Hero*, Daedalus¹⁴ mentions that he is thinking of collating some of these vignettes into a book of epiphanies (*SH*, pp 210-213). In this draft novel, epiphany is not only the name of some of Daedalus’s actual writings, but is also part of the aesthetic theory he is developing. The idea of epiphany is of the revelatory moment when the “whatness of a thing” is observed and synthesised by the beholder. It is not merely the articulated theory, but also the specific nature of the observer involved, that is important in the concept of the Joycean epiphany.

Given its *Bildungsroman* genre, a genre which depicts one person’s formative years or spiritual education German, from *Bildung* ‘education’ + *Roman* ‘a novel’ (*OED*), *Portrait* portrays the journey from Dedalus’s birth to the point he leaves his country of origin to mark his commitment becoming an artist-poet working in isolation. This extends to the pivotal moment where he is to leave his country of origin. It can be considered easily, by comparing the two works, that the epiphany concept overtly articulated in *Stephen Hero* operates throughout *Portrait* to form the core structure of the novel. The narrative follows Dedalus as he develops his artistic practice of epiphany gathering and transformation, which leads him to writing his first works as a poet. Dedalus explains this active process of gathering, recording and transforming epiphanies in spiritual and transcendent terms: he is “a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life” (*P*, p 240). This not only clarifies that his aim is to make ‘radiant’ art from the base material of daily life, but highlights the role of the special observer, the artist as a god-like figure with great powers of perception and creative transformation.

My analysis aligns with the viewpoint that Joyce treats the idea of the emerging artist seriously, even when Dedalus is portrayed with evident flaws and gentle irony. As John Paul Riquelme notes, Dedalus moves “tentatively towards the production of original writing” (in Attridge, 1990, p 104). In other words, Joyce depicts Dedalus as having enough access to originality to evoke the idea that he is authentic (Fig 1, M 2), as well as self-creating (Fig 1, M 1) and transcendent (Fig 1,

¹⁴ I use the Greek ‘ae’ in Stephen’s surname when referring to the character Stephen in *Stephen Hero* as this is the spelling Joyce uses in this work.

3); thus, he is ultimately able to achieve some success in his early experimentations with poetry.

The Joycean epiphany, as defined in *Stephen Hero* and applied in *Portrait*, involves a transformative process by which the beholder is discerning and can perceive an underlying truth in ordinary things. After drawing on Aquinas' theory about apprehending the beauty of an object, Daedalus says:

This is the moment I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is one integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point..., we recognise that it is that thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps out to us from the vestments of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany (*SH*, p 218).

It is the "soul of the commonest object" that makes itself clear to the beholder. Thus, the beholder is able to discern the inherent 'essence' of the object, no matter how ordinary it is. That "thing" which the beholder perceives from life, reveals its "whatness", its "soul", as if it leaps out from behind its mask or outer covering. This idea suggests that the object possesses an intrinsic truth, and that this can be comprehended by the observer. While in this definition which appears during the discussion of Aquinas's aesthetics and the terms *claritas*, *quidditas* and the "whatness of a thing" from *Stephen Hero*, the object becomes transformed or epiphanised. For instance, in *Stephen Hero*, during a walk with Cranly he discusses a clock they see in terms of not yet being epiphanised (*SH*, p 218). Where a conversation about Aquinas appears in *Portrait* drawing on the same terms *claritas* and *quidditas* appears (p 231), firstly the term epiphany is not used directly, but the concept is related. The beholder, Dedalus himself, becomes transformed (into an emerging artist) by the encounter, and also transforms the material-from-life he obtains into art in the form of poetry. The key point in both *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait* is that the essence of the thing from life that prompts the epiphany process reveals itself fully to the beholder due to the special artistic gaze, and ability in the apprehender to transform the base material from life into art. This draws on the first three points in the properties of the modernist subject, firstly that the subject has a singular human consciousness, (M 1, M 2.). Furthermore, the material that can elicit

an epiphany can include a mere phrase, a sound, a vision, a snippet of everyday lived experience:

By an epiphany he [Stephen Daedalus] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech, or of gesture or in a memorable phrase of the mind itself. He believed it was the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments (*SH*, p 211-213).

This further emphasizes the special attributes of the apprehending subject. Note that specifically the “man of letters” is required to discover and transform the substance of life through the epiphany process.

Richard Ellmann suggests that *Stephen Hero* can be seen as an aesthetic manifesto to assist the comprehension of *Portrait* (Ellmann, 1982, p 83). Manifesto, however, is too literal a term. Rather, the ideas introduced in *Stephen Hero* in relation to the ‘epiphany’ are similar to those ideas Dedalus discusses in *Portrait* on the subject of beauty, as Florence Walzl (1965) acknowledges. In *Portrait*, Dedalus draws on Aquinas’s three terms: wholeness, harmony and radiance (*P*, p. 231). Dedalus says: “You see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing. The radiance of which he [Aquinas] speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing. The supreme quality is felt by the artist ...” (*P*, p 231). Common to both novels is the understanding that it is the artist’s role to ascertain both truth and beauty, and to synthesize these from the base components of raw life. Therefore, when it comes to determining truth, both of a spiritual and aesthetic nature, much depends on the transcendent subject’s discernment and visionary abilities (Fig 1, M 3). As Jerri Johnson points out, one of the differences between the two texts is that “unlike *Stephen Hero*, *Portrait* shows Stephen compressing, selecting the salient detail” (2000, p xiv) from the raw material of life. Dedalus is represented as someone who makes refined aesthetic choices in selecting his epiphanies.

When gathering epiphanies, Dedalus experiences quasi-religious exalted states when he comes into contact with fragments from daily life: smatterings of speech, images from the often gritty city streets or the natural world. Dedalus demonstrates the role of the artist as visionary and unique creator through scenes in which he is transported into a transcendent state by apparently mundane moments: he hears the sound of a clock ticking (*P*, p 143), sees a girl standing stork-like in water (*P*, p 185), sees the word *Foetus* carved in a school desk. Significantly, it is his role of collecting

epiphanies, and one such epiphanic experience itself, that brings Dedalus closer to an understanding of his future role as an artist. In *Portrait*, such epiphanic experiences bring insight and the impetus to use this material to create art.

After coming across some friends swimming, Dedalus is triggered by hearing his name spoken in their playful Greek wordplay (*P*, p 183-85). He has a vision, an apparition of his name-sake Daedalus, father of Icarus, climbing the air. “Now at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean?”

Dedalus recognises his vision as symbolic “of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable impressionable being?” (*P*, p 193). So it follows that his epiphany here becomes part of the narrative movement towards his becoming an artist and separating from his culture. In response to the question he asks himself, of what did this vision mean, he experiences a state of radiance:

His heart trembled; his breath came faster and a wild spirit passed over his limbs as though he were soaring sunward. His heart trembled in an ecstasy of fear and his soul was in flight. His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he knew was purified in a breath and delivered of incertitude and made radiant and commingled with the element of the spirit. An ecstasy of flight made radiant his eyes and wild his breath and tremulous and wild and radiant his windswept limbs (*P*, p 183).

Joyce uses the word “radiance” three times in this passage, at once overstating Dedalus’s transcendent moment in gentle mockery, but also underlining the profundity of his experience. I agree with Goldberg (1961, p 32) and Sharpless (in W.M. Shutte, 1968) that Dedalus is depicted as simultaneously wise and foolish. While the above-quoted passage may give the reader the sense that Dedalus is filled with over-imaginative self regard, this radiant experience nevertheless is transformative and central to his artistic development.

His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her graveclothes. “Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer [Daedalus] whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable. Imperishable (*P*, 184).

The epiphany transforms Dedalus in this and in other scenes throughout the novel. Another epiphany provokes him to write a full villanelle (*P*, pp 235-236). The long narrative sequence in which the reader follows the way in which Stephen’s epiphany is

experienced, then transformed in mind into an actual poem on the page, is evidence that his practice of epiphany works as an artistic tool. The poem itself is not centrally important, as it is a symbolic expression of the artist's development, more than literal proof of his capacity as poet.

Dedalus is inspired by the work of European writers like Ibsen, which sets himself apart from his Irish community and establishes him as apart from the herd in a distinctly modernist sense (Fig 1, M. 5). He writes and walks, in the main, alone, and creates theories on aesthetics that is out of step with the interests of his peers. He continues to adhere to this artist-as-loner role despite the threats of social exclusion and poverty and instead will rely on "silence, exile and cunning" (*P*, 1992, p 269).

In comparison, Gladney may speak to himself as if he is alone, but he is firmly situated within the marriage institution as the patriarchal head of a large blended family, and in the university as a senior staffer. In his spare time, Gladney shops among the throng and uncritically engages in mass consumption (Fig 1, PM. 5). He may be cunning, but he does not believe in nor adopt strategies of either exile or silence. He may speak and think as if he feels alone, but he is not depicted as separate in any significant way from society. In *White Noise* it is suggested that the impulse to think individually, or critically of his broader culture is silenced, or dulled, by the babble from mainstream media sources that creates his environment—the 'white noise' of the novel's title. Gladney does not rely on a self-created unique identity (Fig 1, M 1), as does Dedalus as artist, but forges one, based on the appropriation of prior representation, in aligning himself to Hitler's media-created image (Fig 1, PM 2 and 3). Crucially, Gladney does not share Dedalus's creative, transformative relationship to the language he inherits; quite the contrary, as I demonstrate in this chapter.

Dedalus chooses a solitary life, distanced from his peers, and ends by preparing to leave his country. "He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or learn the wisdom of others himself by wandering among the snares of the world" (*P*, p 175). It is not merely physical distance that he creates, but also a separate mode of thinking. Another character observes: "He's [Dedalus is] the only man I see in this institution that has an individual mind" (Fig 1, *P*, p 217). He sets himself apart from those immersed in nationalistic and religious concerns. "To merge his life in the common tide of other lives was harder for him than any fasting or prayer..." (*P*, p 164). Dedalus is committed to separating from his culture and in expressing this fact,

as noted above, he draws on the language of strategic engagement in proclaiming that he will take up arms and draw on “silence, exile and cunning” to defend his individual stance:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and was wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, cunning (*P*, p 269).

Leaving Ireland at the end of the novel, he separates physically from those he knows. Instead of becoming a priest, he thus becomes a “priest of the eternal imagination” (*P*, p 240). As noted by Harkness, both artist and priest work through words and forms: “the artist through words and literary conventions, the priest through liturgy and ritual” (1984, p 34). Dedalus situates himself as an artist who “like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork ... paring his fingernails” (*P*, p 233). He casts himself in a detached role, as if in the place of the God he has rejected, as a remote observer of others. Yet, ultimately it is his ability to discriminate, to make aesthetic selections from the base material from life, and his critique of the language he inherits, that most significantly separates him from others. His intention is to work as an artist, which means to transform the stuff of life into art, to record and rework the known. In contrast, Gladney is depicted as one of the herd (Fig 1, PM. 5), a character who, while he seeks a form of Truth from the world, is motivated to do so to assuage his fear of death. Clearly, his motive is pragmatic, and the way the theme plays out lessens his modernist traits into a state of diminished, compromised modernism. He does not engage in the transformative process that the ‘epiphany’ process requires.

In contrast to Dedalus, who seeks to “fly by the nets” of society (*P*, p 220), Gladney repeatedly shops alongside other consumers at the mall (Fig 1, PM 4). Whether there is an underlying truth beneath the surfaces of things in Gladney’s world is not made clear in *White Noise*. What is clear however is that Gladney does not have the discerning eye, the sensitive sensibility required for a visionary role. Rather, he is portrayed as stupefied by language and stupefied by the commercial drive that the language he is attracted to, promotes.

Gladney actively makes sure that several sources of mainstream media are available in his vicinity at any given time. His practice mirrors the Baudrillardian

warning that the contemporary individual is bombarded by commercial media and cannot perceive reality outside of its influence. “We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning” proclaims Baudrillard (1994, p 79). Yet, while Baudrillard views the individual’s perception as being at the mercy of the conditioning of mainstream media, *White Noise* does not deal directly with the question whether Gladney has agency to perceive ‘unmediated reality’ or, indeed, if there is such a thing at all. Gladney is simply presented as inundated with consumer culture, and its media machine, to the extent that its jingles and brand names infiltrate his consciousness (see Chapter Four).

Further, despite being a university professor, Gladney is not represented as reading academic texts. Apart from *Mein Kampf*, the only sources of information with which he is represented as engaging are from commercial media. The question is thus raised, but not answered: if Gladney were a person, rather than a character in a novel about the 80s, would he have sufficient agency to turn off the TV? DeLillo, unlike Baudrillard, leaves this matter open-ended. In the next section I present an investigation of how Gladney’s consciousness differs from Dedalus’s in specifically postmodern ways, in relation to his search for transcendent meaning.

Gladney and Language

While this chapter compares Gladney and Dedalus in respect of the theme of transcendent meaning, this necessarily raises the issue of the complexity of the language in relation to the tussle between modern and postmodern influences. David Cowart (2002), looking at the use of language and at language as a theme in *White Noise*, alerts the reader to the conventions associated with both postmodernism and modernism. Cowart considers that Gladney is depicted as not experiencing genuine transcendence, further, the fear of death, or *timor mortis*, is central to the novel (Cowart, 2002, p 74). Importantly, as Cowart notes, despite Gladney and Babette’s death fear, they do not turn to religion, and considers the “triadic” advertising slogans ... make all the more poignant the desuetude of that once-ultimate trinity, the three-personed God” (Cowart, 2002, p 78). This would appear to be indicative of a postmodern distrust of “grands récits”.

A study by Arthur Saltzman (1998) offers a postmodern-oriented reading in the main, positioning Gladney as a fully socially-constructed character, through comments such as “no meditation [by Gladney] escapes mediation” and “satori is scripted according to the tawdriest common denominator, as Jack witnesses through his daughter Steffie’s talking in her sleep” (p 484). In respect of Gladney’s language however Saltzman, analyses DeLillo’s own access to original utterances and ‘radiant’ word usage in casting DeLillo (but not Gladney) in modernist terms. As Osteen notes, Saltzman considers that *White Noise* represents Gladney as groping for something luminous within the quotidian, the “radiance in dailiness” evoking Dedalus’s modernist-hero position in *Portrait*.

When one compares Gladney’s relationship to language to that of Dedalus, it is hard to consider it ‘modernist’ in a similar way. For Dedalus rejects the dialects of his peers, the language of nationalism and politics, and in still other ways adopts a selective approach to the language of his culture. He spends time considering how language operates, how it relates to the actual world, how he wants to draw on it to create a form of art suffused with a sense of transcendence—the same sense he obtains personally in his epiphanic moments. He draws on the language in an attempt to rethink and rework it and rejects the English of his country’s cultural oppressors equally to the language of nationalism he encounters among his politicized peers. Gladney however, is content to absorb wholesale the language of his broader culture.

Returning to a concept introduced earlier, Gladney’s thoughts are often presented in a triplet of questions addressed to a source of knowledge that Gladney suspects is linked to some divine agency, but currently unattainable. For example: “Who decides these things? What is out there? Who are you?” (*WN*, p 103). As the novel progresses, Siskind’s speeches affect the content of these three-pronged thoughts. Siskind tells Gladney that the supermarket “recharges us spiritually, it prepares us, it’s a gateway or pathway” between life and death. Unlike the Tibetans who, he says, have a good relationship to the art of dying, here in the west, “we don’t die, we shop. But the difference is less marked than you think” (*WN*, p 38). Siskind adds that the supermarket’s brightly packaged products can provide spiritual relief from the difficult transit from life to death. Obsessed with ways to circumvent dying, Gladney absorbs these ideas wholesale. Siskind says:

Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles, the slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras. ‘*Coke is it, Coke is life, Coke is it.*’ The medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently and get past our irritation, weariness and disgust (WN, p 51).

Gladney’s angst-ridden triplets of questions about death mirror Siskind’s ideas about using the messages of consumerism in the place of the rituals of religion, like prayers or mantras. Siskind’s speeches are mirrored in Gladney’s actions and thinking. Siskind thus introduces the theory in support of what increasingly becomes Gladney’s use of consumer names as a source of pseudo-spiritual comfort to aid his survival.

At first, sets of three brand names like “Tergron, Demorex, Selsun Blue” (WN, p 289) appear when Gladney is in the supermarket, and in direct quote marks. It is as if he sees products and then names them. On page 52, however, three product brand names appear for the first time without quotation marks: “Dacron, Orlon, Lycra Spandex” (WN, p 52); this marks a development in the narrative. It follows that the appearance of brand names without quotes demonstrate Gladney’s increasing incorporation of the language of ‘brand-chants’ into his own consciousness. Cowart (2002) notes that the structure of these chants evokes “the Son, the Father and Holy Ghost” and Olster remarks that Gladney “fingers them [the brand names] like rosary beads” (in Duvall 2008, p 87). Gladney’s early quest for answers from the universe is thus depicted as being impacted on by his uncritical embrace of consumerism and by his willingness to accept the language of consumer culture.

While in Siskind’s pro-mainstream media stance works as a consciously theoretical postmodern position, Gladney is portrayed as unconsciously drawing on product names as a survival reflex. For instance, during the Gladney family’s evacuation from Blacksmith, due to the Airborne Toxic Event, three phrases suddenly appear on the page, on a separate line: “Kyrton, Rust-Oleum, Red Devil” (WN, p 159). DeLillo thus seeds the idea that Gladney, when scared, draws uncritically and desperately on brand chants for solace in a quasi-religious reflex. It is not the way he draws on these words from the mainstream commercial culture that aligns him with postmodernism so much as the fact that he absorbs these words within himself uncritically. In contrast, while Dedalus collects from life scraps of language that are

often vulgar, he does not absorb what he finds with an uncritical sensibility. He reworks them, using firstly his refined sensibility and skills of apprehension, and secondly his transformative artistic sensibility, so as to create works of art from the material of life.

Gladney's Epiphomercial

Many of those critics who present Gladney as an example of a modernist or romantic creation consider that the scene involving Gladney's daughter talking in her sleep, Steffie's Utterance, is an example of a modernist epiphany experienced by Gladney. Nel for example says:

DeLillo also emphasises the epiphany, that classic modernist feature. In the famous 'tundish' conversation from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Stephen Dedalus's recognition of the Irish word for "funnel" sparks an awareness of how his language separates him from the English. In this scene, as in DeLillo's novel, language is at the root of a character's epiphany (in Duvall 2008, p 23).

In Nel's view language is, for DeLillo, also at the root of Gladney's search for meaning and this is also an epiphany. It may be concluded however from a closer look at modernist characters that they do not merely search for meaning but are also somewhat analogous to Shelley's representation of the poet, in acting as individual legislators of meaning.¹⁵

The mandatorily transformative role of the epiphany is not evident in *White Noise*, and this problem is not addressed by Nel. It is not sufficient merely to note that: "most of the [Steffie's Utterance] passage—including its ending—seems to take seriously the idea of transcendence" (Nel, in Duvall 2008, p 23). Gladney's reaction to Steffie's Utterance does evoke the idea of transcendence and implicitly evokes the Joycean epiphany, but does not actually represent the epiphanic experience in its entirety, according to Joyce's definition of this concept. In the next section I conduct textual analysis of the Steffie's Utterance passage to demonstrate this point.

In *White Noise* the Steffie's Utterance scene takes place right after Gladney has had a direct encounter with the Airborne Toxic Event, the life-threatening

¹⁵ "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Shelley, 1821).

chemical entity. Gladney's fear for his longevity is at a height, and he is staying in emergency accommodation. At the shelter, Gladney sits beside his children as they sleep. As he watches the "tumble of heads and dangled limbs" he reports that:

[a] feeling of desperate piety swept over me. It was cosmic in nature, full of yearning and reaching ... These sleeping children were like figures in an ad for Rosicrucians, drawing a powerful beam of light from somewhere off the page (*WN*, p 154).

Here, the heightened quasi-religious language, which evokes notions of humanist spiritual enlightenment, contrasts with the clichéd image of "the powerful beam of light somewhere off the page", suggesting a print advertisement. Therefore, the apparently humanist experience is represented as if through the lens of a simulated order. This framing effect sets the tone for the rest of the scene. Thematically, Gladney fears he has been imprinted by death through his brush with the chemical 'cloud'. He admits that he will turn to any source to find signs of meaning. His motive therefore in seeking meaning is self-serving, not idealistic:

Steffie turned slightly, then muttered something in her sleep. It seemed important that I know what it was. In my current state, bearing the death impression of the Nyodene cloud, *I was ready to search anywhere for signs and hints*, intimations of odd comfort (*WN*, p 154, my italics).

Unlike Dedalus, and other canonical modernist characters, Gladney does not search for meaning in the name of truth, aesthetics or other lofty notions; rather, it appears to be central to the attempt to ensure his longevity in the face of a threat to his life. It is truth as self-preservation that he seeks, here and throughout the novel. After hearing his daughter mutter in her sleep he reports:

I pull my chair closer. Her face in pouchy sleep might have been a structure designed solely to protect the eyes ... I sat there watching her. Moments later she spoke again. Distinct syllables this time, not some dreamy murmur—but a language not quite of this world (*WN*, p 154).

Gladney's description of his daughter's murmurings as "a language not quite of this world" establishes an irony that only fully develops a few sentences later, when the reader realises that the language is that of the automotive industry, a word concoction invented by the Japanese for marketing purposes. Gladney then says: "I struggled to understand. I was convinced she was saying something, fitting together units of stable meaning. I watched her face, waited. Ten minutes passed" (*WN*, p 155). The sense that

he is about to be granted what the reader may expect to be a profound revelatory moment, is thus built up but then swiftly dashed:

She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.
Toyota Celica (WN, 155)

That “Toyota Celica” refers to a car model is a somewhat indigestible fact over which Gladney ponders in the following passage: “But how could this be? A simple brand-name, an ordinary car. How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child’s restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence?” (WN, 155).

Gladney cannot consciously understand why the name of a car affects him so profoundly; yet he *is* depicted as being profoundly moved by these words, an evocation of the brand chant triads from former scenes. Some critics argue that whether the car name is meaningful to Gladney as an utterance in itself not relevant. What is clearly significant is that for Gladney, such consumerist language can operate like “chants or mantras” (WN, p 51) in assuaging his knowing fear of death. Unlike Dedalus, Gladney is in this sense one of the herd, an uncritical consumer happy to absorb the language he inherits in whatever packaging it comes. In short, while the Joycean epiphany produces an individual, privileged revelation of meaning, Gladney’s equivalent is mere consumption rather than transcendent production.

It would be over-simplifying this scene however to posit that Gladney’s modernist subject is wholly replaced by postmodern impulses. Upon hearing Steffie’s Utterance Gladney does set about analysing his own response. He concludes that he is moved into other planes of experience, and yet there is the sense of a contrary movement wherein his postmodernism is itself being re-absorbed by the modernist sensibility he still possesses, in a looping form of humour in which modernist and postmodernist are played off against one another: modernist gentle irony gives way to the higher register of self-reflexive postmodern irony, then back again, with these two levels of cultural sensibility creating a tension as they attempt to cancel each other out.

A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform. It made me feel that something hovered. But how could this be? A simple brand-

name, an ordinary car. How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence. She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida ...(*WN*, 155).

In the aftermath of hearing the words "Toyota Celica" Gladney becomes aware that he feels *both* uplifted and transported spiritually by these words, and at the same time is astounded by the way they have come into his awareness, due to the fact Steffie watches lots of television and is mimicking a commercial.

In this way DeLillo builds up a delicate balance between modernist and postmodernist attitudes and ironies, within the one scene. While Baudrillard in his work on simulacra (1983a) suggests the individual cannot tell the difference between actuality and that which the simulated order presents, Gladney, after recognising that his daughter utters the brand name of a car becomes aware that this is the language of consumer culture, before he accepts it *as if it were* a message from a mystical higher force.

Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe. *Whatever its source*, the utterance struck with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence (*WN*, p 155, *my italics*).

This acceptance of computer-generated language instead of ancient prayer, marks a shift away from the uncompromising modernist autonomous stance of Dedalus in relation to language. The words themselves, "Toyota Celica", referred to as "computer-generated language" do provide a sense of randomness, of words put together arbitrarily. Ultimately they are merely sounds, but sounds bent to the corporate ear in order to seduce consumers with their tantalizing promises. Gladney's brand chants are an attempt to fill the spiritual void that, it is implied, is left by the diminishment of the role of formal religion in secular western society.

Gladney is seemingly granted a moment of "splendid transcendence" in receiving the commercial phrase as if it were divine, while yet being conscious that it is language used as a mass marketing tool by his society. So that Gladney, rather than experiencing an epiphany in the Joycean sense, undergoes the ambivalent experience of the epiphomercial, a hybrid of modernist epiphany and postmodern conformism. Nominally the modernist hero protagonist, engaged in the search for transcendent

meaning from his daily life (M. 4) he is also, and simultaneously, a non-transcendent member of the herd (PM. 4 and PM 4) whose very consciousness is aligned with the values of the mainstream media and who accepts its packaging of language for commercial ends.

Nel argues that the irony evoked in the Steffie's Utterance scene must be put aside, in considering that the passage has a "sincere" tone and that this idea of transcendence should be taken seriously (in Duvall 2008, p 23). Yet this ignores the role and significance of the thematic seeding of Gladney's brand chants, and how such elements help to undermine the modernist sensibilities of such scenes in finely tuned blends of modernist (Fig 1, M 5) and postmodern irony (Fig 1, PM 6). As discussed in my literature review, Bonca has proposed that what provokes Gladney's so-called epiphany in Steffie's Utterance is not what is important; rather, any sort of human utterance has the potential for epiphanic radiance (1998, p 459). "Toyota Celica" may convey the arbitrary sense of computer generated language, a language that does not match up to the magical power that Gladney invests in it. In another sense however, this scene, and others like it in the novel, does highlight the mesmerizing power that consumer culture and advertising language can have over the subject. It is portrayed as having sufficient power to lure a subject from a position of modernist distance (Fig 1, M 4) into a mainstream role of postmodern conformity (Fig 1, PM 4).

David Cowart (2002) and Paul Maltby (1996) have studied of DeLillo's fascination with language and its power, Maltby noting that DeLillo's tendency to grapple with ideas of language in its fallen state, and Gladney's habit of out seeking children as a source of pure truth, are both aligned to the romantic tradition. While Maltby in his work on the visionary moment (2002) makes a statement including the words "a postmodern writer like DeLillo" (2002, p xx), yet like Wilcox this is mitigated by a range of contrary ideas in the course of his analysis, in particular of Steffie's Utterance in *White Noise*. In the essay, the Romantic Metaphysics of Don DeLillo (2002, pp 63-75), he says the tenor of this scene "is not parodic" and the reader is prompted to "listen in earnest". He states that Gladney is not to be considered in Wilcox's terms as a modernist displaced in a postmodern world, but that the utterance as a name has "mystical resonance and potency". Therefore, in this respect, Maltby aligns with a humanist reading of Gladney, in relation to the notion of the literary visionary moment, with Nel and Bonca. In Maltby's case he aligns the

language of the visionary moment in *White Noise* with romantic metaphysics (2002, p 119). This harks to earlier critic LeClair's comment that *White Noise* pressed beyond the ironic to notions of wonderment and mystery (1987).

Yet, as I argue here, Gladney's character is based on a layering of prioritised views from the romantic, the modernist and the postmodern, and these can be read simultaneously within his characterisation. Thus, the scene of Steffie's Utterance within the broader context of the novel is significant: Gladney is in a desperate state to survive threats to his life, and will do whatever it takes to do so, even embracing the commercial language of his culture. Unlike Dedalus and other modernist or romantic heroes, he does not separate himself from the herd but is one of the throng.

In this chapter, while considering how Gladney's character relates to the modernist theme of transcendent meaning, I have explored Joyce's definition of epiphany as exemplified in *Portrait* and defined in *Stephen Hero*. I have argued that Gladney is not depicted as having epiphanies in the same sense as Dedalus does; rather, his experience is of the hybrid epiphomercial. This is because in Joyce's terms, an epiphany rests on the protagonist as an individual self operating as a discerning participant in refining epiphanies from the raw material from the world. The process involves the ability to transform the dross material of life, including forms of language, into transcendent meaning, which in turn can be transformed into art. While Dedalus acts as artist-hero, Gladney experiences something like an epiphany, but is not cast as a modernist in any such terms. Ultimately he is motivated by a mercenary drive towards consumption, and consequently Gladney as subject traverses the conventional boundaries between the modernist and the postmodernist. Having examined Gladney's modernism comparatively, we now turn to exploring his Gladney's opportunistic tendencies towards postmodernism.

Chapter Five

Gladney's Manoeuvres Towards Postmodernism

In this chapter I explore the various ways in which Gladney is represented as a character who manoeuvres for advantage towards postmodernism, undercutting therefore the modernist subject. This operates primarily on a thematic level, but is also depicted on a textual level, that is through the adoption of techniques of postmodern appropriation, in the scene where Gladney makes an attempt on Mink's life. In order to assuage his fear of death, Gladney frequently turns to solutions from external sources, which often offer him seeming solutions in the guise of theories and practices associated with postmodernism and postmodernity. For instance, Gladney embraces consumerism in an attempt to assuage his fear of death. The fact that he is an academic and that postmodernism as a cultural force is influencing his professional world, is one of the ways in which the theory wars impel the narrative.

After discussing ways in which postmodern appropriation operates in the novel, as well as analysing scenes that evoke Baudrillard's notion of the "precession of simulacra", I conduct an analysis of the scene in which Gladney tries to murder Willie Mink. This scene, I argue, takes Gladney's characterisation into the postmodern realm, both thematically and textually. I start however with some broad points in relation to how Gladney's perception of himself as a subject shifts from modernist notions of the self as a singular unit, unique and operating in isolation, to a postmodern view in which the subject is considered as a less dramatically differentiated part of a mass.

As discussed in Chapter Three, one of the core ways in which Gladney operates as a modernist is that his consciousness is a singular consciousness, one that is preoccupied with its own mortality and survival, and also with mounting a search for transcendent meaning. At the point that the Airborne Toxic Event appears, there is a shift in sensibility, and also a shift from the singular subject's death-consciousness to the perception of death as an actual threat to group consciousness; a consequence of postmodernity. Gladney is forced to consider for the first time that his death is not an

individual affair, but perhaps one that threatens to merge his sense of himself as individual into a broader amorphous mass, replete with a new form of mass consciousness represented externally through new forms of media apparatus. Once the Airborne Toxic Event appears as an actual physical threat to whole townships, Gladney is confronted with having to rethink his sense of individuality, and having to consider himself one of ‘the herd’:

These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters. People in low-lying areas get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornadoes. I'm a college professor. Did you ever hear of a TV professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? (WN, p 114).

Not only does his identity merge with the mass but the ironic tone shifts from individual self mockery (Fig 1, M 5), to the style of de-centering irony associated with postmodernism (Fig 1, PM 5).

Similarly central to the plot is the introduction of Gladney's new colleague and friend Siskind, who operates as a mouthpiece for the postmodern theories of Baudrillard that are offered as a form of pseudo evangelism to enlighten Gladney's world view. The way that mainstream television and other media sources have infiltrated Gladney's world, both overtly and at the level of his unconscious thoughts, is further explored in this section as another way in which Gladney's character aligns to postmodernism. In order to consider the complexities involved in the way DeLillo evokes Baudrillard, and therewith postmodern theory, I return to some points Wilcox has made about the strong influence Baudrillard had on *White Noise* in general:

The information world Baudrillard delineates bears a striking resemblance to the world of *White Noise*: one characterised by the collapse of the real and the flow of signifiers emanating from an information society, by a ‘loss of the real’ in a black hole of simulation and the play and exchange of signs (Wilcox, 1991, p 246).

While Wilcox gives full credence to the postmodern influence of Baudrillard on the novel as a whole, he portrays Gladney as succumbing to postmodern influences rather than actively engaging in postmodern modes for pragmatic reasons, as the present study suggests is the case. However, it is demonstrably the case, as Wilcox suggests, that there are very significant differences between Baudrillard's depiction of the media-saturated information society of his age and that which *White Noise* portrays.

Wilcox sees this as DeLillo's loyalty to "interiority", as opposed to a situation in which the subject gives way to the external societal pressures upon it in the Baudrillardian landscape. Upon scrutiny, Gladney's even his so-called interiority, as Frow notes, stems from the simulated order, and thus reveals his oscillation between modernism and postmodernism.

Most importantly however, DeLillo's writing offers possibilities for the individual to escape the stronghold of the simulated order, as Baudrillard's does not. Baudrillard, in fact, annihilates the concept of the individual subject in the process of his argument. As Wilcox says:

In the depiction of a Baudrillardian landscape ... DeLillo differs from Baudrillard in one important respect. Baudrillard's position toward the postmodern world is ultimately one of radical skepticism: finally there is nothing outside the play of simulations, no real in which a radical critique of the simulational society might be grounded. DeLillo's writing, on the other hand, reveals a belief that fictional narrative can provide critical distance from and a critical perspective on the process it depicts (1991, p 361).

Whereas Wilcox suggests that Baudrillard sees no possibility of originality for the individual subject outside of the simulated order that is dominant in the landscape he depicts, DeLillo's writing offers a "critical" response to the postmodern features of the society he represents. In other words, DeLillo leaves a gap in his fictional representation in *White Noise* in which the individual as a subject remains intact—for the most part—in the novel.

Gladney's Consumer Embrace

I have already suggested that in Gladney's pragmatic push towards postmodernism, his use of commercial language in the form I have termed *brand chants*, is a significant factor. I now extend this argument to demonstrate that Gladney's oscillation between modernism to postmodernism is due, in part, to the influence of Siskind's introduction of postmodern theory, and indeed that his influence leads Gladney to move from modernism to postmodernism in a number of pivotal instances. This argument extends also to the brand chants. In the early pages of the novel Gladney flings anguished questions about his own death, and death in general, to the universe at large, but later there is a shift in the content of Gladney's thought-forms, as

he starts to think in brand chants to help him stave off his fear of death. This is prompted by Siskind's speech, in the supermarket, in which Siskind offers Gladney a model of a brand chant as "mantra" by uttering '*Coke is it, Coke is life, Coke is it*'. He adds that "The medium practically overflows with 'sacred' formulas ... (WN, p 51). Gladney does find sacred formulas from the media sources as Siskind has urged him to do, and continues to use them at points when he is most afraid for his own survival. Thus Siskind articulates and preempts, a shift in Gladney's consciousness from modernism to a postmodern alignment with consumerism and its language (Fig 1, PM 4).

In this way, Gladney's characterisation moves towards an embrace of mainstream advertising, among the other simulation-related mechanisms that he aligns with, in response to Siskind (Fig 1, PM 1-5). Siskind operates therefore as a Baudrillard-style 1980s theory-driven academic, reminiscent of the Baudrillard who says:

Today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising. ... advertising's current power and the conditions of its disappearance, since today advertising is no longer a stake, it has both "entered into our customs" and at the same time escaped the social and moral dramaturgy that it still represented twenty years ago (Baudrillard, 1994).

Advertising, for Baudrillard, has entered the unconscious of the general public, and is not experienced as distinct from any other style of communication. In adopting brand chants Gladney evokes ideas of conformity (Fig 1, PM 4). In a relevant comment, Hutcheon says that the contradictions involved in postmodernism, in terms of consumerism, are that on an ideological level, postmodern fiction is at the same time critical of and yet complicitous with liberal humanism and mass consumer culture (Hutcheon 1988, p 4). Although Baudrillard was critical of mass consumption and advertising, his work in part validated advertising and the mass media as topics central to postmodern consciousness.

Gladney's pragmatic approach towards postmodernism can be seen in the depiction of the professional world he inhabits at College-on-the-Hill. Although this is not overtly stated, he is caught in a set of power struggles in which underpinning theories, engaging postmodernist ideas, are used as ammunition by his competitive peers. An aggressive academic from New York confronts small-town Gladney in the

staff room. His colleagues represent a fashionable new order that focuses on elements of consumer-driven pop culture, such as popular TV shows, the B-grade element in media genres, cartoons, advertisements and Hollywood celebrities. These characters, forerunners of the Cultural Studies movement, are lampooned through their reading of cereal boxes and their competitive referencing of trivia from mainstream film: “Alfonse Stonponato looked hard at Lasher. ‘Where were you when James Dean died?’ he said in a threatening voice” (WN, p 68). These interactions show how early postmodernism of the era defined itself by breaking the high culture/low culture divide, and the depiction of Gladney’s colleagues exaggerates the most absurd and superficial elements of ‘the postmodern movement’. Gladney reports:

The teaching staff is comprised almost solely of New York émigrés, smart, thuggish, movie-mad, trivia-crazed. They are here to decipher the natural language of the culture, to make a formal method of the shiny pleasures they’d known in their European-shadowed childhoods—an Aristotelianism of bubble gum wrappers and detergent jingles (WN, p 9).

While these “shiny pleasures” are at the core of DeLillo’s representation of the priorities at play in this fashionable academic movement, among the new staff members involved is Siskind himself, who is portrayed in more depth than the other staff members, but whose obsessions and array of postmodern catch cries are no less satirised.

Gladney and Baudrillard’s Simulacrum

Through various allusions to Baudrillardian ideas, *White Noise* satirically portrays the impact of postmodern ideas sweeping onto the cultural scene, and notably the “precession of simulacra” (1983a), as has been noted by Lentricchia (1998), Schuster (2008), Ebbesen (2006), Knight (2008) and Wilcox (1991), among others. The connection plays out in many ways, in scenes that represent Baudrillard’s “precession of simulacra” notion through actions—for example, the SIMUVAC plot thread, the Most Photographed Barn. The theoretical component is expressed through Siskind as a mouthpiece. Siskind is introduced as a “visiting lecturer on living icons” (WN, p 10), and someone who gives courses on the car crash. Despite the inane elements in this description of his intellectual interests, and even though his speeches are delivered in a heightened mock-evangelistic, zealous style that calls for the embrace of TV,

advertising and mass media, his commentary on the theme referred to as “American magic and dread” (*WN*, p 19) does, in effect, provide a critique of postmodern culture that sets the tone for the concerns of the novel. The critique is expressed, in part, through the black humour behind Siskind’s words, with the reader distanced from Siskind’s enthusiasm: he says here in the West, “we don’t die, we shop. But the difference is less marked than you think” (*WN*, p 38). Also there is the disjunction between Siskind’s theory and practice. Yet, similarly to Baudrillard’s approach, the strong critique that DeLillo offers of consumerism in postmodernity, via Siskind, is achieved through the techniques of inversion and over-statement. Furthermore, while Siskind offers an outpouring of verbal and theoretical enthusiasm for consumerism, in practical terms he shies away from its practice, in a way Gladney does not.

While Siskind’s role is harbinger of the “shiny pleasures” through the range of new theories that represent postmodernism, it is Gladney who actualises these theories in his life while Siskind distances himself from them in practice. For instance, Gladney saturates himself with mainstream media, whereas Siskind, despite his lectures on the brilliance of ‘waves and radiation’ (*WN*, 1985, p 104)—in other words, television—takes notes either while other people watch it or as if he is observing some rare phenomenon. Similarly, while Gladney uses shopping to find near-religious solace, in absorbing consumer goods en masse, allowing brand names to dominate his thoughts, Siskind does not buy branded products and indeed, speaks of “the new austerity” (*WN*, p 18). He places himself in the role of an outsider-observer of the prevailing consumerist culture. Evidently, Siskind is all postmodern theory, while Gladney increasingly acts to engage with these theories, uncritically and in practice.

Gladney’s Simulation Thinking

Gladney’s thinking represents the values inherent in the mainstream media. His thoughts shows that he absorbs uncritically the broader culture’s social hierarchies through his inculcation by the media he feeds on daily, as he soaks in what Engles (1999; 2006) refers to as the “normative values” that shape his views. For example, when Gladney is faced with the demand to evacuate his home due to the toxic cloud’s arrival, he is shocked that such a thing could happen to him, someone with his high social status.

People in low-lying areas get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornadoes. I'm a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? We live in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name. These things don't happen in places like Blacksmith (*WN*, p 116).

Despite his sense of immunity to disaster, and the façade of immutability that the town evokes for him, disaster does befall Gladney in a way that he feels is synonymous with poverty and the lower classes.

I'm not just a college professor. I'm the head of a department. I don't see myself as fleeing an airborne toxic event. That's for people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the country, where the fish hatcheries are (*WN*, p 117).

Gladney sees himself through the lens of mainstream news values. Formerly, he believed himself invulnerable to the styles of disaster depicted in TV news, disasters he associates with an underprivileged amorphous mass. However, while in his representation of Gladney, DeLillo may seem to be aligned to Baudrillard's theory of the "precession of simulacra", his depiction of the state of the subject in postmodernity does differ significantly from Baudrillard's. Baudrillard presents the case that there is no room for individualised perception outside that imposed by the media. DeLillo simply shows how Gladney's self identity is associated with his daily diet of mainstream media, while he does not suggest that all individuals operate this way. In fact, DeLillo does not provide comment on the possibilities for Gladney, or for humans in general, were he to choose not to engage with mainstream media. This remains a question for the reader to consider.

Thus, while Gladney's inner monologues are consistent with the dimension of interiority, his inner thoughts do not represent him as either consistently authentic or individualised, as a purely modernist subject would be (Fig 1, M 2-5). His thinking oscillates between modernist self-creating original subject, to alignment with postmodern ideas of the externally created subject (Fig 1, PM 1). The postmodern elements operate through the way Gladney's thought processes demonstrate that he thinks of others and himself through the lens of media clichés and media-hierarchies, through reducing people to stereotypes. Gladney, as a white, North American, male Caucasian with a high status profession is ranked higher, according to mainstream culture, than women, children, non-Americans and those in the working class.

By the time we enter Mink's room with Gladney, we know that Gladney positions himself, just as the mainstream media does, as the norm. He notes with abhorrence Mink's 'un-American' appearance, describing him in derogatory terms as a composite combination of foreign and odd physical traits: "Did he speak with an accent?" and "His face was odd, concaved, forehead and chin jutting" (*WN*, 1985, p 306). In the hospital, Gladney again uses reductive media-influenced shorthand to describe others: "[t]wo orderlies showed up, great squat men with sumo physiques" (*WN*, 1985, p 316). In another extract Gladney says of his wife: "Her hair is a fantastical blonde mop, a particular tawny hue that used to be called dirty blond" (*WN*, p 5). 'Dirty blonde' is again a media-based cliché. Frow discusses Gladney's tendency to pigeonhole and categorise through drawing on simulation-influenced hyper-detail (1990, p 418). He analyses the scene in which Gladney sees the lollipop woman in the yellow slicker and imagines her in a soup commercial with her husband standing "over a pot of smoky lobster bisque, a smallish man with six weeks to live", as an example of Gladney's "trick of pinning down the type" (Frow 1990a, p 418). In Frow's analysis, what most of these typifications have in common is their source in a chain of prior representations (1998, p 421). This writing strategy of DeLillo's can also be demonstrated to evoke a set of postmodern properties in relation to Gladney, drawing upon Baudrillard's warning about the inability of the masses to perceive reality in an unmediated fashion, due to the over-proliferation of mainstream media representations (Baudrillard, 1983a).

Gladney's Identity Appropriation

Gladney shows a postmodern tendency towards ideas that challenge the modernist notion of authenticity of self (Fig 1, M 2) in making strategic moves that often involve male figures he considers as authorities. When asked by the university chancellor to improve his "feeble presentation of self" (*WN*, 1985, p 17) he conforms unquestioningly, manipulating his outer image by adding an initial to his name, wearing dark glasses, putting on weight and wearing his academic robes on campus for the sake of gravitas. His adoption of image-building props reveals that he is prepared to drop loyalty to notions of modernist authentic selfhood and is being

prepared to pretend he is something he is not, when pressured by external forces. Gladney states, in the wake of his reworking of his image: “I am the false character that follows the name around” (WN, p 17). This moment is a complex amalgam however of modernist self-mocking irony, as he makes light of himself and his false name, together with an evocation of postmodern irony (in other words a form of irony that upholds notions of the unique singular self) and irony that, instead, is based on the notion of the “precession of simulacra” (1983a), whereby Gladney, as actual character represented a person, is positioned as an afterthought in the light of his own name, which precedes him.

In a number of ways, as a Hitler Studies scholar, Gladney aligns his professional image with the iconic dictator in order to soak up his aura of immortality. As Hitler is actually dead, the sense of immortality he emanates derives from the media promulgation of his identity, creating the sense that Hitler lives on, through the TV series, documentaries and films made about him. Therefore, Baudrillard’s “precession of simulacra” theory is evoked as Gladney attempts to absorb the strength he sees emanating from Hitler’s posthumous image, an image originally fostered particularly by the Nazi marketing machine. Gladney teaches a class called Advanced Nazism, which disquietingly makes no mention of the Final Solution, but emphasises Nazi “parades, rallies and uniforms” (WN, p 25). This focus on surfaces in the marketing of identity and image, both his own and Hitler’s, is particularly strong in professional settings and sees him linked more to postmodernist than modernist practice. Gladney sees Hitler’s identity as something bigger than his own, as if a space into which he can enter and expand himself: “So Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop towards, tentative as I have sometimes been in the effort” (WN, p 17).

Siskind indicates his (postmodern) approval of Gladney’s relationship of appropriation to Hitler, commenting that it is as if Gladney is taking full possession of Hitler’s identity:

You’ve established a wonderful thing here with Hitler. You created it, you nurtured it, you made it your own. Nobody on the faculty of any college or university in this part of the country can so much as utter the word Hitler without a nod in your direction, literally or metaphorically.

... He is now your Hitler, Gladney’s Hitler (WN, p 11).

Siskind in effect articulates and encourages Gladney's appropriation of Hitler. In a later comment he emphasises a thematic point regarding Gladney's use of Hitler to alleviate his fear of death: "Some people are larger than life. Hitler is larger than death. You thought he would protect you. I understand completely" (WN, p 287). Siskind operates, in a sense, as the theoretical voice for Gladney's postmodern appropriation of Hitler. Siskind again: "You want to be helped and sheltered. ...On one level you wanted to conceal yourself in Hitler and his work. On another level you wanted to use him to grow in significance and strength" (WN, p 287). Siskind notes both a strategic relationship and a classically postmodern act of a-historical appropriation (Jameson 1991, p 118), one that is antithetical to any modernist notions of character formation built on an authentic selfhood.

These instances show how Gladney adapts his views and behaviours upon contact with external pressures symptomatic of the times. These external forces call for him to conform, to align to postmodernist modes and styles. Two pertinent examples of this can be seen, firstly, when Gladney visits the "Most Photographed Barn in America" with Siskind, and, secondly, when he acts on Siskind's "killer and dier" theory, in staging an attempt to murder Willie Mink. These two scenes reveal that Gladney is depicted as willing to become influenced by Siskind, in his role as postmodern proselytizer, not because he *believes* in the principles involved in the postmodern project Siskind espouses, but in pursuing strategies for survival in a changing world.

In one scene, Gladney joins Siskind on the pilgrimage to the site of postmodern reverence: The Most Photographed Barn in America. Here Gladney plays acquiescent pupil to Siskind's educator in postmodern modes of thought. The visit is told in Gladney's style of flat reportage, a non-committal tone, which suggests he is prepared to accept uncritically, at least at face value, whatever information or evidence is put before him. This scene, its content and tone reflect Gladney's process of adapting to conformity.

Several days later Murray asked me about a tourist attraction known as the most photographed barn in America. We drove 22 miles into the country around Farmington. There were meadows and apple orchards. White fences trailed through the rolling fields. Soon the signs started appearing. THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA. We counted five signs before we reached the site. There were 40 cars and a tour bus in the makeshift lot. We walked along a cow pat to the slightly elevated spot set aside for viewing and

photographing. All the people had cameras; some had tripods, telephoto lenses, filter kits. A man in a booth sold postcards and slides -- pictures of the barn taken from the elevated spot. We stood near a grove of trees and watched the photographers. Murray maintained a prolonged silence, occasionally scrawling some notes in a little book.

"No one sees the barn," he said finally.

A long silence followed.

"Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn."

...

"Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender. We see only what the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. It literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism."

Another silence ensued.

"They are taking pictures of taking pictures," he said.

He did not speak for a while. We listened to the incessant clicking of shutter release buttons, the rustling crank of levers that advanced the film.

"What was the barn like before it was photographed?" he said. "What did it look like, how was it different from the other barns, how was it similar to other barns?" (*WN*, pp 12-13)

In this scene Gladney digests Siskind's almost text-book Baudrillardian pronouncements of the then fashionable "precession of simulacra" theory in Baudrillard's *Simulations* (1983a). Thanks to Siskind's explanation, Gladney is left to consider that contemporary citizens under the spell of the simulacrum can no longer perceive the actual barn as it exists, because media representations have obscured it from view. This theme runs throughout the novel, and is evoked in what Gladney terms the "postmodern sunsets", those unusually vivid sunsets due to pollution on the environment (*WN*, p 227) and the SIMUVAC plot thread. The SIMUVAC involves a group of people practising simulated evacuation measures, using the real disaster of the chemical spill as a stage to practise their simulations. It is not the first time the simulacrum theme has been explored in fiction—indeed, Baudrillard cites Luis Borges' fable in 'Of Exactitude in Science' (1975) of a map so large and detailed that it mirrors and covers exactly the terrain it depicts.

The Barn scene in *White Noise*, which begins 12 pages into the novel, reveals Gladney in his initial stages of conforming to postmodernism, which he is fast becoming aware of as an important cultural trend, under the pressure of an intellectual

fashion gaining rapid ground in his professional milieu. Gladney's role in the Barn scene is to enthusiastically absorb this taste of postmodern theory as offered by Siskind. This scene is an example of DeLillo's double-coding, as he at once critiques the simulated order and speaks as if with a nod and a wink to those who are reading the then-new theories of Baudrillard about this very order.

In order to consider the complexities in the way DeLillo evokes Baudrillard and thereby postmodern theory, I return to some points Wilcox has made about the strong influence of Baudrillard on *White Noise* in general, recalling his statement that "the information world Baudrillard delineates bears a striking resemblance to the world of *White Noise* ... characterised by the collapse of the real (Wilcox, 1991, p 246). Wilcox portrays Gladney as succumbing to postmodern influences, rather than actively engaging in postmodern modes for pragmatic reasons, as the present study suggests is the case. However, I agree with Wilcox that there are differences between Baudrillard's depiction of the media-saturated information society of his age, and the world of *White Noise*; DeLillo offers possibilities for the individual to escape the stronghold of the simulated order, as Baudrillard does not. Baudrillard in fact, annihilates the concept of the individual subject in the process of his argument. As Wilcox says, DeLillo differs from Baudrillard in the important respect that DeLillo does not offer a complete collapse of the real in postmodernism, but rather suggests "a belief that fictional narrative can provide critical distance from and a critical perspective on the process it depicts" (1991, p 361).

Further, as Wilcox suggests, while Baudrillard sees no possibility of autonomy for the human subject outside of the simulated order that dominates the landscape, DeLillo's writing offers a "critical" response to the postmodern features of the society he represents. In other words, DeLillo leaves a gap in his fictional representation in *White Noise* in which the individual as a subject remains intact—for the most part—in the novel. Wilcox sees this as DeLillo's loyalty to "interiority", as opposed to a situation in which the subject gives way to external societal pressures in the 'Baudrillardian landscape'. However, in this thesis I question the extent to which Gladney's representation remains modernist in its depiction, in suggesting that on scrutiny, even his so-called interiority, as Frow notes, stems from the simulated order, and thus reveals his oscillation between modernism and postmodernism.

Conforming to (Postmodern) Room Behaviour

In relation to Hitler, as mentioned, Siskind presents the theory of “killers and diers”, which by the novel’s end has become a theory of significance to Gladney. To expand on this idea: Siskind explains there are two forms of people, those who kill and avoid death by clocking up “life-credit” points, and the powerless who roll over and die (WN, p 290):

“I believe, Jack, there are two kinds of people in the world. Killers and diers. Most of us are diers. We don’t have the disposition, the rage or whatever it takes to be a killer. We let death happen. We lie down and die. But think what it’s like to be a killer. Think how exciting it is, in theory, to kill a person in direct confrontation. If he dies, you cannot. To kill him is to gain life-credit. The more people you kill, the more credit you store up. ...” (WN, 1985, p 290).

Since Gladney’s *modus operandi* is to avoid death at any cost, in his strategic “maneuvering for advantage” we see him, at a point of desperation, once he finds out his wife has been cuckolding him, resorting to this theory as a recipe to avoid being one of those killed off in the world, or victimised by its circumstances. Siskind has already told him: “The killer, in theory, attempts to defeat his own death by killing others. He buys time, he buys life...” (WN, p 291). Gladney wants power over Mink and power over his own death-fear. While Siskind stresses that his argument is only theoretical Gladney, driven by mercenary motives, takes Siskind literally and engages in the climax of his mercenary acts based on the “killer-dyer” premise. He attempts to murder Mink. This study now turns to analysing this scene (WN, 1985, pp 305-314) in which Gladney, once inside Mink’s room, becomes a postmodern character and, in doing so, becomes a satire on postmodern characterisation.

As Charles Molesworth notes, DeLillo’s novels often feature a solitary man being propelled “headlong in a sealed chamber” (1991, pp. 143-44). Indeed, “many of his characters find their destinies shaped by, or expressed, ... in place—a room, a hole—as well as in movement”. When Gladney steps inside Mink’s room it is as if his modernist subjectivity, however contested, gives way completely to the postmodern influence of Mink. In the scene in question Gladney seeks ultimate power over Mink.

Thematically, in being driven by self-interest, it is as if Gladney has made a pact, on entering Mink's domain, to abandon any hint of modernist originality or authentic selfhood (Fig 1, M 2) in his character. The existence and conditions of this pact can be discerned from the speech Mink makes on first seeing Gladney in his room:

“Room behaviour. The point of rooms is that they are inside. None should go into a room unless he understands this. People behave one way in rooms, another way in streets, parks and airports. To enter a room is to agree with a certain kind of behaviour that takes place in rooms” (WN, 1985, 306).

Mink's rules apply when Gladney enter the room, and these rules, as it transpires, are that Gladney makes an unspoken deal to merge with the 'postmodern'. It follows that in concurring with the rules of “room behaviour”, Gladney succumbs to the full influence of Mink's prototypically postmodern selfhood: he is represented as losing notions of original, singular, authentic selfhood as he merges physically with Mink, with the mixing of their blood. Under the influence of the pharmaceuticals he eats, for Mink, the sign and the referent are indistinguishable, and the original is replaced by notions of the copy. For Gladney the present merges with prior media representations as his act of attempted murder; his act is described to the reader as if through the lens of the history of b-grade thriller genres. Furthermore, as noted by several scholars, Mink is a composite character, racially, but also a composite figure of new style of contemporary human, in that his physiognomy itself resembles a TV set (WN, 1985, p 306).

A particularly extreme aspect of his postmodernity is that he mistakes the signifier for the signified. For instance, when Gladney says “falling plane” and “plunging aircraft”, Mink hides and adopts the crash position, as if he himself is in a falling plane. Nominally this is due to the Dylar pills Mink takes. What is not stated directly, but can be picked up by readers ‘in the postmodern know’, is the reference to the then popular French interest in *explication de text*, or breaking a text into its linguistic components for close analysis and interpretations of that text, in relation to the work of Saussure and those influenced by him. That a character cannot tell the difference between the sign and its signifier, one suspects, is a joke alluding to this postmodern preoccupation.

Once entering Mink's room, with murder in mind and self-interest driving him, it is as if Gladney acquiesces to the postmodern representation of the murder act, and

surrenders his subject to it in pursuing an act that appears to be drained of the possibility of any individual originality. The following section provides a close analysis of this murder scene which, I argue, shows Gladney merging with postmodernism.

On the way to Mink's room, Gladney plays and replays in his mind his plan to murder Mink in his mind, conjuring a host of ideas and images seemingly lifted from TV cop shows, film noir, Raymond Chandler novels and the like:

The plan was elaborate. Drive past the scene several times, approach the motel on foot, swivel my head to look peripherally into rooms, locate Mr. Gray under his real name, enter unannounced, gain his confidence, advance gradually, reduce him to trembling, wait for an unguarded moment, take out the .25-caliber Zumwalt automatic, fire three bullets into his viscera for maximum slowness, depth and intensity of pain, wipe the weapon clear of prints, place the weapon in the victim's hand to suggest the trite and predictable suicide of a motel recluse, smear crude words on the walls in the victim's own blood as evidence of his final cult-related frenzy ... (WN, p 311).

Details of the gun and the use of jargon, like "fire into his viscera", replicate language used by TV show detectives and forensic experts. The gruesome closing lines of this passage in which crude words are smeared on a wall, as in a "final cult-related frenzy" reveal that Gladney's thinking draws from a repertoire, from high and low cultural media sources, of murders. Jameson represents postmodernism as presenting a "degraded landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader's Digest* culture" (1991, p 2). Indeed, the passage above from *White Noise* evokes the postmodern appropriation of high and low cultures specified by Jameson. The repetitions of the elements in this passage, as Gladney replays this scene repeatedly in his mind, introduced no new elements, further depicts his inability to imagine this murder act outside the stronghold of cliché and media-created thought-packages.

Jameson argues that postmodernists no longer quote from a prior source, as in the modernist art practice, but appropriate large portions of material from prior sources that become an intrinsic part of the new text. Indeed, Gladney's landscape is "degraded" as Jameson suggests is indicative of postmodernism, by the level of appropriation involved, in this attempted murder passage. It is as if Siskind, with his theory of "killers not a diers" is propelling him forward, and in doing so has shrunk his possibilities into these two reductive, media-created roles presented in numerous TV

shows: murderer or murder victim. When the murder attempt fails however, and Mink shoots him back, it is as if the hold over him exerted by Mink's room and Mink's rules, starts to unravel, and Gladney begins to escape the stronghold of these over-determined roles from prior media representation.

This scene of the attempted murder itself begins to appropriate not merely the language of media sources, but a particular attempted murder: that in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (2008, original edition 1959), which is frequently placed in the High Modernism category but, I suggest, is also a hybrid work that crosses into postmodernism. Through these strong references to Humbert Humbert's encounter with Clare Quilty, Gladney's attempted murder operates, in Jameson's terms, as postmodern appropriation. The pre-existing murder scene in *Lolita* creates a template from this former literary novel. Since this scene is written as if through the consciousness of Gladney, it is thought processes that are depicted in the pastiche, as he thinks through prior media and literary representation. Thus, it is again suggested that it is impossible for Gladney to operate as a modernist in relation to the idea of murder, since his every thought and act has a layer of allusion so strong that it appears pre-determined. Murder itself has played out so often in representational genres that it is as if Gladney has no option but to pay tribute to other murder scenes when engaging in this act. DeLillo's work here thus exemplifies Eco's idea of the impossibility of speaking innocently, as in the man who can only say, 'As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly' (1994, p 67).

Both men have an extended conversation that draws on, and turns into banal farce, the notion of murder scenes from prior representation in popular culture. In *Lolita* the world of theatre is the reference, in *White Noise* popular films and TV. Furthermore, in *Lolita* Humbert Humbert finds his victim in an altered state, comparable to Mink's. Quilty is drunk when Humbert Humbert says, "Quilty ... I want you to concentrate. You are going to die in a moment" (Nabakov, 1959, p 338), and, later, after the men wrestle as Humbert Humbert shoots at him clumsily, missing at first, Quilty dashes from room to room, pausing at one point to play the piano, and as a bullet hits him in the side, he "rose from his chair higher and higher, like old, gray, mad Nijinski, like old Faithful, like some old nightmare of mine ... (Nabokov 2008, p 344-45)". Quilty, a playwright, plays his death scene to the hilt like a ham actor on stage. In *White Noise*, Mink is high on the Dylar pills said to remove a

person's fear of death. Neither Quilty nor Mink seem to be able to comprehend the seriousness of their situation as proposed victim – even as gun's are pointed directly at them. Thus they 'play' up the drama of their own role as possible murder victim. Thanks to alcohol, Quilty cannot fathom that Humbert Humbert plans to shoot him whereas, thanks to the pills, Mink not only cannot grasp that he might also be shot but he is unable to tell the difference between the real and the remembered or between a signifier and its signified. However, in *White Noise*, after Gladney leaves Mink's room, the scene diverts in tone and plot from the *Lolita*-like script. Thus, the novel here operates along the lines Jameson outlines for pastiche: Gladney indeed "disappears" into the shadow of Humbert Humbert before later re-emerging as he returns home and appears in the final scene in the shopping mall as his old consumer-driven self.

Prior to entering Mink's room, Gladney's search for meaning is fueled by the understanding that a single truth can be uncovered from the raw material of the world by the perceptive individual with vision. In Mink's room, time slows down and Gladney's perceptions of reality become multi-layered, as if he can perceive multiple threads of meaning, or information sources, simultaneously. Gladney reports: "Auditory scraps, tatters, whirling specs. A heightened reality. A denseness that was also a transparency. Surfaces gleamed" (*WN*, p 317). It is as if the room is his postmodern text to deconstruct, a literal example of Derrida's notion of the all-encompassing text. Gladney's perceptions mimic or appropriate the postmodern attention to textual minutiae as if enacting Lyotard's suggestion that reality is formed of mini-narratives (1979). And in this sense, the modernist self-mocking irony changes register and becomes irony about the inability of the subject to access originality (Fig 1, PM 5.)

While for the most part Wilcox's argument that *White Noise* does not fall into postmodern pastiche is applicable, because DeLillo's novels "engage historical and political issues" (Wilcox, 1991, p 362), I argue that the passage in question is an exception. Given the extent of appropriation employed, the way the scene operates distinctly along the lines of Jameson's description of *pastiche*, Gladney indeed "disappears" into the shadow of Humbert Humbert. The style of the writing lacks the authorial elements of earlier sections that mark DeLillo's signature style. As Jameson says:

... in the dialectical leap from quantity to quality, the explosion of modern literature into a host of distinct private styles and mannerisms has been followed by a linguistic fragmentation of social life itself to the point where the norm itself is eclipsed: reduced to a neutral and reified media speech ... which itself then becomes but one more idiolect among many. Modernist styles thereby become postmodernist codes (1991, pp. 16-17).

As demonstrated, this scene in *White Noise* is a clear, albeit isolated example of modernist styles becoming postmodern codes.

Prior to entering Mink's room, DeLillo sets the satire of postmodernism in motion when Mink, high on Dylar, leaves a garbled message on the door: "NU MISH BOOT ZUP". Gladney remarks on seeing it: "Gibberish but high quality gibberish" (*WN*, 185 p 305). As Mink represents the quintessentially postmodern, and he is the author of this inscription, the suggestion is that postmodernism produces "high minded gibberish". This humorous idea sets the theme for the new relationship between language and meaning once Gladney enters Mink's postmodern domain. On entering the room, Gladney's perception of the raw material of life, on which he thus far has drawn, in modernist fashion, to find heightened, singular meaning, is significantly altered. Gone is the sense of grand narrative thinking that had underpinned Gladney's search for transcendent meaning in earlier scenes; gone is the sense that there is indeed a truth to be uncovered. Gladney's monologue starts to echo distinctly postmodern ideas when he says: "I sensed I was part of a network of structures and channels. I knew the precise nature of events. I was moving close to things in their actual state" (*WN*, 1985, p 305). He no longer searches for meaning in a world made of solid objects and predictable language structures predicated on singular truths, one in which he is a distinct entity. He now feels he is part of a "network of structures"; this is suggestive of Lyotard's view of the postmodern subject as a nodal point within communication circuits (Lyotard, 1979, p 15).

Furthermore, formally, the writing in this passage embodies Jameson's notion of *blank parody*, which I consider to be postmodern irony. As well as aligning Gladney to postmodern structures, the passage simultaneously parodies postmodern fashions in itself. Yet, once Gladney's plan goes awry and he himself is shot, he again displays some modernist traits, such as the desire to redeem himself and a sense of compassion for Mink's humanity. Once Mink is shot, Gladney's character oscillates rapidly between modernist self-mocking irony, and postmodern irony—the latter being more

intensely self-aware, and darker in tone. To begin, Gladney mocks his own attempt at heroism: “I know I felt virtuous, I felt blood-stained and stately, dragging the badly wounded man through the dark and empty street.” (WN, 1985, p 314). Gladney utters this before delivering mouth-to-mouth to Mink, adding: “I felt large and selfless, above resentment. This was the key to selflessness, or so it seemed to me as I knelt over the wounded man, exhaling rhythmically in the littered street beneath the roadway” (WN, p 314). His commentary has the dark, self-reflexive tone of the postmodern character watching his futile attempt at playing the modernist hero.

Gladney is portrayed as a strategist, operating for self-gain as if by reflex, through most of *White Noise*, and he displays sardonic self-awareness of this toward the novel’s end. Once he has shot Mink, as discussed previously, he reflects on this tendency in himself in respect of his meeting with a German nun, with whom he catches himself “maneuvering for advantage” (WN, p 317). This survivalist-conformism underlies most of his interactions with others.

Thus, while Gladney thematically enters postmodern terrain in many instances throughout this novel, in the ‘murder’ scene his representation through pastiche, the way his identity, his subjectivity, merges with the de-centred characterisation of Mink (Fig 1, PM 1) all position him firmly in a postmodern character position, one that challenges the notion that he is a singular entity with access to authenticity and originality.

White Noise operates through drawing on a range of both modernist and postmodern strategies on a structural level. As mentioned, Gladney evokes the modernist artist-hero’s quest for transcendent meaning, and for the epiphanic revelatory moment. However, it also operates at the level of *pastiche* of murder thriller/genres (the attempted murder of Mink). *Pastiche* is also employed, though not to the same extent, in passages that evoke postmodernism’s preoccupation with popular film and literary genres. This also occurs in a range of scenes that situate Gladney, alternatively, as if he is a character who has fallen into a plot from the disaster genre (the Airborne Toxic Event), and other scenes that situate him as if within the campus genre (scenes in College-on-the-Hill).

In conclusion, this chapter has explored Gladney as a character who adopts postmodern ideas for strategic and pragmatic reasons, a recurring theme in most of the novel that comes to a climax in the scene where he attempts to murder Mink, a scene

in which postmodern elements also come to the fore textually. In this chapter I have drawn on the scholarship of Frow and Engles to discuss the ways in which Gladney's interiority is compromised by postmodernism in that it is influenced by the mainstream media's tendency towards typification and normative social hierarchies. I also demonstrate that Gladney appropriates Hitler's media-infused identity as part of a set of pragmatic moves towards postmodernism, along with his adoption of consumerism's brand chants; both ideas align him to Baudrillard's postmodern theory (1983a). Finally, a close analysis of the scene in Mink's room leads to my conclusion that Gladney both represents and parodies postmodernism formally and thematically at this point of the novel. Having presented the postmodern element in Gladney's characterisation through textual analysis, I now conduct a comparative analysis of Gladney with a more consistently represented postmodern character, Bruno Clément from Michel Houellebecq's *Les Particules élémentaires* (1998) in the English translation *Atomised* (2001).

Chapter Six

From Conformist to Clone: a Comparative Study of Gladney and Clément

In this chapter I conduct a comparative study of Jack Gladney from *White Noise* and the character Bruno Clément from Michel Houellebecq's *Atomised* (2001). Clément is positioned at the endpoint of the continuum of subjectivity so far developed along the theme of a search for transcendent meaning. The continuum begins with the modernist Dedalus, positions Gladney in an indeterminate ground between modernism and postmodernism, and places Clément as a postmodern subject devoid of the desire for transcendence, and indeed devoid of a context in which transcendence is on offer. To review the argument so far: Dedalus is driven by the desire to glean material from his daily life, in the form of words, visions and sounds that he collects and transforms through the epiphany process so as to produce Art. It is through this process that he simultaneously seeks and locates 'truth'. This process is provoked by the collapse of Dedalus's Catholic faith, which had guaranteed his soul immortal life, and the compensating quest to find transcendence in Art in his role as a "priest of the eternal imagination" (*P*, p 240).

In contrast to Dedalus, Gladney's desire to seek transcendent meaning, while a strong motivating impulse, finds him not operating at a remove from his broader culture but merging with the throng, in shopping malls and supermarkets, where he accepts the mediated language his consumer culture dishes up as a form of pre-packaged or mediated 'transcendence'. Compared to Dedalus, Gladney does not use the material he obtains from daily life for the purpose of making Art, but in order to assuage his fear of death. High ideals and aesthetics do not drive him to seek meaning, but he pursues pragmatic and escapist solutions to assuage his fear of death. Houellebecq's *Atomised* on the other hand is placed at the end of the transcendence trajectory. Like both Dedalus and Gladney, Clément mounts a quest for solutions to his life, but his search provides a departure from the language-oriented search for transcendent meaning staged by Dedalus and Gladney.

Prior to the comparative analysis, I offer some general comments on *Atomised* and how it operates as a postmodern work with postmodern protagonists. The central narrative, about the life of a pair of half-brothers, Michel Djersinski and Bruno Clément, is framed by an opening poem and an epilogue that provide a vision of the future in which humankind is replaced by female clones. This science fiction-like framing, and a range of other framing devices, operates to communicate the idea that Clément is a construct, an externally created character in a variety of respects (Fig 1, PM 1). Since the narrator is a clone, this is a fairly direct evocation of notions of the ‘copy’ and of Baudrillardian simulacra (Fig 1, PM 2). Within this outer frame of the clone narrator, the central story of the half brothers is presented, not using standard novelistic fictional devices, but a range of didactic modes. The context is very specific, and is rendered with factual precision. The novel begins in the 60s, but focuses particularly on the decades of the 70s-90s, where it identifies the ‘new age’ industry and the ‘sex club’ circuit emerging in the wake of the 60s’ sexual revolution and its associated counter-culture movements.

Atomised in fact creates a thesis about the role of the sexual revolution in contemporary French society and what Houellebecq depicts as the commodification of the gendered subject within it. The novel prompted critics such as Varsava (2005) and Jack Abecassis (2000) to call it a *roman à thèse*: a work based on a polemic or didactic. For the narrative builds the case that the permissive values dominating secular liberal society in the 80s and 90s are the legacy of the individualistic narcissism promoted by post-60s liberationist thinking. This aspect of the novel drew the comment from Slavoj Žižek that *Atomised* presents:

[Th]e dark side of the 1960s ‘sexual liberation’: the full commodification of sexuality. Houellebecq depicts the morning-after of the Sexual Revolution, the sterility of a universe dominated by the superego injunction to enjoy (Žižek 2008, p 30).

In this way, Houellebecq critiques the libertine sensibility that commodifies not only sex but the subject itself. Houellebecq offers a critical and scathing attack on Western liberal humanism and the development of the ‘cult of self’, through the device of the clone-narrator as scientific observer and social critic rolled into one. The clone-narrator reports: “The sexual revolution was to destroy the last unit separating the individual from the market. The destruction continues to this day” (A, p. 136).

Clément's life story, written in the third person, is represented through a number of what may be termed external narrative modes. Thematically, the clone views him as a specimen of a species now extinct, and there is a sense that the narrative is built from a range of 'reports' derived from external investigations of him. The overall effect is as Houellebecq calls it, a "patchwork",¹⁶ and is based on the fact that each narrative mode is different and replicates a voice of mainstream culture, one appearing after the other without linking devices, without any one dominant coherent voice or style to give a unifying flavor to the novel. The external narrative modes switch dramatically, appropriating textual formats from high to low culture; a signifying feature of postmodernism according to Jameson (1991, p 2). An academic speech about Aldous Huxley (*A*, pp 186-192), sits alongside other passages that resemble pornography, marketing brochures and glossy magazine texts. However, these modes do not create a pluralistic view of Clément, but instead produce a reductive view of his character. Each of his experiences or attributes is explained as the inevitable result of historical, economic or social circumstances. Furthermore, these external narrative modes give the impression that they mimic contemporary perspectives on their subject of enquiry, offering a many-faceted depiction of Clément as a "type" caught within and created by mainstream discourses, thus evoking Lyotard's postmodern *petits récits* (Fig 1, PM 3).

The narrative modes operate to represent Clément as if he is under evaluation by, alternatively: a molecular biologist, social scientist, a historian, a cultural critic, an animal behaviourist, a contemporary philosopher and a commercial pornographer. With some of these external modes being didactic in style, and others fictional Abecassis calls this "Houellebecq's fictional-essayistic grinder" (2000, p 802). However, rather than providing a sense of pluralism or expansive view, the effect is that Clément as a subject is utterly embedded and reduced to type by these modes. As a subject he is granted no sense that he has agency, but is cast as a product of his times, his psyche being that of a typical male subject of his species. I offer two

¹⁶ His technique, something the author in 2010 described as "a kind of patchwork, weaving, interlacing" earned him criticism for plagiarism in the French version of the on-line publication *Slate*. (www.thedaily-maverick.co.za/article/2010-09-07) *The Daily Maverick*, Theresa Malinson, South Africa.

examples to demonstrate this. The first occurs in the scene where Clément's actions are described alongside accounts of the behaviour of chickens and pigeons:

Generally, the initial reaction of a thwarted animal is to try harder to attain its goal. A starving chicken (*Gallus domesticus*) prevented from reaching its food by a wire fence will make increasingly frantic efforts to get through it....When unable to find food, pigeons (*Columba livia*) will frequently peck at the ground even if there is nothing there which is edible. ...it is known as displacement activity. Clément began to write (A, p 213).

This passage's opening with reports on chicken and pigeon behaviour establishes, through association, that Clément is a creature engaging in "displacement activity". Hence, unable to get his animal needs met for sex, Clément writes in a futile attempt to nourish himself. This suggests that he cannot take up creative writing to escape the confines of the cultural grid into which he is completely locked, a move that the modernist-hero Dedalus is able to attempt.

A second example of the way the external narrative modes position Clément is the 'cultural critic' narrative mode, which interrupts a specific fictional passage in which Clément and his girlfriend, Christiane, are frequenting sex clubs. "All about them couples were fucking" (A, p 288.) The fictitious characters and the fictitious details of their activities continue for several pages, in an explicit evocation of pornographic writing, followed by a few didactic passages that locate the characters as if in an actual socio-historical context:

In the libidinal system which Bruno [Clément] and Christiane had joined, the sexual model progressed by the dominant culture (advertising, magazines, health education groups) was governed by the principle of adventure ... (A, 293).

This documentary tone, one of the most frequent modes of all the external narrative modes employed, thus presents a running commentary on the meaning of the characters' behaviour throughout the novel. This at once directs the reader to interpret Clément, as the narrator does, through the lens of a set of symptomatic and predictable responses typical of a subject of his era: one who is pre-determined according to his gender, age, conditioning, and socio-economic standing. This technique encloses the character (subject) in a fixed analysis, and gives him, as a character, a sense of being fused into position, a product of external forces.

There is none of *White Noise*'s central modernist/postmodernist division in *Atomised*, but other notions of fragmentation or splitting are prominent. Not only do

the half-brothers resemble sides of the Cartesian split (with the leading scientist Michel being cast as ‘all mind’, and Clément with his carnal desires, the ‘all body’ component), thematically both are ‘split off’ from the ability to feel empathy. The novel also explores the divisions between the genders and between the individual human and its copy, or clone. That said, the focus of the present study is on Clément as a postmodern subject, compared to Gladney’s bridging subject between modernism and postmodernism.

Gladney and Clément: Interiority Masking Media-generated Subjectivity

The discussion of *White Noise* so far has established that while Gladney’s internal monologues derive directly from his character, the modernist elements of his character are undercut by his tendency to view the world through the lens of mainstream media clichés. In other words, there is a blurred line between Gladney’s modernist interiority and the media-generated subject. In relation to this, Clément also reduces others to type in his thinking, while he is also depicted as being ‘reduced to type’ himself, both by his own self-valuing system and by the external narrative modes that report on him. In plot terms, his character is dissected by the clone-observer, who studies him as an example, a limited case study of ‘man’.

Significantly, the clone’s perspective is not neutral; rather, the external modes that stand in for the clone depict Clément as a pathetic, flawed subject soon to face his well-deserved extinction. Thus, while Gladney views others in terms of recognisable types, as if he can only understand the ‘actual’ world through the lens of advertisements and television standards, Clément not only pins others down to type by drawing similarly on mainstream norms but he is himself pinned down, and fully determined, by the narrative voices that see him as typical of mankind. The reader is informed by the external modes that Clément is a character typical of his era. For instance, we are informed that his “only goal in life” had been “sexual”, and that this makes him “characteristic of his generation” (A, p 73). In contrast, Gladney’s representation as an everyman of the mid-80s is more implicit. A range of hints and

textual clues, rather than direct statements of fact, that are placed before the reader to be unpacked, imply that Gladney is a dull 80s conformist influenced by mainstream media.

In *Atomised* the narrator's various modes operate to provide external and authoritative viewpoints of Clément that position him as a character pre-determined by external forces, someone furthermore, characterised by a set of predictable stock responses to his circumstances. This grants him little autonomy or authority in relation to the authorial voices of the narrator-clone. Gladney however is it seems the prime source of authority in *White Noise*, by virtue of owning the dominant first person point of view. However, in many respects, his authoritative control of meaning in the narrative is frequently challenged and completely undermined as various forces external to him shake his stability: the brush with the airborne toxic event, his children challenge his views, the TV voices challenge in the Gladney house challenge him as sole authority in the space.

The world of *White Noise*, on one level, is introduced through a combination of Gladney's vivid sensory impressions and his inner monologue, as if they emanate through his individualized, 'unique' consciousness. The sense that Gladney is a unique subject rests on the strong evocation of stylistic modernist interiority. Furthermore, in *White Noise*, alternative sources of authority undermine Gladney's assumed role as head patriarch and sole legislator of meaning in his milieu. While it appears that Gladney is the only source of authority in the text, due to his having the entire point of view in which the narrative is delivered, there are various other authorities that challenge his understanding and perceptions.

One such source of authority is Siskind, whose views are linked to another, central source: the media. For the television and radio offer authoritative voices that both inform and misinform Gladney and his family members of things in the world, countering Gladney's versions of 'reality'. In the scene with Heinrich in the car, Heinrich chooses the media's interpretation of facts over his father's contrary position. The influence of the radio during the Gladney family evacuation overrides common sense, yet the children are impacted by what they consider is the media's authority, above the beliefs upheld by their parents. The TV not only bonds the Gladney family, with their mutual fascination for disaster footage but provides another set of narrative voices within the Gladney household "Upstairs a British voice said: 'There are forms

of vertigo that do not include spinning” (DeLillo 1985, p 56). Again, “The voice at the end of the bed said: “Meanwhile here is a quick and attractive lemon garnish suitable for any seafood” (DeLillo 1985, p 178). As McHale says: “*White Noise* ... emphasises TV’s ubiquity and the interaction between TV programming flow and the flow of reality itself, demonstrating how TV worlds institute themselves into the real world to pluralise the latter” (1991, p 129). Mainstream media forms are further advocated with religious zeal, through Siskind’s ‘waves and radiation’ speech (*WN*, p 104). The media, and Siskind’s ideas about it, influence Gladney to the point that they become inseparable from the voices within his inner consciousness. While Gladney offers more evidence of modernist interiority than Clément, the media’s role within his thinking raises the question as to whether he has an interior self that is distinct from his external culture’s values to any significant degree. Furthermore, even at his most anguished, and seemingly individualised, his utterances, associated with his fear of death are drawn from a repertoire of modernist clichés. As is characteristic of this work, DeLillo leaves the matter open, as to what degree Gladney is represented as having a sense of the modernist authentic self merely to challenge these ideas, and likewise to what extent Gladney truly evokes modernist ‘depth’. On this score, DeLillo critics remain divided.

In contrast, and continuing with the theme of the media-generated subject, while certain passages offer the reader Clément’s private thoughts, they are written so that there is no discernible internal monologue that can be distinguished, in any significant way, from the external narrative voice/s from his mainstream culture. His thinking consistently mirrors mainstream values and commercial clichés. For instance, in a passage he is writing in his diary after reading a travel brochure, the narrator states: “Cap d’Argde was divided into five blocks ... with a capacity of 10,000 beds—the largest in the world” (*A*, p 257-58). Typically it is difficult to distinguish where Clément’s regurgitation of the brochure leaves off and his internal voice and his writing begin. This technique of enmeshment of Clément and the authoritative external narrative modes operates throughout the novel. It is as if consumer Capitalism is his only mode of thinking, thus exemplifying what Baudrillard says that today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising, so that it has ... “entered’ into our customs” (Baudrillard, 1994).

Typification operates both externally to Clément, in its depiction of him as a known type and from within his consciousness, where he reduces himself and others to type. Plot-wise, this typification stems, as it does in *White Noise*, from Clément's relationship to mainstream media sources and values. While Gladney is surrounded by the media forms of 1980s television, radio and tabloid press, in Clément's case, when the novel provides a close focus on him at the age of 42, the media forms he engages with are contemporaneous with the 90s: *Marie Claire* (A, p 276), *Newlook* (A, p 190), *Connexion* and MTV (A, p 276, p 190), *Hot Videos* (A, p 202) junk mail and tourist brochures of the period (*Atomised*, p 271). The reader is offered snippets and close-ups of these media forms in turn. While, due to his media diet, Gladney slots people into a hierarchy of importance, based on mainstream TV values—in which he, as a white northern American university professional is ranked higher than, say, a blue collar worker of non-northern American descent—Clément places himself lower on the hierarchy he adopts to view the world. His view mirrors the criteria that characterise the mainstream sexual marketplace of his society (A, p 42). In this sense, his thinking creates a set of reductive gender-stereotypes through which to view the world, and others: for example, “stupid little WASP bitches” (A, p 94), “wankers in shorts” and “bimbos in thongs” (A, p 155). His is the street language reminiscent of popular music, pornography and commercial TV and is closely aligned to Jameson's assessment of postmodernism as presenting a “degraded landscape of schlock and kitsch ...” (1991, p 2).

Both Gladney and Clément are portrayed in works that offer fictional characters alongside historical personages. This textual strategy is associated with the postmodern tendency for a subject to draw attention to its textuality and to operate overtly as a construct (Fig 1, PM 1). Gladney resides in a fictional town, Blacksmith, works in a fictional university, College-On-The-Hill, and offers classes in Hitler Studies, a fictional course based on an actual historical personage. In this way, *White Noise*, creates a sense of a “face off between fact and fiction” (McHale 1992, p 192). This exacerbates the tension and “exposes the seam” of the postmodern novel (McHale 1992, pp 192-93). However, rather than defining the novel, this plays out as a background context in *White Noise*. That is, the work is fictional in the main, with a few historically specific elements. Written in the first person, the narrative voice emanates from the fictional character, Gladney, who in no way is depicted as ‘actually

existing', but rather is a character who is like a person, just as Dedalus seems to be living and breathing, but ultimately remains a fictional creation who key ways resembles a person.

The characterisation of Clément dramatically brings this sense of a “face off between fact and fiction” into focus, prompting Alan Dent to remark that Houellebecq’s characters are “caught in historical circumstances like flies in amber” (2009, p 236). Firstly, whereas Gladney is set as a character in a period loosely contemporaneous with *White Noise*’s release, Clément is situated specifically within a historic period, in the context of key dates, actual venues and personages. The narrative adopts a didactic tone to present this historical context: “Post-war France was a difficult and troubled society: industrial production was at an all-time low and rationing would continue until 1948.” (A, p 27) before Clément’s story commences. Clément’s mother is reported to have danced: “to bebop ... with Jean-Paul Sartre”. (A, p 27). Another character meets Mick Jagger and Brian Jones (A, p 248), another again mentions an invention from *Les Cahiers du Cinema* (A, p 31). These references to actual personages and historical events evoke what Eco calls a “transworld identity” (1979, p 229) that is characteristic of postmodern fiction.

The historical narrative in *Atomised* is precisely themed so that Clément is situated within a polemical context in relation to the narrative of liberal humanism. Historical milestones such as the introduction of the contraceptive pill (A, p 135), the legalisation of abortion (A, p 80), divorce by mutual consent (A, p 80) and the staging of the counter-culture musical *Hair* (A, p 54) are documented as shaping Clément’s life. Such facts are presented as directly impacting Clément, as a character representative of his times. These elements substantiate Karen Piper’s statement that: “The postmodern subject finds himself irrevocably welded into the structure that contains him ...” (Piper, 1995, p 159). The combination of techniques embeds the fictitious character as if within historical actuality; it draws attention to the novel’s fictionality but also operates as one of the strategies that implicates Clément as a construct of historical circumstance.

Gladney and Clément: The Abject

Gladney and Clément also, to varying degrees, draw on ideas of the subject as construct in relation to Kristeva's notion of the abject (Fig 1, PM 1). For Kristeva, the abject involves that which is "racially excluded", or a "jettisoned object" in relation to the human body (Kristeva, 1982). Finally, when the abject subject gazes within itself, it realises that what exists on the outside, exists on the inside: this is what Kristeva calls "the impossibility of the abject". Kristeva writes that the abject beseeches and pulverizes the subject ... (1982, p 5). When the postmodern subject is in a state of abjection, it is undergoing a process of being "pulverized"; in other words, its subjectivity is violently subject to being ground down into an unrecognizable form. The implication is that all subjectivity gives way, as the internal and external become one substance.

Clément's relation to the abject is consistent throughout the novel. Gladney, on the other hand, reaches a state of abjection upon entering Mink's room. When Gladney confronts Mink, who evokes a sense of un-American, non-wholesomeness. In the room, described as "shabby", Mink constantly pops Dylar pills like "candy". They miss his mouth often and they are smeared all over the carpet. There is grit and white foam. It is a highway motel, like Quilty's, and cheap; its occupant is drugged and spouts sentences that are like direct quotes from television. He is described as having a "a scooped out face" and a "weary pulse of a man" (*WN*, p 302). He is, in many ways, thus the postmodern Other to Gladney's American solid white identity; in fact, he calls Gladney "white man" (*WN*, p 306). He exudes a sense of abjection, particularly in the sense of the internal matching the external, as he utters random sentences much like those from Gladney's TV.

Mink's abjection, and its influence on Gladney, is especially played out when Gladney fires the gun, when Mink fires back and shoots Gladney. Mink is described as "fishlike" (p 314.) Gladney decides to deliver mouth-to-mouth and finds Mink's mouth "was awash in regurgitated Dylar foam, half chewed tablets. ..." Gladney's aim is to get past Mink's "foul body". Therefore, Mink also marks this scene as an example of the abject.

In comparison to Gladney, Clément is more completely and consistently abject. This is one of the many challenges in this novel to the modernist subject as singular consciousness. Clément's language reveals his abject character: "Talking to

morons like that is like pissing in a urinal full of cigarette butts; like shitting in a bog full of Tampex” (A, 132). Clément is represented as particularly abject in his verbal outpourings of repulsion in response to the ageing bodies of women, with his descriptions evoking Barbara Creed’s “monstrous feminine” (A p 115, p 129, p 85, p 121, p 169, p 217, p 233). Creed offers the monstrous feminine as a term to describe the tendency in the history of art and popular culture to draw on imagery evoking associations with the female body, specifically the maternal body, in the production of horror genres and texts drawing on notions of the uncanny (see Creed 2003). The scene with his dying mother, where he threatens to urinate on her corpse, presents a heightened example of this. Clément is clearly a postmodern subject in this sense; his interior presents nothing but a mirror of the external world. Clément’s interior echoes his society’s often B-grade, commercial values, especially in relation to the commodification of sexuality. Thus, while Gladney evokes the postmodern abject only in one scene, Clément’s postmodern abject, a version of the constructed subject (Fig 1, PM 1), is consistent through *Atomised*.

Clément and Gladney: Merging With Consumerism

Another form of division in *Atomised* is that between the human and the consumer object. I have characterised Dedalus in terms of original authentic selfhood and Gladney as an example of authentic selfhood modified at key times by Baudrillard’s concept of the “precession of simulacra” as a simulated self. Gladney, due to his fragile hold on mortality, is vulnerable to the seductions of consumer culture. Clément’s depiction moves one step closer than Gladney’s to the full implications of Baudrillard’s concept of hyper-conformism or the simulated subject. Not merely does he move in a world of up-to-the-minute consumer goods but he obsessively spends money to access sex and puts himself, as if a product, on the sexual marketplace. In Clément’s world, human bodies are commodities in the sexual economy that defines his worldview. Furthermore, in these consumer terms he deems himself to be failing as a product. Within the sex club circuit, Clément becomes aware that he increasingly does not have what is naturally required for market survival (A, p 294-95) and resorts

to buying his way towards meeting his insatiable sexual desires. This leads to a comparison of Clément and Gladney in respect of consumerism.

Clément extends Gladney's theme of the conformist drive towards consumption under pressure of the postmodern order. As has been established, Gladney is portrayed as a character who allows the world of mass consumption to nullify his anxiety about death, in the course of his search for transcendent meaning. While thematically, Gladney's fear of death drives his pragmatic acceptance of consumerism and its language, it is through his own internal monologues that we learn about his fear of death. In *Atomised*, the reader learns of Clément's fear of death, expressed specifically through his fear of aging, from the external narrative modes. It is the didactic narratives, posing Clément as typical of humankind, that provide this information: "In contemporary Western society, death is like *white noise* to a man in good health, it fills his mind when his dreams and plans fade" (p 95). Clément is just this type; aging, someone whose plans and dreams are rapidly diminishing. Fear of death directs him towards the fetishistic style of consumption, to which he turns in desperation, to some extent like Gladney, as a source of escapism. Linder (2003) develops an argument about Gladney's fetishising consumerism in *White Noise*, and it is in this sense that Gladney provides a link to Clément whose fetishisation is both more extreme and more specific. In a passage about Clément's brother that is however a comment on the institutionalisation of the gendered male in French society, the narrative reports:

If he were homosexual he would be able to take part in the AIDS marathon or Gay Pride. If he were a libertine, he could look forward to the *Salon de L'Erotism*. If he were a sportsman, he would be in the Pyrenees, right now, watching a *stage* in the Tour de France. Though an indiscriminating shopping, he was delighted when his local Monoprix had an "Italian Fortnight". This life so well organised, on such human scale; happiness could be found in this. (A, p. 143)

The novel evokes a life of organised consumer ease for Clément that packages his lifestyle and commodifies his identity. While Gladney demonstrates a modernist desire to seek transcendent meaning to escape his terror of death, such forms of modernist sensibility do not dilute Clément's postmodern drive in relation to consumption. He does not seek transcendence, he does not experience radiance, he seeks creature comforts and sex, preferably for free, but he will pay if need be.

Clément's consciousness is at one with the mainstream marketplace. He transforms the concept of the "teenage girl" into a fetish object, as consumerism transforms it into a target market for advertising. Clément is "prepared to go to the ends of the earth" for nubile flesh "wrapped in a miniskirt" (A, 124). Clément, like his broader society, valorizes youth over age and fetishises feminine beauty as an ideal to be consumed by the (male) gaze. The problem for Clément is that he is human, and humans age. The novel, as noted earlier, focuses on a time when he has reached the age of 42 and, like a product on the sexual marketplace, is reaching his use-by date.

In contrast to the search for transcendent meaning that operates through language, the meaning-producing system that Dedalus and Gladney attempt to access, Clément's search is characterised by a focus on the senses. He seeks sex and voyeuristic pleasure at any price. As he ages, Clément makes use of what consumer culture offers for access to young women's bodies. Like Gladney, Clément turns to consumption to meet his desires, but in Clément's case the text's narrative voice normalizes Clément's choice to pay for sex with young women:

He was 42 years old. Did he want women his own age?
Absolutely not. On the other hand, for young pussy wrapped
in a mini-skirt he was prepared to go to the ends of the earth.
Well, to Bangkok at least. Which was, after all, a 13-hour
flight (A, p 124).

When the price is too high to obtain sex directly, he pays to access locations that allow him to engage in voyeuristic acts, such as peep shows. Many scenes are set in the new age health resort the *Lieu De Changement* and in a range of non-specific sex clubs. Again, the novel's narrative voice both affirms and determines Clément's values in regard to the commodification of sex, as being enmeshed with those of his culture. "The year had started well from a sexual point of view. The influx of girls from Eastern Europe had meant prices had dropped ... For 200 francs, you could get a little personal relaxation, down from 400 francs ..." (A, p 121). By addressing the reader as "you", one becomes implicated in this assessment of the year as measured by its availability of prostitutes, as if this is a normal value.

The narrative thus attempts to normalize Clément's view of young women as pure product for purchase. This is announced in the authoritative mode that the narrative adopts to state pure fact. In just such a way, he is depicted as offering an example of "a return to the true nature of desire":

Sexual desire is preoccupied with youth, and the tendency to regard ever-younger girls as fair game was simply a return to the norm; a return to the true nature of desire, comparable to the return of stock prices to their true value after a run on the exchange (A, p 123).

This passage masks a phallogentric normalising view of exchanges in the sexual market by comparing it to the stock market. Further, these systems are treated as natural rather than human-made systems underpinned by human standards. That the desire for increasingly younger girls is a universal “norm” is proposed as a simple fact by the narrator, throughout the novel, and is indeed mirrored by actual mainstream advertising culture. Boundaries between what is culturally true, what Clément considers is true and what the narrator-clone reports as fact in the narrative, are blurred. In this manner, Clément is depicted as a product of his culture with no subjective interior; again this aligns him with Kristeva’s theory of the abject self.

As discussed, in *White Noise* Gladney’s acts as would-be-killer are presented in the form of postmodern appropriation, drawing on Nabokov’s *Lolita* and on other examples of prior representation—from B-grade cop shows to *film noir*. Clément’s sexual acts are also evocative of prior representations from the B-grade world of budget pornography. Yet while such appropriation operates only in one key scene in that novel, with the attempted murder of Mink in *White Noise*, examples of appropriation reverberate throughout *Atomised*, where Clément’s sexual acts appear repetitively, in graphically portrayed banal detail (with lots of attention paid to sexual practicalities and little to the story-line) as if they are direct from budget porn. Thus, Clément’s characterisation takes appropriation onto another level: individual consciousness dominated almost exclusively by the mediated world. Both novels therefore, in this sense, match Jameson’s notion of the “degraded landscape” of the postmodern (1991, p 2), which exhibits all five of the interconnected properties associated with postmodern notions of the subject (Fig 1, PM 1-5).

Gladney and Clément: Diminished Transcendence

Clément’s search is for sexual pleasure. *Atomised* situates Clément in a framework governed by the rhetoric of individualistic ‘sexual freedom’ associated with a liberal

humanist ideology. His context is historically specific to a culture feeling the impact of the 1960s sexual revolution. In this context Clément is represented as mounting the search, not for meaning as determined by language and ‘truth’ but, motivated by desire, for constant pleasure in the name of sexual freedom or liberation. Clément clearly operates in the context of a brutal sexual marketplace where the subject is commodified. Like Gladney his life’s search is staged in the face of mortal fear. The comparisons do not end there for, even though Clément’s central quest in the novel is not for language-based meaning, the hiatuses in Clément’s search for sexual gratification, the range of moments when he obtains sexual relief from acts as mixed as gazing on young semi-naked girls to engaging in group sexual encounters in sex clubs, operate in a similar way within *Atomised* to Dedalus’s epiphanies in *Portrait* or Gladney’s epiphomercials in *White Noise*. They mark the narrative journey of the subject, offering the highs and lows of his sexual experiences as a form of loose plot structure.¹⁷

Like Gladney and Dedalus, Clément’s sets out on a search, but the search in *Atomised* differs from Gladney’s and Dedalus’s in eschewing transcendent meaning for hedonistic drive. Unlike the other two protagonists, Clément seeks sexual pleasure rather than meaning. Yet his desire for gratification to curb his burdensome ever-present sexual desire performs a similar structural function in *Atomised* as the search for meaning theme does in the other two novels. That is, Clément’s search for, and moments of sexual release, create a plot thread with a range of hiatus points similar to the epiphanies in *Portrait* and the epiphomercial in *White Noise*. If one considers the novels on a trajectory that situates Dedalus and his epiphanies with modernism at one end, through to the transitional Gladney, who displays elements of modernism and postmodernism in the centre, we come to Clément at the other end with his wholly materialistic search for gratification in *Atomised*.

The initial phases of the continuum are enacted through language, certainly for Dedalus and also for Gladney to some extent. Joyce uses language associated with traditional religion such as “radiant” (*P*, p 183) and DeLillo uses a combination of brand names, “Toyota Celica” and self-consciously adopted religious language such as “transcendence” (*White Noise*, p 155), whereas the language in *Atomised* draws from

¹⁷ As Clément shares the novel with the parallel narrative of his brother, Michel, this is only one part of the overall narrative structure.

the vocabulary of budget pornography and the “new age” industry that the novel explicitly critiques. After one particular orgasm, the narrator says Clément “had never felt such fulfillment in his life” (A, 164). Terms like “fulfillment” and “happiness” characterise Clément’s experiences of sexual relief from his nagging burdensome desire, but Houellebecq highlights in the novel that these terms reflect ideals that have been adopted, and marketed, by commercialised industries selling new age courses, as well as in the sex club circuit.

At this point, I pause to offer a comment on a related thematic in the novel, which again demonstrates to what extent Clément is an externally created subject, an unmitigated postmodern creation. In *Atomised*, the classically novelistic elements of fictional plot and character sit within a style of didactic polemic in which various aspects of history are overtly discussed in a documentary style. In the novel, Houellebecq provides a study of the “new age” movement and the sex club circuit, as part of his critical argument. The narrator states: “The sexual revolution was to destroy the last unit separating the individual from the market. The destruction continues to this day” (A, p. 136). Each of the novel’s specific frames offer some form of social critique along these lines.

In some sense Clément’s quest for sexual gratification can be viewed as a postmodern extension of Gladney’s search for transcendent meaning, with its emphasis on materialism. Unlike Gladney however there is no sense that he has autonomy, that he could turn off the TV if he so chose. In discussing Clément, Abecassis states that: “To the democratic man, so goes the myth, the great orgasm can be as commonly consumed and experienced as a can of Campbell’s Soup” (2000, p 807). Clément is just as aligned to this version of Warholian consumer culture: his desire to obtain sexual gratification is characterised by the quick-fix, pay-and-obtain terms that consumerism allows. The language used to describe Clément’s erotic experiences does not evoke the notion of radiance or transcendence. Ironically, the one point in the novel where he is depicted using language that evokes ideas of transcendence is one in which he does nothing at all. It is a moment where he is able to simply let go of his sexual craving, a craving that the novel suggests will ultimately lead to despair and a sense of being ‘atomised’:

He had stopped wishing, he had stopped wanting, he was nowhere. Slowly, by degrees his spirit soared to a state of nothingness, the sheer joy that comes of not being part of the

world. For the first time since he was 13, Clément was happy (A, p 154).

Clément's momentary act of letting go of his sexual craving allows him to experience a sensation described in Dedalian terms. The announcement that "his spirit soared" evokes directly the language Dedalus uses to describe the image of his namesake soaring into the sky. "His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he knew was purified in a breath" (P, p 183). This is the closest thing depicted in the course of *Atomised* to Clément's experience of transcendence in modernist terms. It is relevant that it is not the consequence of the fulfillment of the search he undertakes, but rather of letting go of his burdensome desire. For Clément, the search for fulfillment through sexual pleasure is a failed one. For most of the novel he is depicted as existing in a state of agonised craving like the abject creature Count Dracula's (1897) need for blood. Clément himself observes his own sexual pursuit in vampiristic terms: "[He] thought about the Faustian nature of sexual pursuit, its vampirism ..." (A, p 123). Gladney's comparable craving is that for self-aggrandisement of all kinds. He has his own style of vampire-like desperation; he will not suck blood, nor is his sexuality characterised in such terms as Clément's, but he desperately wishes to suck on the pharmaceutical pills to rid him of his fear of death when he sees Mink devouring them in desperation, "sucking them like sweets" (WN, p 308).

While styles of modernist and postmodernist irony alternate on the pages of *White Noise*, in *Atomised* the humour is darker, more self-conscious, more self-referential—in other words, more consistently postmodern in flavour. For instance, at one point Clément is engaged in his typical preoccupation: obtaining the attention of a girl on the street in order to look at her breasts. As a pretext he asks her whether she knows the way to the sweet shop. After a few ineffectual attempts to talk to the girl, he decides to give up because: "It was just too complicated, too late-twentieth-century" (A, p 155). It is thus suggested that Clément sees himself as too closely enmeshed within the complexities of his historical framework to retain the innocence required to keep up his pretext. This brings to mind the double-coding adopted in postmodern culture (Eco 1994, p 67). Furthermore, Clément's jaded worldview, in his position as an aging male aware of his declining use-value in the sexual marketplace, is throughout a source of bleak, self-aware humour. That Clément is a balding, unglamorous civil servant, who is poorly endowed, prompts Abecassis to call him a

“loser” (2000, p 809). It is his very role as loser in the mainstream cultural order that is used to present a scathing critique of contemporary culture that evokes a blend of laughter mingled with disgust.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed a range of formal and thematic attributes associated with postmodernism in the characterisation of Clément in *Atomised*, to compare him with Gladney in *White Noise*. I have shown that Clément’s characterisation both resembles, and yet differs significantly from Gladney’s postmodern tendencies towards consumerism, by taking the idea of consumption to extremes. Clément is both consumer (of sex), and consumed by it. He is himself a consumer and that which is consumed, as he pays for sex in the club scene. While Gladney traverses both modernist and postmodernist characterisation, Clément is an unalloyed postmodern character. He provides an extended enquiry into the nature of the constructed subject, dominated by the mainstream values of his broader culture. I have compared Clément to Gladney, showing that Clément obsessively pursues sexual gratification as opposed to, but comparable to, Gladney’s search for transcendent meaning. Clément’s search is not a matter of ideas associated with language-based systems of meaning, such as do remain in *White Noise*. Clément is disassociated from the language Gladney inherits from formal religion and spirituality. Rather, his search is depicted entirely within the framework of a culture dominated by consumption. In fact, it presents the transformation of the individual itself into a consumer object, on its way to becoming an object transformed by science and industry.

Whereas Dedalus represents a character who splits off from his broader culture as a heroic modernist-artist, and whose interiority often reveals him divided between warring modernist ‘selves’, and Gladney reveals a self split from within, as if split into modernist and postmodernist subjects, each position tussling with the other for domination, in *Atomised* the half-brothers, Djerzinski and Clément, are posed as two halves of the Cartesian split. Djerzinski is all mind and Clément all body, or bodily desire. Just as Gladney raises issues of the subject pursuing desires through consumerism in a world increasingly under the influence of postmodernity, Clément

further plays out the endgame of the postmodern male reacting in conformist ways to the broader culture in order to fulfill hedonistic, rather than idealistic-artistic, desires (Fig 1, PM 4).

It is Djerzinski, Clément's half-brother, who in *Atomised* observes his brother is trapped in a futile lifestyle of chasing "neurotic Lolitas". Djerzinski in *Atomised*, like Siskind in *White Noise*, operates as a mouthpiece for the various dilemmas of postmodern life represented in the novel. In his role of observer/scientist Djerzinski's viewpoint provides a sense of intellectual critique that operates outside of Clément's range.

I have demonstrated that Houellebecq employs postmodern techniques that include multiple framing devices, which give the sense that the text, on one hand is not coherent, but nevertheless operates to create a closed narrative structure into which the subject is firmly welded and depicted as externally created. The area in which Clément is expressed as having agency is in his verbal excess, his use of expletives and other forms of expressions in language. In *White Noise*, Gladney pursues transcendent meaning and finds it within the terms of his own search: in language and signs from his external world. That is, he seeks transcendent meaning from listening to his children speak in their sleep, and finds it there—perhaps not in a modernist sense, wherein he would transform the language, but rather by accepting the consumerist language his society offers. I argue that Clément represents the postmodern end of the trajectory from modernist Dedalus through to Gladney. This sets the ground for the process I undertake in the following chapter: a comparative study of Gladney and the protagonist Jack Blight from my creative project *1984 Did Not Take Place*, a character who undergoes an analogous but contrasting process to Gladney, as an initially modern character merging with postmodernism.

Chapter Seven

Questions of the Subject: Jack Blight and Jack Gladney

This chapter compares the characterisation of Jack Gladney in *White Noise* with that of Jack Blight in my creative project, *1984 Did Not Take Place*. This comparison addresses the role of the 1980s theory wars in both works, and in particular the significance of Baudrillard's theories, since both *White Noise* and *1984 DNTP* are set in the same historical period, and both are influenced by the 1980s theory wars.

Some background to my novel: *1984 DNTP* is a satire that offers three parallel narratives as its core structure. One narrative traces the life of artist Jack Blight, a second follows Arts academic, Daniel Black and a third portrays journalist and Art writer Jillian Trembath. These characters are early exponents of then-new postmodern Art production and criticism, and each manipulates the other for professional and personal gain. Set in Sydney in the year of its title, the novel depicts the insecurities of a post-colonial culture in relation to the reception of theories from the European 'parent' continent. This is explored through the portrayal of a fourth character, visiting French cultural critic Michel Bouffant, whose theory of the "Obsolescence of the Original" parallels Baudrillard's "precession of simulacra" (1983a). Bouffant's visit intersects with each of the character's lives. His theories are adopted, reworked, misinterpreted and mis-applied by this *clique* of emerging mid-80s postmodernists.

The central character Blight initially sees himself in the role of singular artist-genius working in isolation. However, after falling in with a group of postmodern artists and academics, with their help he begins, like Gladney, to 'maneuver for advantage'. Soon he takes up the role of leading player in what they have constructed to be a postmodern Art game, one that proclaims *avant-garde* ideals while being geared towards commercial success. Although such leading players in a postmodern scene are meant to be armed with the latest Theories, Blight does not have the intellectual skills nor the desire to fully engage with postmodern theory, so hires Arts academic Black as his 'personal theorist' to convince the world of his understanding

of contemporary postmodern theory, and its influence on his work. The irony is that the very thing that makes Blight's work of interest to its audience at the time, its theoretical underpinnings, is that which the artist himself could not understand, even if he were to try. (Thus the theoretical underpinnings, in actuality, are not underpinnings at all, but theories that are in fact externally applied after the fact.)

It is not so much Baudrillard/Bouffant's ideas themselves that the novel satirises as *the reception* of his ideas by a sycophantic audience who are oblivious to the fact that he is actually critical of many aspects of the postmodern consumer culture they embrace. Like Baudrillard himself, renowned for his dismissive attitude to Art, particularly in *The Conspiracy of Art* (2005), Bouffant disavows Art; but this does not prevent both Black and Trembath from reworking his theories to promote Blight's artwork. In drawing on the theories of Bouffant to help market Blight's work to both the artworld and the general public, Black plays the role of one of Featherstone's 'intermediaries' (2007, p 40).

Blight, Gladney and the Theory Wars

Both *White Noise* and *1984 DNTP* depict the impact of the 1980s theory wars on their characters. However, *1984 DNTP* is entirely focused on this within a particular, relatively narrow artistic milieu whereas in *White Noise*, the impact of the theory wars is, to some extent, more deeply embedded within the novel.

In *White Noise* the impact of postmodern theory on Gladney's world is as explicit as it is possible without actually being named, through such elements as Siskind's Baudrillardian speeches, the prominent theme of simulacra, and the interactions between academics in Gladney's staff room, which depict the first wave of theorists aligned to postmodern in academia. That postmodernism poses a challenge to the paradigm of modernism is an underlying assumption in the text. *White Noise* positions Gladney as a character whose natural state is modernist. His character initially represents a host of received ideas, from Descartes through to Kant, about the nature of the transcendent subject. However, throughout the novel these are frequently undermined. Gladney's shifts between modernist and postmodernist positions are not articulated in the first person narrative, but are played out through his thoughts, actions

and interactions with other characters. The central theme in *White Noise* then, is the advent of postmodernity and its impact on the subject.

In contrast, the theory wars as cultural conflict is far more prominent and accessible within *1984 DNTP*, and is addressed explicitly by the characters, who are depicted as perceiving themselves as combatants within this conflict. In the world Blight inhabits there is a sharp divide between those insiders who identify as ‘postmodernists’ and those who are external to this world, who are labeled ‘modernists’. When Blight’s friend, Malcolm Tiler, suggests that Blight make work in Astroturf he offers as an incentive that “it will take the piss out of the modernists”. This implies that works in Astroturf would present a challenge to the modernists’ assumptions about Art. When Blight overhears Trudy Smee and her friends criticising him, he responds:

We all exhibit at the same gallery, we are all meant to be supporting one another in our war against the modernists.

These modernists are the hidden enemy of those in Blight’s crowd and a source of frequent mockery and disdain. Modernists are associated by Blight’s peers with all things dull, anachronistic and lacking in intellectual grit. Blight’s gallery director, Vivian Rubin, dismisses modernist critics, whom she equates with the “tedious worship” of “painters of eucalypt trees and those tiresome Australian myths”.

Blight and Gladney: Manoeuvres Towards Postmodernism

Both Blight and Gladney, on coming into contact with postmodern ideas, adopt styles of posturing that challenge modernist authenticity with regard to Trilling’s notions of sincerity. To address his “feeble presentation of self” Gladney wears dark glasses he doesn’t need, dons an academic gown on campus, and adds initials to his name for gravitas’ sake, thus conforming to the pressure to focus on strategies associated with surface appearance and the marketing of his persona. Blight hires a personal theorist to suggest to the public that he is versed in postmodern theory when he is not. Thematically then, Blight and Gladney are similar, but they can be differentiated by

the techniques employed in their depiction, in respect of their alignment with modernism and postmodernism.

Blight, like Gladney, operates as a character caught in a culture in transition between modernism and postmodernism. The most dramatic contrast between the two characters is that Blight's relationship to modernism is not associated with transcendence. Unlike Dedalus and Gladney, Blight is not driven by the need to make sense of the world on the level of 'meaning' or 'truth'. Unlike Dedalus, he does not listen to, contemplate, and transform the language he inherits; nor does he reflect on the impact language has upon him, as does Gladney. Rather than being motivated by the desire for meaning from his world, Blight is instead motivated by the possibility of commercial success, material gain and hedonistic pleasure. In this respect he is more closely related to Houellebecq's postmodern Clément. Since Gladney also has some postmodern elements, particularly in relation to consumerism, some meaningful comparisons of these characters can be made in relation to this theme.

Blight is a more self-conscious operator in respect of postmodernism than is Gladney. Faced with the choice to adopt postmodern theory, he consciously takes steps to do so for the sake of his career. As I have argued, Gladney unconsciously adopts Siskind's theory, by enacting the messages Siskind's words articulate. It as if Gladney absorbs these ideas wholesale, in the same way Baudrillard talks of the subject in the *Ecstasy of Communication*, like a pure screen (1983b, p 127). In contrast Blight, by adopting Black as his personal theorist, is represented as a more knowingly calculating operator than Gladney in relation to postmodern theory.

Blight's relation to modernism and postmodernism is entwined with culturally determined views of how Art is created and what function the artist plays in society. Early in the novel, having suffered a humiliation one evening, Blight has an idea for an artwork to express his unhappy state:

If I was a painter from those days of old, when artists were encouraged to express themselves through quantities of heavy paint, I would create a work titled *Alone, Dejected, On Brown Velour* in which a forlorn character—with a harrowed face—emerges from a sea of brownish bilge. This flash of inspiration was a hopeful sign. It reminded Jack that he did, indeed, have genius lurking inside him. He then recalled that he was not a painter from those days of old, but was blessed to be living in the progressive 80s. He felt it his duty to dump this outmoded idea, based on catharsis and other outdated indulgences, and face reality.

In the above passage, the modes Blight imagines himself working in, figurative painting and the use of thick paint, are associated with modernist traditions such as Expressionism, with its emphasis on self expression and ‘authenticity’. In this way he operates as a modernist Art *cliché*. Blight has been trained, in many respects, to operate as a modernist artist, someone who considers himself as a visual artist, as a genius-working-in-isolation. However at this point in the novel, thanks to his association with postmodernism, he is driven to re-evaluate. However, he is not filled with enthusiasm for the postmodern project—he simply wants to fit in to the new cultural order. One of the factors that determines whether a work is postmodern or not is that it offers an appropriately postmodern ironic stance, rather than the sense of earnestness that his imagined painting has conjured. In practice, it also requires a catalogue essay drawing on postmodern theory to accompany the work. Blight’s artwork of Astroturf is made accessible to the public through Black’s theoretical interpretations of contemporary French theorists. Furthermore, Blight’s public image is promoted through Trembath, the newspaper arts writer. Thus, while Gladney absorbs postmodern theory unconsciously, Blight knows when he is being a modernist, and consciously works towards being a postmodernist.

Blight is increasingly aligned to the notion of postmodern art-making as a form that is not created in isolation by the artist as singular genius, but within a system of networks. While Blight is an artist of his time, just as Dedalus is of his, when it comes to notions of the artist-hero, Blight is depicted as functioning as someone who pushes his persona, as well as his art, as a commodity in the contemporary art market. In his relation to postmodern consumer culture, as a subject he is again more closely aligned to the postmodern characterisation of Clément, than to the modernist Dedalus.

Like Clément in *Atomised*, Blight is positioned as a fabrication in the historical context of 1980s figures and places. Thus, to some extent he is embedded in a characteristic style of postmodern narrative (discussed in Chapter Six). In *1984 DNTP*, historically real figures like Derrida and Foucault are cited side by side with the fabricated Bouffant and Blight. However, Blight is not depicted entirely as a subject as construct, but rather he possesses a singular subject’s consciousness throughout the novel. Whereas at times Gladney’s conformity towards postmodernism is represented as aligning to a constructed self as pure screen or switching centre proposed by Baudrillard (1983b, p 127) or moving towards Lyotard’s self as a nodal point in a

system of networks. Nevertheless Blight and Gladney are both characters who are divided between modernism and postmodernism. Both typify the 1980s in their different ways, in the context of a culture in the process of dramatic change. The pressures associated with the 1980s theory wars significantly shape both novels, and the properties of the protagonists within them, and in differing ways, both characters are depicted as maneuvering for advantage when coming into contact with postmodern theory.

Conclusion

The characterisation of Blight in *1984 DNTP*, like that of Gladney in *White Noise*, is suggestive of the subject's development in relation to ideas associated with modernist and postmodern literary representation that reflected the debates instigated by the theory wars of the 1980s. Blight, like Gladney, represents a subject marked by its relationship to this period of intellectual ferment and state of transition. While this may suggest that both characters are thus merely 'products of their times', as social constructs, clearly this is not the case, for both characters do not eschew practices of the singular subject in such ways as would align them with unequivocally postmodern representation.

While Gladney's search for transcendent meaning operates as a response to *Portrait*, *1984 DNTP* is reminiscent of *Portrait* in a different sense since Blight's journey is also that of the emerging artist who seeks to hone his practice through engagement with theory. Bligh however, in comparison to Dedalus' earnestness, has a very different relationship to theory, due to the duel between modernist and postmodern paradigms. Yet the modernist preoccupation with transcendent meaning, so prominent in *Portrait*, is absent in Blight's case. Both Gladney and Blight are subject to the pressures of the theory wars, but the ways in which they approach the urge to "manoeuvre for advantage" are significantly different.

Thesis Conclusion

My interest in *White Noise* firstly stems from my experience as a professional writer in the 1980s, an era of cultural transformation in which postmodern theory played a significant role. It was also fuelled by having noted how postmodernism came to be heavily embedded in the institutional framework of global academic culture, which increasingly standardises as it commodifies. I note that Australian high school students have been learning ‘postmodern theory’ by rote for examination purposes, which seems contrary to the ‘radical’ and emancipatory impulse of earlier postmodernism. As Hutcheon (2002, epilogue) suggests, by the time you have a book called *Postmodernism for Beginners* (1995) the ‘radical’ movement she had helped to articulate in its early years has transformed, and has been absorbed into the mainstream.

Unlike *White Noise*, published contemporaneously with the era it represented, my novel *1984 Did Not Take Place* offers a portrait of the 1980s written considerably later. In hindsight, it is possible to consider postmodernism’s impact in the arts at a remove. For example, it has allowed for a broadening of views and ideas, particularly in relation to notions of the subject. Reassessment of the subject has not only led to the non-humanist strains of thought I address in this thesis, but to the expansion of humanist fields such as post-colonialism and gender studies. As Kellner puts it:

The canons of white male European culture have been challenged and a wide range of new voices and individuals have been encountered. In addition, the perspectives of oppressed groups present critical insights into mainstream culture, allowing us to see oppressive elements that we might overlook from our more privileged perspectives (1995, p 96).

Yet *1984 Did Not Take Place*, like *White Noise*, focuses on the problematic contradictions between early postmodernism theory and its relation to consumer culture. As noted earlier, postmodern fiction operates at once as critical of, and yet complicitous with, both humanist ideology and mass consumerism (Hutcheon 1988, p 4).

I have shown that Gladney, as the protagonist in *White Noise*, represents a subject that vacillates between notions of the modernist authentic self-creating subject, and the postmodern textually created, de-centred subject. That Gladney's character can be seen to represent the debates that took place in the mid-80s between modernism and postmodernism, particularly highlighting ideas about what constitutes the subject, has not been addressed in the scholarship to date. By drawing on Wilcox's 1991 essay, in which he claimed that Gladney is a modernist displaced in a postmodern world, I argue that Gladney does indeed evoke modernism, but that he does not represent properties associated with modernism consistently throughout the novel. The ways in which he is portrayed as a modernist are convincing on one level, and they include the sense that he is a living person, of flesh and blood, with feelings of deep anguish and despair about his finite mortality. The sense that he seeks meaning from his universe of a profound nature adds to this impression. He is depicted in fact in a structure that is similar to that established in a range of modernist texts, where the drive towards the culminating visionary moment creates the dramatic tension. However, I suggest that his modernism is compromised by his shifts towards postmodern properties in many places in the novel.

My study helps to consolidate existing scholarship that argues *White Noise* is a novel that addresses many of the concerns Baudrillard voiced in the period: about the perils of the mass media, consumerism, and what he considered to be the crushing system of late stage capitalism, which devoured its critics. Yet, while DeLillo shares many of these concerns, such as the pressures on the culture, and its inhabitants, from the capitalist machine in the era of postmodernity, his vision, it has been noted, is less stark than Baudrillard's when it comes to notions of the subject. DeLillo's considerable achievement in *White Noise* is that he has created a text which, while acknowledging that advertising and the mass media can infiltrate the unconscious of the subject, there is still room for the possibility that the subject has access to some form of original, authentic inner self, if only that subject can find the power to turn away from the seductions of the mainstream media.

This thesis has investigated the question: What does *White Noise* say about 'the subject' as a theoretical concern in the 1980s period? As well as the related query: How can we account for Gladney's ambivalent and oscillating subjectivity? This has led to several findings: I demonstrate that Gladney vacillates between modernism and

postmodernism, which can be read as a reflection of the heightened debates relating to the 1980s theory wars, a phenomenon contemporaneous with the novel's release in 1985. By then, Baudrillard had published his work on the "precession of simulacra" (1983a), and related preoccupations are present in *White Noise*. Furthermore, *White Noise* reveals in Gladney a character who faces a culture of change with strategic pragmatism. This characterisation gives some sense of the trends of the times towards yuppiefication, mass consumption and the 'greed is good' motto espoused by Gordon Gekko in Oliver Stone's film *Wall Street* (Stone and Stanley Weiser 2009).

These findings about Gladney can be considered significant in the light of the novel's prominent role in the canon as a work that is popular on university reading lists for courses on postmodernism. The novel can be read as a bridging text between the two cultural paradigms of canonical modernism and the canonical postmodern novel. In this thesis I have compared Gladney's character to that of Dedalus from *Portrait*, using Dedalus to represent a canonical modernist with an authentic singular self, separate from the herd, occupying the role of artist hero, able to transform the base material from the world around him into the 'truths' that underlie what Woolf calls "life itself" (1919). In other words, he is aligned to the notion that the subject is the sole arbiter of meaning: a transcendent subject.

A close comparative analysis of passages from *Portrait* and *Stephen Hero* against *White Noise*, and in particular the scene of Steffie's Utterance (*WN*, p 135) demonstrates that Gladney is in fact depicted only in part as a transcendent subject. This analysis demonstrates that Gladney's oscillation between modernism and postmodernism is particularly apparent in relation to this notion of the subject as transcendent. Gladney's epiphomercial is in part modernist in nature, despite being aligned with the commercial world of mass media. The scene is one of many in the novel that demonstrates that Gladney, a subject under the pressure of the polarizing debates of the theory wars enlists modernist notions in one instance and postmodernist ones in the next.

In this thesis I have also compared Gladney's postmodern tendencies towards consumerism with those of the Bruno Clément from *Atomised*. While Gladney traverses modernist and postmodernist characterisation, I demonstrate that Clément is an unalloyed postmodern character. He is an extended illustration of the constructed self dominated by the mainstream values of the broader culture. Clément's life search

is undertaken in pursuit of personal pleasure and does not evoke ideas associated with language-based systems of meaning, as do the life searches of both protagonists in *Portrait* and *White Noise*. I have discussed also the ways in which Houellebecq uses specific postmodern techniques, including multiple framing devices, which give the sense that the text is not unified but nevertheless offers a closed narrative structure into which the subject is firmly welded. Clément is thus depicted as externally created, as opposed to self-created.

This thesis has also involved investigating Gladney's conformist and mercenary tendencies, which align him in several key ways with postmodernism as it merges with consumerism, and with other themes that compromise his modernist-as-lone-hero characterisation. While Gladney displays thinking that is characterised by media-influenced typification, unlike the argument proposed by Baudrillard's theories, his characterisation in this novel does not close down the possibility that he continues to have access to authenticity, self-creation and transcendence. In this open-ended novel, the reader may still consider that in order to access agency it is up to a character like Gladney to find it in himself to turn off the TV set. Unlike *White Noise*, which does not name postmodernism, but reveals its strong impact on the subject in the era it depicts, my own novel offers a more openly defined exploration of this topic. It has a two-fold relation to its portrayal of postmodernism as an emerging movement in the 1980s. By focusing on the oscillating nature of the subject in *White Noise* typified by Gladney's relation to canonical modernism and postmodern subject positions, it operates as a novel that represents an era in the throes of a transition from modernism to postmodernism as cultural movements.

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1984 Did Not Take Place

Anne Howell

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With his genius in his eyes, his manners on his lips, his long career behind him and his honours and rewards all round, the great artist, in the course of a single sustained look and a few words of delight at receiving him, affected our friend as a dazzling prodigy of type.

—Henry James, *The Ambassadors*.

Chapter 1

Jack Blight's contours had molded into the shabby couch in his Darlington flat, where he was smoking and thinking about life's indignities, like the act of sitting on that very couch, when other more successful artists were, no doubt, enjoying slicker surfaces. Leather, suede or vinyl in silver, red or black, anything beat brown velour. Although he loathed it on one level, he felt at one with his brown couch. It symbolised a failure in his sense of *décor*, and evoked another of his glaring failures, his lack of success with the opposite sex, an example of which had occurred less than an hour earlier. Since the incident, his plan had been to smoke two packs of Camels and not dwell on it. Even while his body was committed to the smoking part of the plan, his mind defied him. He kept thinking back to that moment when Isabel, his downstairs neighbour, a woman of vague, exotic heritage—with attractive dark eyes—had stormed out.

She had come up to his flat for the first time to see his paintings. As the smoke rose in wisps around him, Jack wondered why she had left before he'd had a chance to explain the principles behind his work. Women were perplexing. Prior to her visit, she'd seemed so keen to find out about his practice. He took a deep drag. The visit had started off smoothly. He had led Isabel into this very room, a small space certainly, but with his latest work enhancing the ambiance, it was an interesting interior, he felt. He had gestured toward the row of five canvasses, at which he now gazed glumly. They were in various stages of completion, propped up on chairs and milk crates, exuding the pungent smell of oils. The closest one was finished.

"I call them my *Black Goddess* series," he announced, and was about to launch into his speech explaining where he'd found the originals, and the ideas that underpinned them, when Isabel had stammered: "How ... how ... could you?" looked at him with flashing eyes, grabbed her things and walked out, slamming the door behind her.

With the echo of slamming door in his ears, Jack had staggered to the couch, and was still sitting there some three quarters of an hour and eleven Camels later. If I was a painter from those days of old, when artists were encouraged to express themselves through quantities of heavy paint, I would create a work titled *Alone, Dejected, On Brown Velour* in which a forlorn character—with a harrowed face—emerges from a sea of brownish bilge. This flash of inspiration was a hopeful sign. It reminded Jack that he did, indeed, have genius lurking inside him. However, he then recalled that he was not a painter from those days of old, but was blessed to be living in the progressive 1980s. He felt it his duty to dump this

outmoded idea, based on catharsis and other outdated indulgences, and face reality. Reality consisted of the silence in which the subjects of his works, glistening in oils, were staring out at him reproachfully, ignored and unexplained. He felt a rising sense of shame. Even though Isabel was merely one of a number of attractive women he fancied about the place, and not an artist such as he, instead the type committed to a regular person's life, some dull office job, Jack had thought the undelivered speech was going to lead to other things.

It had been two years and three months since he'd experienced anything he did or said, in relation to the opposite sex, leading to other things. For Jack, who considered himself, at 28, a young man in his prime, two years and three months was a very long time. Besides, artists were supposed to have the power to lure women into their beds with their talent. As anyone could see from his *Black Goddesses*, even those not finished yet, he had plenty of that. He gazed proudly at his works, each a little different from the next, the subjects all harking, he imagined, from the same charming little village in some uninhabitable place. They were not simply any old modernist studies of the female form, they were subtly and stylishly handled. Furthermore, the subjects' skin was not much lighter than the background, which made them tonal studies on the theme of black, rather than figurative works, he felt. Yet considering all this, why had things gone so terribly wrong with Isabel?

Jack stubbed out his cigarette and lit another. Smoking was good. You could count on smoking, whereas the object of his desire was not reliable. Exactly why she had left in such a huff was beyond him. Even though she lived downstairs, which was not that far away, Jack's experience with women, what little he had, told him she was not likely to communicate with him again. He had been running into Isabel for six months on the stairs before he decided to brave the 'come and see my etchings' cliché, and ask her to come upstairs to see his work. At the time, her dark eyes had lit up.

"Oh, you are an artist? I am very fond of the fine arts," she'd said in her charming accent. Things back then had seemed so promising. Yet here he was alone again. He came back to the present, his fingers burning on a butt. He stubbed it out. Who was Isabel anyway? Just someone from the lower floors. Better stop mooning and get back to what counts. He painted feverishly into the night, and for several days following. He didn't leave the flat except at such an hour that insured he wasn't likely to run into Isabel. Occasionally, he wondered what she was doing at this time or that, among the rooms of Flat 3 below. Yet if his mind wandered so he chided himself, and set his mind back to the superior business of painting.

Chapter 2

Jack watched the ball head across the green, roll up to the hole, teeter unnervingly on its edge, and drop in.

“Yes!” he cried with victory in his voice.

“Beautiful shot, mate, beautiful shot,” said his friend and fellow artist, Malcolm Tiler, slapping him on the back. Jack, known to develop a thirst on such occasions spoke his mind.

“What about another beer?” An hour earlier Malcolm had turned up on Jack’s door step wearing checkered pants and a suspiciously sporty cap. Just as Jack feared, Malcolm invited him to brave the great outdoors.

“Need to keep up my mystique and that means not aligning with the activities of fit and healthy types,” he pronounced. Malcolm had a swift response.

“Things have changed. No longer do artists have to avoid sport. Lyotard stresses the role of play and games. Not only Lyotard, in fact Derrida says that....”

“Can’t imagine either out in the Australian sun chasing a ball around a green,” interrupted Jack.

“Perhaps not, but their ideas at least allow for the concept of play to be taken seriously, very seriously ... I suggest we hit the course, brought an Esky chock to the brim with ale. Great way to shed any remnants of modernist angst.”

They found themselves, celebrating Jack’s hole-in-one by strolling to the Esky for refreshments. They sauntered off to the next hole, and the one after that lugging their Esky with them. However, compared to Jack’s hole-in-one nothing from then on, by way of performance on the green, came even close.

This didn’t ruin their afternoon. There was always plenty to talk about when one is working in the contemporary arts. Malcolm was the more prolific talker of the pair, especially well versed in matters artistic and cultural. Mostly he was insightful, knew a good deal about the French theorists, though he could get somewhat whimsical at times, especially when he’d had a few. There was a time and place, Jack felt, for talk, even of art. However, the time and place was not when he was concentrating on his final shot through which he was determined to make a comeback. So, staring with full attention on his ball, Jack took aim.

“It strikes me there’s something profound about Astroturf,” Malcolm said, with that recognisable air of whimsy in his tone, “something redolent of the times that opens it up to possibilities as a medium.” Jack lifted his gaze to scowl.

“What the hell are you on about?”

“Astroturf,” Malcolm said, “It’s worth thinking about exploring.”

Malcolm was evidently drunker than he looked.

“What for?” Though it may sound as if he was trying to find out, Jack didn’t really want to know. It was hot, his shirt was sticking to his back, his hair was

plastered to his scalp, and he wanted to pull off this final shot with panache. When he took aim Malcolm's voice again broken his concentration.

"In the sense that Astroturf is rife with creative possibilities."

Jack straightened up and cast his gaze over the surface on which they stood. He'd been traipsing on the mini putt putt course for some time without considering the nature of the substance underfoot.

"Astroturf's ridiculous," he muttered, before returning to the demands of his shot.

"No, mate, I beg to differ," Malcolm's tone was vehement, "Astroturf is many things, but not ridiculous. It works on several complex levels, being both symbolic and emblematic of our postmodern age."

Jack glared at him in such a way as to let him know he was being tedious, utterly so, not to mention obstructive. Jack was trying to wrap up the game for heaven's sake. Even his most disapproving look didn't quell the man.

"If I were a painter, and had come to realise the time was ripe to make a statement about the death of painting—to usher in a more radical art form—you know what I'd do?"

In exasperation, Jack threw down his club.

"I do not think the time is ripe to announce the death of painting, no matter what anyone says. Plus seeing as you are *not* a painter, were I to consider painting at its end and find myself at a loss, why should I turn to you for advice?"

Malcolm's work involved the devouring, piece by piece, of Four Wheel Drives. He ate each car as a discreet performance piece, which was then added to a series he had been developing with the aid of a modest Australia Council grant. Each vehicle that he ate, he did in stages, which were documented on video with the accompaniment of an ambient soundtrack, often featuring cello.

"Just because I have my performance practice doesn't stop me from having ideas for artworks in other mediums. It's about working conceptually, as you know."

Jack stared out across the green; stared but didn't see. To an onlooker he might have appeared calm, but he was instead filled with malcontent. Jack was well aware that Malcolm had inventive ideas for artworks all the time. Meanwhile he—who was brilliant as a painter, with all the requisite technical skills—struggled to have an idea of his own. He couldn't even get ideas for paintings, let alone venture into other fields. It wasn't easy being a conceptual artist, without having concepts at one's fingertips, let alone having Malcolm as a friend to show one up. Jack recovered his club and took his former pose, glowering at the ball, willing it to do exactly what he desired. He aimed and took his shot. The ball glanced off the club at an odd angle, so that after successfully passing the windmill it dropped into the pond in which a cluster of yellow plastic ducks bobbed.

"Great! Those bastard ducks have snared my ball!" muttered Jack.

“Never mind that, Jack. Look at all this Astroturf around you. It’s inspirational!” Malcolm had started to rant loudly, which was a worry not only because other players were now staring, but it could attract the attention of a putt putt official, Jack felt.

“Tone it down, Mal,” said Jack.

Malcolm was not one to tone himself down, not when he was on a roll, and not when his roll was about an idea for art. Instead he adopted an exalted expression and began to speculate some more about the merits of Astroturf. Jack looked away to scan the green, pretending he couldn’t hear. His mind filled with irritable thoughts. For despite his big moment at the game’s commencement, Jack was failing in the main. Failing at a mini sport, did not make him feel like a mini failure, quite the contrary. Nearby, Malcolm, oblivious to Jack’s disgruntlement, continued with his rant in an even louder voice.

“Astroturf solves many of the problems posed by actual grass. It isn’t threatened by insects or grubs, nor suffers from browning or weeds. You can put away the sprinkler and the Victa mower. What’s more it’s divinely mass-produced. Who needs the natural stuff when the corporation can dish up Astroturf in perfect rolls? All in all, it could operate as a symbol of our consumer age. A symbol to both celebrate and critique.”

Jack, through gritted teeth told him to shut up, a demand to which Malcolm responded by raising his voice another notch.

“If I was a painter, I’d buy up quantities of Astroturf. I’d throw away my paints, position the stuff directly on my stretchers, make it work as structure and content both. Think Jack, art made of perfect slabs of fake grass. Your ideal contemporary landscape. Take the piss out of the modernists.”

People nearby were shaking their heads, and muttering in Malcolm’s direction. Luckily no officials seemed to be nearby.

“Malcolm give it up!” said Jack. When that didn’t work, Jack decided to tackle the man. After a bit of a tussle, Jack managed to haul him to the ground. Once earthed, he simmered down. Leaving him to sober up, Jack trudged off to rescue his ball from the clutches of the ducks.

On his way back, he began puffing. Only 28 years of age, a young man in his prime, and here he was short of bloody breath, it was depressing. I must give up the ciggies, I really must, he muttered under his breath. He patted the pack of Camels in his shirt pocket. When he returned he found Malcolm, completely out to it, slumped by the Esky. Jack sat down next to the unconscious man and lit up. An afternoon of sport can take it out of a bloke, he thought.

OOO

It had been two weeks since the incident with Isabel and Jack was finally stacking four of his *Black Goddesses* in the back of Malcolm's ute. They set off for Rubin's Contemporary Art Space, situated in a *cul-de-sac* in Paddington, at which they were participating in a group show. For Jack, Malcolm's poncey taste in music meant contending with *Simple Minds* on the cassette deck up full blast, again. The show at Rubin's was titled *White on White: Malevich Revisited* and would be highly conceptual in nature, Malcolm had let it be clear on inviting Jack to apply. Jack was new to the idea of a conceptual gallery, the complexities of which Malcolm had been introducing him to over the last few months.

"Thanks to Malevich's white period it's been a great excuse to dredge up some of my old footage from the late 70s," said Malcolm.

His piece for this show was a film of a white Four Wheel Drive devouring he'd done at Thredbo in '79.

"It's called *Devouring White Vehicle in Snowfall*, which is due for a renaming."

"Yes," mused Jack, "Far too dated and Zen."

They both mulled over this at first, as Mal negotiated Paddington's backstreets and *Simple Minds* continued to irritate Jack. The tossing of ideas around proved productive.

"How about *Snow White's Revenge*," offered Jack, flicking ash out the window.

"Hmmm. Or *Deconstruction: White Zone*?" proposed Malcolm.

"Hey, that's good!"

Once arrived at the ivy-choked premises in question, after setting up his equipment, Malcolm headed off. Jack was hanging the second *Black Goddess* when he was interrupted by a woman, or rather an unprepossessing feminist, he vaguely recalled answered to the name of Trudy Smee.

"Hello Jack. Well, good old fashioned painting I see?" she said, somewhat snidely, it seemed to Jack.

An installation artist, she wore black spiky hair, red lipstick, biker boots and a studded belt above tight black jeans. She was not in fact merely a regular feminist, but a post-Lacanian feminist Malcolm had told him once. Jack knew that Lacan was one of the French theorists on the rise, one of the many theorists everyone was always rabbiting on about these days. Yet why gangs of feminists such as Trudy Smee had aligned with him remained a mystery to Jack.

As they stood side by side, Jack realised that at her diminutive height Trudy Smee was at eye-level with the breasts of *Black Goddess IV*, and that she had placed one staunch hand on her hip, and was sneering at the pair. Jack had found the original painting gathering dust in the back of a Glebe op shop. It was of an Oriental woman with blue skin on a velvet background. Everyone knew that kitsch stuff, had had a laugh at it at some point. Naturally he was the one to see its potential, snatch up the work gathering dust, copy it, and, in this case, not

merely cleverly in the usual sense, but had ironically converted the colours into shades of black. His rendition involved the subject's skin being barely discernible from the imitation black velvet of the background. Trudy suddenly moved a few steps forward to stare at *Goddess IV* close up, then pulled back again, all with the same sneer having settled on her face.

Jack recalled that in a recent show, she had used her own and her friends' urine, swathes of pubic hair, saliva and toenail clippings. He couldn't get his head around that sort of thing, but didn't say as much aloud, not even to Malcolm. She had a good name as an installation artist, and that counted for a lot. Besides, artists exploring new terrain like him were not supposed to be easily repulsed.

"So you've subverted the white-on-white theme. Very cute, Jack. Very cute," she finally said dryly.

Jack puffed out his chest, and rocked on his toes.

"Yes. I felt it was the most radical way to evoke notions of the Other."

You could, Jack had found, insert the phrase 'the Other' into almost any sentence about your work and it would be well received.

"That said, what is your position on the subject matter?" she asked, in an unpleasantly accusing tone. Jack moved his considerable weight from one foot to the other. His mind began to race. There was obviously something specific Trudy Smee wanted from his answer. People like her were always trying to get a man like him to divulge his theoretical position on his work. It was tiresome. He stared into the luscious lips of *Black Goddess IV* and frowned.

"You know, Trudy, I'm drawing critically on so many things.... So very many ...err ... things."

"Go on, Jack," she said. "Please feel free to enlighten me about these things on which you critically draw."

"Ah, yes. By engaging with this wonderful historical material from the 60s, I'm, err, well, you know, I'm breaking new ground ..."

Jack knew this wouldn't suffice. For the life of him he couldn't remember the term he was supposed to use at this critical point in time. The mandatory, stylish term everyone else used to describe his copying technique had completely escaped him.

"I can see you're working in *appropriation*..." she said, and there it was! Thank God!

"Yes *appropriation*, exactly," he said, in his deepest voice.

"Yet why *the exoticising* of the female subject? How do you validate that move?"

Jack was overcome with resentment towards that spiky hair of Trudy Smee, not to mention her bright red lips, the biker boots and the studded belt she wore. Why was a feminist, post-Lacanian or otherwise, wearing this ostentatious outfit? Why were her lips painted in such a bright red? Why wasn't she without a shred of

make-up in some sort of old hessian sack? What right did she have to come over to his private corner of the gallery, and demand he cough up a position on his work?

“Well, I’m glad you asked me that, Trudy. Yes I am. Because it’s not ... it’s not just your usual case of *appropriation* I’m undertaking here”

Jack’s mind was racing to remember something an Institute man he had met recently, at his local, had said. It had been quite an accidental meeting. Jack had just finished his black paintings, and had happened to mention to this fellow he was an artist. The Institute man had asked him about his work with unusual interest. Jack had started describing the *Black Goddesses*, and the fellow had used one of those snappy terms that people use these days, a term that would be just the thing to drop into the conversation now, Jack felt, if only he could remember it. That’s right! The fellow had jotted it down on a coaster for him. Could he still have it on him? Considering he only owned two pairs of trousers, it was possible. Jack began fumbling in his right pocket, then in his left. Trudy Smee was shooting daggers at him by now. He’d better say something soon. His fingers stumbled onto a damp, crumpled item deep inside his pocket. He surreptitiously removed it, and squinted at its surface, where there was indeed a discernible scrawl.

“Well, you see Trudy, I’m dealing here with *the postcolonial*, you know, considering its theoretical implications.”

“I see. The *postcolonial*, of course. Well, then, best be getting back to my installation,” she said in a peeved tone, before striding off in her clunking biker boots.

Jack turned back to his *Goddesses*, those on the wall and those still waiting to be hung, and commended himself on protecting them from the critical gaze of Trudy Smee. He was becoming aware that in this crowd it was important your peers thought highly of your work, and that to do so, they needed you to substantiate your moves verbally, even to the post-Lacanian feminists on the scene. He went back to work on the hanging. Finally he was done, and stood back to review the result. How good the paintings looked in his special gallery corner, each Goddess hanging proudly in place, and in total, they contrasted beautifully with the white walls. He felt a flush of superiority, thinking of all the others in the show who hadn’t thought of such an *ironic* approach. On his way out, Jack paused at Trudy Smee’s installation. It was positioned right near the entrance, on the upper landing, beside the exhibition title. Nearby a group of Trudy Smee’s look-alike friends were lolling like truanting schoolgirls. The work itself, Jack noted on inspection, was housed in a small bookcase of a thing painted white. Jack found himself peering into rows of interesting-looking bottles filled with a nougat-like substance. He was partial to nougat, and other sweet and sticky

foodstuffs, anything really one could consider a desert. He felt a little hungry at the thought. Trudy Smee sidled up.

“Well Jack, glad you stopped by. I’m exploring putrefaction as a symbol of the decay inherent in late stage Capitalism. These vessels are each filled with pus, and associated fluids, from failed hysterectomies the material has been taken straight from the waste units of some of Sydney’s most notorious hospitals for abuses to women. So, as you can see, I’m combining my socio-politico concerns with notions of *the abject*.”

“Very interesting... ah ...work, better be off,” Jack said in a nauseated voice, and stumbled out the doors. A few stars had come out, the air was fresh. It was a relief to be outside, away from notions of *the abject*. That aside, it had been a long and productive day. Jack would have a cigarette before setting off. He sat by the gallery doors and lit up. He could hear the sound of voices emanating from inside. He was blowing some very fine smoke rings as he tuned into a female voice:

“Some of the male artists in the movement, they can talk the talk, but nothing’s changed. They’re as sexist as they’ve ever been.”

Not too concerned, as one often heard that sort of gripe, Jack watched his languid smoke ring dissolve against the evening sky. I must get moving, he thought. Then another voice issued forth, which he recognised as Trudy Smee’s.

“I just had a look at Jack Blight’s work. Fuck me, it’s sexist and racist. He is regurgitating all the usual stereotypes, but according to him it’s done in the name of *postcolonialism*, so that’s okay.”

This was followed by what seemed to be the conspiratorial sounds of a lynch mob gathering. Jack leapt to his feet and with ash flying, scurried off into the dark.

OOO

Determined to put as much distance between him and Rubin’s as he could, Jack was soon puffing like a coal train up familiar Paddington streets. He had, through force of habit, taken the long route home. He was heading for Oxford Street, a journey he usually took at a leisurely pace. Now he dashed past the art supplies shop, at which he usually lingered dreaming of purchases he couldn’t afford. He didn’t pause to take a breath even when the garlicky aroma emanated from *Donatella’s*, the most popular restaurant on the block. As he rushed along past hosts of faceless strangers, a churlish voice berated him from within. Who do they think they are, ripping into a man like that behind his back? Just because they’re feminists ... We all exhibit at the same gallery, we are all meant to be supporting one another in our war against the modernists. They may be post-

Lacanian, but they are not meant to form a little private club and tear an innocent man apart.

While heading for Taylor Square, a stitch forced him to pause, his thoughts rattling on. How dare that lot accuse me, and my paintings, of being steeped in racist and sexist notions? How dare they say I'm a regurgitator of stereotypes! I may be many things, but a regurgitator I am not! As he crossed the street he reminded himself that those women had missed the point of his work. There is an abundance of people, even those versed in postmodernism it seemed, who can't tell when a man is critiquing a thing and when he is not. It evidently takes a certain sort of intelligence, a certain level of art literacy and serious depth, for someone to realise that my *Black Goddesses* are not what they seem.

He passed a group of men in tight-shirts and shorts, a very precious lot he noted, not that he was homophobic or anything. Even after putting behind him the croissant shop, with its buttery wares in the window, he kept up his pace until he arrived at the darkened doors of a nightclub in which people danced all hours to the latest New Romantic hits. While he might have, on any other occasion, started an internal diatribe about fashion, with its demand for men to flit about in shirts with puffy sleeves and lavishings of hair gel, he was too preoccupied for that. While postmodernism is all about irony, the post-Lacanian feminists are not good at getting the joke. I suppose they're too busy thinking about the bastardry of men, fostering all that old-fashioned hatred, not to mention rage. Surely our movement is about dropping all that angst. If it's on about anything, the postmodern condition is about giving oneself permission to lighten up.

All this brisk walking was taking its toll. Jack had an ache in his ribs, which reminded him he could do with a cigarette. He paused, lit up and resumed his journey. He finally arrived at the gritty streets of Darlington. Soon he was heading towards the ugly little brown block he so loved. He wondered if Isabel was in. He had not thought of her for weeks. Now that he had, the most peculiar idea struck him in relation to her: what if the false conclusions reached by the post-Lacanian feminists about his paintings could have something to do with Isabel's swift exit from his life? Had she mistaken him as a common regurgitator of ideas? In a superficial sense, Isabel, in appearance, was not dissimilar, he supposed, to some of the types of women represented in his *Black Goddess* series, particularly *Goddess III*, which happened to be a representation of a smiling young native girl in the nude. Yes, maybe Isabel had missed *the irony*. With heart beating, Jack headed for his apartment block. He needed to knock on the door of flat no. 3. He needed to explain a thing or two about postmodern irony to its inhabitant. On reaching the front step, he saw a 'To Let' sign in the window.

OOO

After a bus ride and a hike across some inner city streets, Jack arrived at the Chippendale warehouse, perhaps squalid to some, but glamorous by many an artist's standards.

"Jack, what's up?" asked Malcolm, on finding Jack, the colour drained from his face, on his front step.

They picked through the car parts that littered the place and as Jack arranged his bulk on a red car seat couch, Malcolm fetched them beer. He crouched on the floor to tinker with a hubcap, in preparation for its next ritualistic devouring. Jack was in a pensive mood.

"You know how sensitively I've approached my *Goddesses* ... now I find people are looking at them with cynical, judging eyes, misinterpreting my motives."

"Which people?" asked Malcolm.

"Women, actually. Sometimes the very women I want to seduce, and sometimes those like Trudy Smee."

"Why would women misread them? Your *Goddesses* are brilliant."

"That may be the case, but it seems to me I might never get a woman interested in me if I continue with works along these lines." Jack paused, then added, "Besides they're unlikely to ever sell."

Malcolm, spanner in hand, looked up and burst out laughing, so the spanner rocked.

"Sell! Nothing we do sells. Doesn't now, won't in the future. It's too radical for the market."

"True. But" Jack paused for a moment, lost in thought, "While I may be committed to working on the cutting edge, you know, challenging the conventions of art as we know it ...well, the thing is, I want more out of life than living in obscurity in a poky Darlington flat."

Malcolm looked quizzically at Jack, wondering where he was heading with this idea. A hopeful glint, slightly mad, appeared in Jack's eyes: "That Astroturf idea of yours might have credibility, and even some commercial possibilities. I mean do you really think if one were to adopt it as one's new direction, it might actually take off?"

For a moment Malcolm looked blank. Then he recalled his rant at their recent mini-golf game.

"Artists that work along similar lines are getting both profiles and big money in New York. Why?"

Jack smiled a wan and private sort of smile.

Chapter 3

As Jillian Trembath ran her fingernails down the back of the man's business shirt above, she thought about how glad she was that no one else was present to witness this little scene unfold. She prided herself on being stylish, and there was nothing stylish, she suspected, about lying under a man, partially unclothed, on the desk of a newspaper office, no matter how successful he might be in the media. Fortunately it was of an hour that the cleaners had come and gone. At least the man concerned wasn't shabby himself, while this office might be, Jillian surmised. Thankfully, when out of this particular context, Bob Herrick has quantities of style. Jillian once more dragged her fingernails down that extensive length of nylon/polyester shirt and sighed. Bob Herrick was issuing low, swinish grunts as if from somewhere a long way off.

He was a big man, with a big man's broad back, and the movement of Jillian's shapely but not particularly large fingernails didn't seem substantial enough to make the impression she desired. Though she must have made an impression on him of sorts, or else she wouldn't be here in his private office in the first place. Really, it is impressive, she thought, to find oneself, after a routine day slugging it out on the news desk, lodged so firmly underneath the arts editor of *The Sydney Times*, one of the city's most important men on one of the city's most prestigious broadsheets. Bob Herrick certainly was not just anyone. He was no ordinary hack, but a celebrity in arts journalism. Though she had to concede, his performance, at this particular point, was not as far removed from the ordinary as one might hope. As Jillian was not one to dwell on the negatives involved in such occasions, she put this matter out of her mind. Besides, there were far more interesting things to think about, like how, earlier in the week, the paper's visual art critic, Peter Stiles, had been sacked, when he was discovered writing under a pseudonym for the competition. This recollection led Jillian to imagine a scenario in which her critics were assembled and attacking her with slanderous accusations such as you opportunist little slut! Jillian was always prepared for any assault, be it real or imagined. One couldn't get where she was today without keeping one's defenses up. No! She had not found herself here, at this odd hour of the morning, with her stockings hanging on the back of a swivel chair, under the arts editor of *The Sydney Times*, just because of the fortuitous sacking of Peter Stiles. She would point out emphatically to her accusers that she was genuinely drawn to the man above. He was an attractive man, not necessarily in the physical sense of the word, given his considerable weight and rather squinty eyes, one could not accuse him of handsomeness. However, certainly he was very attractive in regard to what counts, and that, as always, was personal style.

Personal style was earned in Bob Herrick's case by the publication of numerous intelligent articles over the years, regular TV and radio spots on SBS and ABC arts programs, not to mention that his picture byline appeared weekly in *The Sydney Times*. Jillian felt a wave of satisfaction, until her thoughts took another unpleasant turn. Among her critics, she was well aware, were Sydney's leading feminists. Imagine what they would say if they could see me now! To complicate matters, Jillian considered herself a leading feminist, even though this aligned her with everyone else in the problematic movement. Local feminists were grouped into two unhappy camps, the leftover 70s bra burning variety and the recently emerged feisty, whip wielding leather-clad lot. As both sorts spent their time bleating equally loudly about the pitfalls of the patriarchy, they were far too predictable for her to join either camp. Jillian stood aloof and proud as a feminist of her own design, putting the word around that she was a feminist with a difference, someone who avoided pigeonholes and stereotypes. She practised a form of very progressive feminism, getting her tips from the famous feminists from overseas, who approached things with so much more panache than those in the dull Australian sisterhood.

In the distance, Bob Herrick's grunts remained steady, comfortably so. This allowed Jillian to consider further how her style of feminism gave her room to steer away from the traditional feminist habits of feeling victimised by men, becoming noisily angry at them, and analysing their failings quite to death. There were many good uses for men in a progressive feminist's life. She dragged her fingernails forcefully down that length of nylon/polyester. There was room for wearing low cut tops, and dangerously high high heels, there was room for so many wonderful products like hair remover, and hairspray, not to mention interesting shades of lipstick, like her favorite cherry red. There was room for watching pornography, and of course, plenty of room for seducing all manner of men.

Bob Herrick interrupted her train of thought by delivering a series of vigorous hip movements, impressive for a man of his age and proportions. Then he reverted to his former rhythm, which while somewhat uninspired, afforded Jillian the freedom to keep thinking her private thoughts. By now Jillian had been working on the news desk for 18 months. When she started she had not intended to cover news, not with her degree from the most prestigious institution of higher learning in Sydney, not with such a sophisticated, well-rounded education in the arts. However, the arts pages had no openings at the time, and the news desk did. Back then, Peter Stiles had reviewed every miserable landscape artist, every tragic modernist painter of nudes and every tired sculptor of bronzes. So each Saturday when the edition came out, Jillian's blood pressure rose on reading his column, while each week she was forced to hammer it out on news.

Working in news involved rushing about in an ungainly manner and interviewing people from all walks of life. Jillian wasn't fond of mingling with people from all walks of life, as they had brutish things happen to them, insisted on demonstrating about lost causes, and on the whole suffered from being mainstream and dull. Besides, in news, one day she was writing about cockroach epidemics and the next proposed tax cuts. How could one show off one's expertise under such trying conditions? As everyone knows, developing expertise in public view is how a woman gets where she wants. As a writer of daily news, the upside was one did feel influential in a dreary newsy kind of way. Although while her readers lapped up the disasters and other sad items she wrote about daily, it just wasn't arts. Considering this she wondered how she could please Bob Herrick a little more. She feared she'd been so quiet over the last while, he might have quite forgotten about her. She issued a series of sensual moans, or at least what she hoped sounded like the moans emitted by a sensual woman, a thing she suspected she was not. She feared she did too much thinking really, in the final analysis.

Just then Bob Herrick began to speed up his process, speed it up so fast the table started to thump, and papers started to jiggle around them, with some flying off the desk and floating to the floor. Jillian felt the wind rushing out of her lungs, and suddenly there Bob Herrick was, with his shirt sleeves rolled back, supporting himself high above her on a pair of enormous hairy arms. Jillian marvelled at the sight of him as if frozen in midair, quite unlike the way he looked in his picture byline. After a series of traumatised cries, he collapsed on top of her in a heap, affording her a view of the wall ahead. Her eyes fixed on the framed Walkley, an item that, Bob Herrick had proudly informed her earlier on, he had earned as a young reporter for a series of articles on union corruption. Jillian was annoyed. Even if she obtained a job as the arts writer, she was not likely to be granted a Walkley for her trouble, no matter how brilliant the artists she discussed or how superb her writing. Still covering the arts was just as important, if not more so, than writing on boring union matters. The public have a right to know that modernism is dead, that there are postmodern artists in our midst, who are daring and talented and working on the cutting edge. Bob Herrick was getting increasingly heavy. Jillian hoped he would take pity on her soon and roll off. While one cannot assume a young woman would be hired in a position usually held by a man, and one of senior years, she believed she deserved it, and what's more she was the right person for the job. She could make a difference in this climate of sad cultural clichés.

When, finally, Jillian was at liberty to remove herself from the desktop, she shivered irritably, before locating her missing clothes. She watched Bob Herrick roll down his shirtsleeves in a businesslike manner. He might be an admirable

editor and writer on the arts, he might be adept at doing TV and radio spots, he might even look inspiring in his picture byline, but this dalliance had taken up far too much of her time. As he headed off for some mysterious editor's car park Jillian entered the lift, thankful to be at last alone. While staring into the mirror to sort out her tousled hair, she caught sight of her eyes in the glass. This activated her inner critics, always ready to bring her down. You've just succumbed to the deplorable tactics of ordinary women, those who throughout history have used their sexuality as leverage to get ahead. She stared fiercely back into her icy blue eyes. I am Jillian Trembath, I would never stoop to such a degree. As she thought of all those ordinary women who throughout history had stooped in such ways, her mouth curled up at the corners in disdain. As the lift came to a shuddering halt she knew with every particle of her being that despite what some might say, she had not been clutching onto male power in the belief that she did not have enough of her own.

She was still mounting her private defence as she smoothed down her little black skirt, while striding out into the marble foyer with a swaying of her hips. I concede I am young and at the start of my career, but I am a powerful woman in my own right. The recent encounter, in fact, was motivated by her attraction to a powerful man, a man who happens to be her professional superior, but who she considered as her intellectual equal. In fact he was her equal on all fronts. That Bob Herrick might prove to be instrumental in ushering her into a job, which would allow her to herald in the postmodern arts, was merely a coincidence.

Chapter 4

Jack was lounging on his couch of brown velour, smoking. The light was dim and dust mites danced before his eyes. Nearby, the ashtray overflowed. One day, his work would attract an enormous crowd, while featured in some vast and stylish venue on opening night, art heavyweights would attend, not just those bottom feeders looking for free booze one found at Rubin's. Indeed, his first opening would have more than just the usual shitty cask white, it would offer smooth reds and sophisticated whites, a flowing stream of Champers, rivers of it, floods. Indeed, he must remember not to drink too much himself, for after all, he would be required to wax lyrical on the subject of his work. In his mind's eye, there he was, his debonair self, lyrically waxing about his daring innovative work before the throng, and indeed it was a healthy-sized throng indeed. Before the night was over, a red dot on every piece. In the reviews, the critics lavish him with praise, acknowledging him as the talented bastard he always knew he was. Thus more sell-out exhibitions, until he is making pots of money. In fact Jack is soon in a position to hire others to produce his work, which is done these days. One thing leads to another, so that soon he never need leave the comforts of his couch again, which has, along the way, transformed into one of soft black leather.

He had spent years having versions of this break-through scenario. All through those scummy student years, that daydream had kept him going. Jack had attended art school in those heady days when aspiring artists painted, sculpted, drew the nude and bowls of fruit and did not consider art's theoretical underpinnings. Yet, he mused sourly, he was not likely to ever realise his dream, on account of those very underpinnings, that were in fact mandatory these days for an artist. What's more it was fine to be called an *appropriator*, quite good in fact, but not a regurgitator of stereotypes. That pack of art's post-Lacanian feminists had been running his name into the ground, reducing his chances of ever getting his big break. He was cursing them when Vivian Rubin called.

"Jack, it's Vivian. I won't keep you. I am calling because, you see, I was so taken with your *Black Goddesses*, I want to offer you a show."

"A show."

"Yes, of your own."

Jack was dumbstruck. It felt like a long time since he, himself, had been impressed by a *Black Goddess*. After taking his works down from the group show he had stored the series in his mum's garage, and planned to forget he ever made them.

“That’s great news. It would be just the thing to offer a viewing of my, well, my latest work in Astroturf.”

Jack hadn’t actually been working in any medium of late. Just dragging himself through the long days, and restless nights.

“Astroturf, Jack! When did you change directions? Why wasn’t I informed?”

Vivian sounded so fierce, Jack grew a little scared.

“Well, I’m informing you now. In fact you are the first to know. I have kept my move under wraps.”

She sighed dramatically.

“Oh, I don’t know, Jack, I don’t know. You artists will be the death of me.”

He could tell from her tone she was glad she was the first to know.

“Hmm ... well, about that solo show?”

“If you want it, Jack, I’ll need proof. I’ll stop in at your studio on Monday and you can show me the best you’ve got in Astroturf.”

OOO

“The best you’ve got! The best you’ve got!” Jack was muttering. From his position on Malcolm’s couch, he was mulling over the indignity of Vivian having so little faith in him, she had demanded physical proof. When a man has talent, considerable amounts of it, shouldn’t his word be enough? Not far away Malcolm was wrestling with a large stretcher on which a swathe of Astroturf was mounted, all except for one recalcitrant corner that kept buckling no matter what he tried. Malcolm emitted a grunt as he struggled to position the bastard corner into place, his staple gun held steady between his legs. His hands were white at the knuckles as they gripped the stretcher. It had taken them the last three days and nights to get to this point.

The Astroturf had been tricky to purchase. They had to schmooze a local sports ground mob to gain access to a specialist warehouse that usually only sold in bulk. Though the sale of a smallish portion was eventually achieved, once back at Jack’s flat they realised that not only was it too cramped a space in which to carry out the delicate operation, but the Astroturf itself had a tendency to misbehave.

“I guess it was not designed with the making of conceptual art in mind,” Malcolm pronounced as the difficult corner yet again slipped from his grip.

“No. Although you can get it right if anyone can. You know, Mal, I’m disappointed Vivian demanded this of me. She should have more faith, trust my decisions to move into new terrain.”

Jack reached for a Camel.

“Oh, there are always doubters when a radical idea is concerned. There have to be doubters, otherwise the idea wouldn’t be radical, would it?” said Malcolm, as he set the rebellious corner in place with a clack of the staple gun.

OOO

Vivian arrived at Jack’s wearing a vibrant red and grey dress, tattered in places, and made, she informed them, by a local designer on an apocalyptic theme. Jack thought it did evoke notions of death and decay, perhaps not due to the design, but rather because Vivian, who was ancient and bony, was wearing it. She strutted into the room and stood looking about and rattling her car keys impatiently.

“So where are these earth shattering Astroturf works?”

He pointed to the six by eight foot rectangle of Astroturf on a stretcher positioned to her right, and wondered how she’d managed to miss it.

“That’s it?” she asked, “No added design, no cutouts, no discernible interference of any kind? Not even a signature?”

“That’s it.”

A minute passed, and a very long minute it was, with only the rattling of Vivian’s car keys breaking the silence, and Jack growing increasingly tense. Finally she spoke.

“I’ve always thought of Astroturf as banal, but in this case its very banality might be just the thing to make it take off. Banality, of course, conjures up some wonderfully current notions.”

Jack’s face lit up hopefully.

“However, Jack, before I can commit, please tell me on whose theories you are drawing, and who you’ll get to write your catalogue essay.”

Jack’s stomach churned. On account of the extensive practical considerations, and the lack of time, despite Malcolm’s insistence, Jack had forgotten that he needed to dredge up a theory to apply to this new work. He should really have spent some time mingling with those writers Malcolm was always mentioning he knew, trying to pick their brains and find some suitable ideas, but it had entirely slipped his mind.

“Um, since leaving, you know, notions of *the postcolonial*, I have been immersing myself in several very pertinent theorists work, all French of course.”

Vivian nodded sagely.

“Err...Derrida springs to mind Although, on the other score, no local writers seem quite right. This is very radical work, Vivian, very emblematic of the times ... maybe there is someone you can recommend?”

Jack knew if there was one way to flatter Vivian it was to let her know he knew how many intelligent people she knew in the artworld. Vivian sighed dramatically, while still staring directly at the work.

“All right, then. I do know a lot of people about. I’ll locate an appropriate writer. Anyway, Jack, the fact is I’m compelled to take a punt on this Astroturf of yours.”

She turned to see the effect the depth of her generosity had on him. Jack hoped he looked appropriately grateful.

“So, I’ll get the catalogue organised. Meanwhile what I want from you, dear man, is lots of work. When I say lots, I mean it. We need to give the world the message: Astroturf art is here, and it is not apologising for itself. It will be daring, big and bold. Once we introduce it, we need to absolutely drown the world in Astroturf. The people need to feel utterly submerged in it.”

Jack was genuinely filled with gratitude now, he was brimming with it, overflowing with it, awash. Just when he had been certain it would never come, here was his big break at last.

“I’ll make tons of Astroturf work, you watch. You won’t regret this, Vivian. Promise.”

In no time Vivian was out the door, with an apocalyptic flash and the receding rattle of her car keys.

Chapter 5

Daniel lit up a post-coital cigarette. Next to him lay Jillian Trembath, her nakedness covered by a designer sheet. She was, he knew, making a point of not smoking. She had recently given up.

“I don’t believe in smoking,” she announced piously, as he inhaled.

“When it comes to God you can make such a claim. However smoking exists, so even if you don’t do it, that shouldn’t alter your ontological position on it.”

Jillian frowned as Daniel let his smoke exude dragon-like through his nostrils.

“Revolting ... What I mean is smoking is no longer interesting. Good health has come in, you know, from overseas.”

She began shooing away his smoke, adding: “It’s so depressing how we’re always behind with international developments. The least I can do is instigate a health trend in this country.”

She told him she had commenced a gruelling fitness regime. Daniel felt a wave of embarrassment about his own body, some of which was exposed above the sheets. As a chest, his was verging on the sunken, his shoulders were far from broad.

“... I’ve been to the gym every day this week, sometimes twice and God knows how much mineral water I’ve drunk.

Sensing she was heading for a state of moral superiority, he threw in a dig.

“It is remarkable, Jillian, all this new-found discipline of yours, not to mention sheer drive. Which reminds me, I forgot to ask, with you being so young and professionally untested, how did you manage to land this critic’s job of yours? Was there someone in management you had to fuck for it?”

He knew he had hit his mark when Jillian swung around, eyes flashing angrily.

“How dare you! ... I ... I didn’t have to fuck my way in, went through all the proper channels, albeit young, they recognised my potential ... Daniel Black, I demand an apology!”

When Daniel didn’t apologise, Jillian began to pout. When he laughed she thumped him across the ear with a pillow, which actually hurt and helped him realise he had gone too far. He had risked alienating Jillian, who was after all no longer his eager Honours student, but was now the art critic for *The Sydney Times*. How idiotic it was of him to risk offending her, he must behave more cautiously in future.

“Look sorry, Jillian, I was just joking. Of course you got hired by legitimate means, I never doubted that for a moment. Everyone knows you are perfect for the job. Perfect”.

Evidently Jillian was in no mood to forgive him as she continued to pout and further cross her arms before her. Daniel hated the silent treatment. It was exhausting. In fact Jillian, on the whole, was exhausting. He tugged at the sheet, to cover himself as best he could.

“Seriously, you can do so much good for the artworld from where you’re positioned. We desperately need someone in the mainstream media to educate the public about the postmodern condition, not to mention the vital role theory plays in art. There’re usually such archconservatives in the media. Think how much damage that bastard Stiles has done to the movement. All that personal abuse he’d dish out if an artist did anything radical or conceptual. Such a terrible anti-intellectual.”

Jillian suddenly stood up, allowing the sheet to fall from her body. She flexed her muscles like a bodybuilder.

“Let’s forget all that. Like the new me? Schwarzenegger eat your heart out,” she kept flexing and un-flexing her arms. As Daniel stared up at her toned legs, her neat rim of pubic hair, her flat stomach, her pert breasts, and her biceps, almost as big as an athletic boy’s—far bigger than his own—topped off with her fierce blonde bob, he realised she was like a cartoon character the Japanese might have dreamed up. His mind saw the connection with this, and the way Bouffant proposed that notions of the copy and the fake were gaining prominence in the contemporary world, in fact gaining so much prominence they were dissolving their originals in the process. He wondered if the Jillians of the world would eventually take over all the non-Jillians. That is, would all those steely, self-created, self-perfected young women like Jillian—the ones he tutored at the Institute daily, with their hard edges, killer instincts and expensive haircuts—eventually trample over the softhearted, floppy breasted, pastel wearing types left over from the 70s; those women who looked ordinary, and thus original, too tragically original for the new world order? He didn’t believe in indulging in nostalgia for people who were flawed, although ironically, he was just that in relation to Jillian’s type. Yes, he was far from self-perfected in the physical sense at least, preferring an afternoon spent reading a book to a workout at the gym.

Daniel had no idea why Jillian was standing up stark naked for so long posing, but it somehow ran true to form. She was really something, this fierce young thing he had just done his best to fuck. He knew she was not with him for his sexual prowess. She was here for his brains, to pick them for ideas for her column most likely. Which he found depressing, the way things these days had become so blatantly about exchange. Maybe I am nostalgic after all, for old values and all that crap. He suddenly missed, with a pang, the person he’d once been when he was Jillian’s age, someone involved in the whole Marxist-influenced attachment to social reform, with its black and white thinking and

uncompromising ideals. The current theoretical framework in which he operated was less simplistic, and therefore far more intellectually stimulating, but even he, while at the forefront of the crowd pushing the theories of Bouffant, and other cultural commentators of his ilk—suspected that, at the end of the day, the nihilistic circular games played out on the postmodern front could land you in a mire so complex you ran the risk of missing some crucial point.

Jillian knew her theorists and how visual art operated in the light of current ideas, thanks in part to Daniel's direction when she was his final year student in the Human Arts department last year. Yet did she have any politics in her; politics in the old sense of the word? Politics with fire. God, it was 1984, and here he was talking about outdated, romantic notions like 'politics with fire'! Next thing he'd be drawing on that old, outmoded phrase 'politics with heart'. If anyone found out where my thoughts were heading, into this sappy terrain, they'd scratch me from the invitation lists. Suddenly Jillian thudded down beside him and drew the sheet over herself. Her mood had turned sombre.

"I want to come in big with my first review," she said softly, "You know, make a decisive move. The thing is I've been trawling through *Art Almanac* and there's not a single decent opening on this week."

"You're sounding defeatist. That's not like you, Jillian."

"Don't patronise me. I have to find someone to write about in my first review, someone outstanding. There's a deadline. It's all right for you to operate at a leisurely pace in your ivory tower, but I'm working in the commercial world now."

That stung. Daniel hated those ivory tower quips people threw at him and his colleagues. Yet there was no point lashing out at Jillian again, especially now he was in a prime position to steer her where he wanted. In the next room was a stash of catalogues in which he had written an essay presenting a highly theoretical, not to mention brilliant, reading of Jack Blight's new work. The catalogue was for a show that was about to open at Rubin's Contemporary Art Space. A show in which he had been granted, thanks to Vivian Rubin, a good deal of freedom to move. He was able to give a new, more relevant title to the exhibition, rework its entire written component in fact. It was thus, not just Jack Blight's show any longer, but his own creative work.

"Jack Blight has an opening down at Rubin's Contemporary Art Space this week," he said in a studied casual tone.

"I saw that in the Almanac, but doesn't he do those horribly kitsch paintings of native girls? They're in such bad taste, and I don't mean bad taste in a good way."

"He's headed into new terrain recently. Really new terrain. I think he's hit on something very interesting. My sense is this could be the start of something big."

Jillian's blue eyes were now staring intensely at Daniel. He realised this was the first time in this interaction with her that he'd gained her full attention. He took the opportunity to educate her.

"Blight's new work is underpinned by Michel Bouffant's theory of the Obsolescence of the Original. I can give you a preview of the catalogue," he said. There was surely no need to mention that he was the author of said catalogue essay, she would discover this little detail soon enough. After all, the main thing was to get her interested in the show.

"Okay. I'm prepared to take a look, but just a look. I mean Jack Blight isn't really to my taste."

Daniel swiftly donned a robe and dashed out. As Jillian opened the shiny green catalogue he placed before her, he leaned back beside her on the pillow, with his elbows behind his head. Imagine! I will be quoted in the art pages of *The Sydney Times*. Instant readership on a mass scale. Not that I believe in newspaper representations with their reductive mainstream take on things.

Chapter 6

Jack should have been heading out the door by now, feeling good in his smart black clothes, looking forward to the big event. Instead he was in his bathroom, buckled over himself, tugging at the zipper on his fly. No matter how hard he tugged, it wouldn't move. He cursed that he owned only one pair of smart black trousers; the other pair was spattered with paint. He stumbled into his bedroom and located an old shiny shirt generous enough to cover the debacle. Artist as Pavarotti impersonator at his opening night, Jack mused as he stood mirror-bound, morose.

As he couldn't get hold of Malcolm, he dashed into the street to find a cab. Twenty minutes later, while the opening had officially begun, Jack was still hovering outside the ivy-choked façade of Rubin's, smoking. He wasn't taking suave, controlled inhalations, or letting the smoke issue out, maturely, from his nostrils. He was not smoking stylishly as William Burrows might. Rather he sucked desperately on his latest butt, telling himself he really should go in, how simple it would be, if only he didn't feel so queasy. Indeed, he well knew, he should have swaggered in by now with confidence and flair, swaggered in to stand before the throng and preside over his new work. Yet Jack's confidence and flair were flagging in the face of the sounds issuing from within. There were soft voices talking and a hollow intermittent laugh. At last his legs propelled him through the doors and toward the exhibition display on the front wall, on which his name appeared in large green font, under letters spelling *Simulated Paddock*. Simulated what! He was dumbstruck. What was wrong with '*The Astroturf Experience*', a title he'd spent days concocting? Bloody Vivian! He recalled she was renowned not only for her dubious fashion sense, but for meddling in her artists' business. Entering cautiously, he thrust his eyes and nose around the corner, a pose that allowed him to spy five people present in the gallery, three of whom were bar staff. Another was Vivian, talking to a malnourished individual, with leather jacket and spindly limbs, who looked suspiciously intellectual.

It was such a sad little turnout, spasms of pain gripped Jack's abdomen. One should not see the work for the adoring hordes, he knew as anyone did. Yet there it was looming over the empty space, large, bold, garishly green and unarguably absurd. He clutched his aching belly. What he needed was a drink. The bar was by the far wall, with Vivian and the single guest *en route*. If one had a serious thirst, avoiding one's overbearing, tea-totalling gallery director was essential. After a few nimble footsteps further in, he found himself behind a column. With one more dash to the next column, he would soon be within reach of the bar. Then of course, once he had a drink he would socialise.

“Jack, is that you?” said a voice remarkably like Vivian’s, an irritating mix of gravel and sugar. His fears were confirmed when her enquiring eyes appeared around the column.

“Oh, hello Vivian,” Jack said, slowly strolling out.

“It *is* you Jack. I thought you’d never come! Why ever were you hiding?”

“No ...Not hiding, just...you know...surveying my work from a different perspective. It is important as an artist to adopt many perspectives.”

Vivian was wearing a fish inspired black dress implying scales and fins.

“Well I am glad you’ve arrived, whatever perspective you wish to adopt. Anyway, Jack, I’d like to offer my assessment of the leap you’ve made into Astroturf.”

“Go on then, Vivian, assess away,” he said, and in anticipation of the worst, Jack sucked his breath into his lungs so fast it prompted a coughing fit. His eyes watered terribly. By the time he could see, Vivian had begun.

“With the added refinements, such as the marvelous new titles, your show has come into its own. All in all, it’s a daring move. Positively redolent of the times.... I am taken with it. Really I am, Jack, and I know everyone else will be too.” She paused to radiate her famous charm at him. Meanwhile, via peripheral vision, Jack had obtained a welcome glimpse of the bar. He was very thirsty now. Although Vivian apparently hadn’t finished.

“As you know, I wasn’t sure it was such a good idea when you threw in the towel with painting. Now I can see what you were up to all along, well, I’m sold....and I certainly hope the pieces will be too by the end of the night.”

After this lapse of taste, she drew back again to look at Jack with an expression she probably thought was rapture. Vivian was good at doing public impressions of heightened states. Then, it seemed, she had even more to add.

“What you’ve created with *Simulated Paddock*, Jack, is brilliant, so very contemporary. We can only hope the public aren’t too steeped in modernist clichés to be blind to that fact....”

Jack’s stomach upset had waned considerably. He began to rock on his toes and to puff out his chest.

“Why are you wearing that old tent of a shirt, Jack? You really should have made an effort. It’s not the 70s anymore. Appearances *do* count.”

His eyes shot down only to find his shirt, having caught the drafts from an air-conditioning duct, was billowing around him alarmingly. He tried to push it down, and cast Vivian’s comment off. Who was she to judge? Her dress had fronds on it like rotting seaweed. She linked his arm with hers and started guiding him away.

“Come and meet Daniel Black ... we were just discussing Michel Bouffant, his insights on the death of the subject, the demise of history, the loss of the author, you name it and that Bouffant has killed it off!”

Everyone Jack ran into these days rabbited on about this great Bouffant. He was a French theorist, one of the many Jack had been meaning to get his head around, though never quite found the time to open a book of his. Jack observed that the man Vivian was taking him to meet was the malnourished fellow she had been talking to earlier. Before reaching him, Vivian was distracted enough for Jack to escape her grip and make detour to the nearest wall, so he could investigate a puzzling matter. He peered into the nearest titles next to one of his works. It read *Utopia Has No Roots (Grass or Otherwise)*, which was odd considering that when he submitted the series, it had been called Untitled (1-23).

“Jack, please, we are waiting for you to grace us with your presence.”

“Wait no more”, he cried, finding himself encountering another oddity, the fact that this fellow Vivian was soon keen to introduce was the very same who had written the message on the coaster at his local, that had saved his hide with that post-Lacanian feminist turncoat, Trudy Smee. After the men acknowledged they had met before, Jack could tell Vivian was beginning one of her famous interfering acts. Yet just what she was trying to interfere in, he couldn’t fathom.

“Jack, you must love the stunning catalogue essay Daniel produced. With ‘Astroturf Actually’ and his darling titles, his contribution has conceptually brought the show together, don’t you agree?”

From this new position, Jack had a better view of the bar. He gazed longingly at rows of wine glasses filled with shimmering reds and whites. There were also some attractive flute-shaped glasses gently effervescing.

“Jack? You must be thrilled at how adeptly Daniel connects your work to Bouffant’s theory of the Obsolescence of the Original in the catalogue essay?” With this last remark, the whites of her eyes had become enlarged, which Jack knew was Vivian’s way of trying to communicate something important. Just what that something was, though, baffled him. Suddenly he recalled a folder, very green and very shiny, had come in the post the other day. One glance and he had seen its potential to stabilise the rickety leg of the table on which his TV sat. He knew he’d better say something fast to smooth things out.

“Yes. Can’t complain about being put up there with Bouffant. Thanks, for everything.”

“Vivian and I were just discussing Bouffant’s appearance at Planet Postmodern,” said Daniel in a reedy voice.

“Planet what, I mean, ...beg your pardon?” said Jack.

“You must know about the conference the Institute is staging ... our very own progressive multi-media, multi-faceted event on postmodernity. I’m on the

committee.” He looked pleased about this fact “...it’s historic, I mean Bouffant himself, coming to Sydney to deliver his new paper, *1984 Is Not Taking Place*.” Vivian had started nodding her head like a toy dog in the back of an old lady’s car.

“Marvelous, marvelous,” she said, “you know all this talk of Bouffant reminds me of what we’re doing here, at Rubin’s, promoting art that challenges old-world notions.” With a sweep of her seaweed fronds she continued, “Take Jack’s work for example. Here is art that’s done away with the attachment to the artist as gesture-making individual, done away with notions of genius.” Jack felt insulted, but hid the fact. “What we’re left with, is work that operates as an expression of pure concept.” Jack nodded solemnly to convey that he was both talented and deep.

“Yes. Exactly, I couldn’t agree more,” said Daniel emphatically, “So tell me, Jack, have you bought your ticket to the conference yet?”

“Not exactly,” he replied.

“But you must! Imagine missing out on Bouffant *live!*”

If Jack had been paying attention he might have noticed that Daniel was obsessive about this matter. Despite being the youngest of the conference organisers, it was his job to sell the tickets for Bouffant’s landmark talk. Some days he could think of nothing else. Daniel was obsessive by nature, one had to be to read everything Bouffant had written, not to mention the other texts by 28 exponents of new and radical ideas that had emerged from Europe alone that year. If Jack was paying attention he would have deduced that Daniel was focused on everything to do with Bouffant’s impending visit. Jack was instead paying attention to a member of the bar staff who had materialised by his side with a tray of drinks. As Jack turned around to grab a glass of bubbly, almost weeping with gratitude, he noticed the strangest thing. The gallery had filled with people, the number of which added up to quite a throng.

OOO

In half an hour the gallery was filled to capacity. Smoke hung heavily in the air. Inside there was a raucous din and, drinks in hand, people spilled outside onto the street. As Jack mingled with friends and fellow artists, collecting exuberant greetings and jovial quips, his guts once again griped and grumbled. Even with his insides giving him grief, he managed to offer each huddle of guests a glimpse of his talented creative self. He wasn’t remiss in acknowledging the achievements of others either.

“Your wallpaper works are inspiring...”“I love your latest take on Yves Klein blue,” ...“Great barbecue installation.”

However, drawing his longed-for crowd had not been enough. It was downright peculiar the way Malcolm hadn't turned up. For he was nowhere in sight. Besides who knew what people really thought? They might loathe his work, be saying vile things about it behind his back. To his face they didn't talk about it at all. Instead, everyone went on about the likely identity of the new critic at *The Sydney Times*. Now that that bastard Stiles had left, everyone wanted to know what new bastard they had installed. Otherwise when Jack turned up people simply droned on as usual about Foucault. What's more every time Jack caught sight of even a sliver of his works on show, he missed being someone who worked in good old reliable paint.

Clutching his drink in one hand and his aching belly in the other, he retreated to his original vantage point at the entrance, from which he could take stock. Obviously people were discussing his work among themselves in code. Indeed, he detected signs in people's hand gestures, in the raising and lowering of their eyebrows, the shuffling of their feet. He saw in all this clear messages of his failure to impress. He leaned against a partition and belched. After a moment he turned to notice an old woman nearby poking a forefinger into the grassy exhibition title. He squinted in her direction, then realised who it was.

"Mu-um", he cried.

His mother trotted over.

"Hello, Jack, am I terribly late?" Dear, darling mum. Jack was choked with emotion. Her presence overrode the fact she had turned up to his sophisticated event wearing an ancient pale blue suit with matching hat and woolly stockings clumping around her ankles.

"Just a bit late, mum. Never mind. So nice of you to come."

Considering Malcolm's absence, and everyone else's silent rebukes, it was such a relief to see her tender powdery face smiling into his. He went all teary.

"Don't tell me you're *drunk* Jack!"

"Yes, I confess I am. It's expected of one. In fact I'm not nearly drunk enough."

He then toured her around the show, with her 'ooing' and 'ahhing' at each work, even though she had not the slightest clue, he knew. Naturally Vivian swanned over. The queen of Earlwood was duly introduced to the high priestess of Sydney contemporary art. The two women took an instant and violent dislike to one another and made snippy remarks. Once his mother had apologised for the brevity of her visit and trotted out, Jack felt more wretched than ever. His mother had bothered, not like some people he knew.

"Stop looking so morbid, Jack," said Vivian.

"Morbid? Disappointed more likely."

"I understand completely. It is disappointing. Not a bite. The buyers wouldn't know a good investment if it slapped them in the face."

Jack felt like slapping Vivian in the face, she was so superficial. How could she talk about sales when he was experiencing a deep sense of betrayal.

“You’d think Malcolm would have bothered,” he muttered indignantly.

“Oh, you know performance artists, he’s probably swallowed some car part, in an emergency unit losing gallons of blood as we speak. Besides, there are more important people to consider. Like a collector, who I just spied coming in.”

Vivian was already dragging him towards an ancient woman in a Cossack’s hat and enormous moth-eaten coat. She stood between two works, titled *Feed Time for a Synthetic City* and *Conversation in Loss for Cows with Hidden Hides*. Vivian hauled Jack away from staring into the titles, perplexed, and towards the old trout.

“So Jack, do tell Mrs Piper-Jones about the impulse behind *Simulated Paddock*.”

So as to enhance his urbane charm, he sucked in his cheeks.

“Well, you see, it struck me that the time was ripe to announce the death of painting.” and on he went, dredging up some things Malcolm had said at their putt-putt game. Yet as soon as he paused to take a breath, the old thing thanked him for his trouble, and walked away.

“Oh please don’t put me through that again,” Jack begged Vivian.

“You could at least have quoted Derrida!” she snapped and, in a spray of seaweed, dashed after her.

Left alone, Jack sipped solemnly on his glass of red. He knew he should try harder to quote Derrida, considering all that young blood bursting from art school spouting Derrida like robots. Frankly, he could never remember what other people quoted Derrida as saying, not even the English bits. It was all so terribly exhausting. Vivian returned and began pulling his glass away from his lips.

“There’s someone important I want you to meet.”

“Not again, Vivian, I’m drinking.”

“No excuses, Jack!”

She dragged him to a spot where a scrawny bottle blonde in a very short skirt stood looking deceptively insignificant. He never would have guessed she was the new critic half the room had been talking about.

“Jillian Trembath, our new arts columnist at *The Sydney Times*, please let me introduce the innovative artist behind *Simulated Paddock*, Jack Blight.”

He shook her tiny school-girl hand. Jack loathed critics, in fact loathed them even more than the pretentious titles on his work. As he gazed at her, there was something particularly abhorrent about this one, her lack of gravitas for starters.

One of the gallery staff arrived and whispered something behind his hand to Vivian. She frowned.

“Excuse me, Jillian, Jack ... I have something to attend to. Please get acquainted, and I’ll be right back,” and in a froth of seaweed she dashed off.

“Interesting, that you’ve made this shift into conceptual work straight from painting, I’d like to interview you about it,” Jillian Trembath said, almost intelligently, Jack felt. While Jack was thrilled by this brush with the media, he made sure to look appalled that this little stick of a thing wanted to attack him with her tedious mainstream questions at his very opening. After arranging to meet at Rubin’s the next morning, she left the gallery. When Vivian returned she was livid to find the critic gone.

“We should have invited her to the dinner! She is *the media*, Jack. They turn on you like *piranhas* if you don’t invite them to your functions and gala events.”

“Hang on”, said Jack, “It isn’t a function or a gala event, it’s a dinner at the Thai place down the road.” Vivian threw him such a dark look, he thought better of saying anything else.

OOO

By the time the crowd was thinning, Jack stood by a wall feeling dejected. He cast his gaze over the title of a nearby work, *The Illusory Hillside: Nostalgia’s Endpoint*. He knew what it was to be at an endpoint. His show had been a flop. It wasn’t that late in the evening, and yet people were draining out. He wasn’t fooled by the friendly tone his fellow artists adopted to say farewell. It was the retreat of devious types, he knew. Then Jack saw a strange-looking figure walking towards him, against the general flow. It was Malcolm!

“Christ. So sorry, Jack. So stupid of me to miss everything.... It’s not a great excuse, but you see I worked all last night, right around the clock, so scheduled in a quick nap this arvo. Slept right through the alarm. It was so late when I woke, I didn’t have time to freshen up. Excuse my grungy state.”

Jack narrowed his eyes suspiciously. Come to think of it, Malcolm did look uncharacteristically like a grease-monkey for someone attending an opening.

“*Simulated Paddock*, that’s genius!” Malcolm said. “Most importantly, how do you think your foray into Astroturf has been received by the artworld?”

“How should I know,” said Jack gruffly.

“Didn’t people comment?”

“No. No one said a word. Except Vivian, who said far too many words on such subjects as the lack of commercial interest it inspired.”

“You don’t want to sell, not yet. It wouldn’t look right. Would undermine your credibility.”

Jack had softened by this point, glad to hear Malcolm’s likeminded views on the inappropriate expectation of sales.

“Well anyway,” Malcolm added, scratching his greasy chin, “from what I can see, and everything you’ve said people were too intimidated by your move to

comment, which, frankly, is what you want. Congratulations, mate, you've pulled it off!"

OOO

A group of die-hards from Rubin's made their way along the back streets to the Thai-Tan, Vivian's favourite after-opening restaurant. At the head of the group were Jack and Malcolm, the former having trouble walking a straight line, the latter cutting a dashing artist-as-tramp figure in the night. Vivian walked behind them next to Daniel, who in laying bare his hopes and dreams in relation to Bouffant's impending visit, was straining their professional bond. Then came the three painters in the group: Tom Burn, who worked with notions of the everyday, Dale Spin, who drew on the written word, and Drew Gunn, who called himself a minimalist. At the rear were the twins, Bill and Tim, who few could tell apart, and who worked in video art. On arrival, Vivian sat at the head of the table, as always. Jack sat on the same side of the table as the video twins, and Malcolm. After the first few dishes arrived, an argument broke out between the video makers on one side of the table, and the painters directly opposite. Tom Burn was talking about his ongoing project on the theme of kitchen utensils when one of the twins made his first attack, damning the act of painting in the contemporary age.

"How can anyone still paint, when everyone who is anyone has pronounced the end of painting," said Bill, or perhaps it was Tim. Whoever it was, the other twin piped up.

"Let's not be coy. Painting is *dead* ... It was on life-support last century. In the contemporary age, the plug has been finally pulled. Just a few anachronistic artists like yourselves refuse to admit it."

Jack, who could no longer really consider himself a painter, felt at a loss. The three painters who were tucking into a large plate of steaming noodles, began quite visibly to seethe in their respective ways. Tom Burn was the first to verbalise his views.

"Painting's not only very much alive, it's a tradition still in its infancy."

His latest series, in oils, depicted neat rows of butter knives. Next to him, Drew Gunn, who intended to explore the possibilities of Yves Klein Blue for at least another decade, added: "Painting is so young and bursting with vitality it isn't even out of nappies yet."

All the painters nodded in assent.

Malcolm, in a sombre mood on account of missing Jack's big event, for once didn't comment, but tried to keep a neutral expression to show he wasn't partisan.

Meanwhile Jack was trying his best not to get emotional. He had engaged in many an argument along these lines, where he had argued hard for painting as an art still very much alive and well. Taking everything into account, if he wasn't a painter, what was he? If called upon to take a position in such a debate, what would it be?

Bill, or perhaps Tim, cried out: "Painting is so fucking dead it was buried by someone in a *frockcoat!*"

Jack rocked back on his chair, taking a neutral position.

Dale Spin, whose work in needlepoint presented extracts of Marguerite Duras, in translation, angrily shook her chopsticks at the twins.

"Painting is so very much alive it's throwing its porridge across the room from the high chair. It's wearing a bib. It's ..it's...."

Tom Burn began to shout, with spittle flying: "It's in its infancy, and I meant this in a good way. Yeah, painting hasn't even gotten off the bunny rug."

Tim, or was it Bill? roared back: "You're wrong my friend, so very wrong. Painting is *so yesterday* even its ghost has expired. All it is is a trace."

Jack thought this was rather good, even if he should remain loyal, even in his mind. He suddenly overbalanced, falling backwards and sending wine across the floor as he landed. As he clambered to his feet, the proprietor arrived, speaking hotly in broken English, and waving his hands about, until it was evident that he was throwing them all out, which was not a first for a Rubin's post-opening booking.

OOO

Although Malcolm felt he did possess it, it did not take genius to see that Jack, now fish-eyed and incoherent, was drunker than he should be, even for someone emerging from the opening of his first solo show. Malcolm would have driven him home regardless, and now it was clear, that as well as getting him to Darlinghurst he would be carrying him up the stairs and helping him to bed. The others had gone in other directions, Vivian to her Merc. They were a block away from the restaurant, walking back to the ute, when Malcolm realised he'd left his wallet at the restaurant. Malcolm decided to run back to the Thai-Tan to fetch it.

"Won't be a moment, don't move," he said, leaving Jack on the corner, under a street light, smoking. On coming out of the Thai Tan, Malcolm noticed at once that Jack was no longer a vertical figure up ahead, but a horizontal one on the pavement under the light.

Suddenly a white van, with a logo of some sort on the top, pulled up next to Jack, and a pair of uniformed men, one much taller than the other, marched out and over to where Jack was sprawled. Malcolm began to sprint now towards the

scene, transfixed by the sight of Jack, in his big shirt, becoming momentarily raised by the two men, only to slide out of their grip and flop back to the pavement. He was like some strange floppy fat puppet that couldn't be raised from a puddle of billowing black fabric by the two puppeteers.

"What do you think you're doing?" Malcolm yelled as he neared.

The tall man gave him the once over and glowered: "Settle down, mate. There are spare beds down at the refuge. This guy's in need."

As an artist Malcolm tried to adopt objectivity at all times, and he could tell that, objectively speaking, Jack did look like someone in need. He was unconscious after all. Malcolm could think of nothing else to do but plead with his comatose friend.

"Wake up, Jack. Tell them who you are, that you're with me ... tell them you have somewhere to sleep tonight. Hey Jack?"

Jack did not respond. The shorter man grimaced.

"Consider him lucky, mate. Sometimes by this hour there's no beds left. A night of decent rest will do him the world of good."

Malcolm began clenching and unclenching his hands. The platitudes were killing him. Clichés sucked the beauty out of life. Every decent artist knew that much, he felt.

"You need somewhere to sleep yourself?" the tall one asked.

This made Malcolm's fists clench and unclench again.

"You don't understand. We're artists. It was his opening night. He's drunk that's all. It's a normal situation."

"Every second one's an artist, mate," said the short one.

"Yeah, we get plenty of Picassos," said the taller one.

Just then Jack opened his eyes a fraction and staggered onto his feet, muttering. The men grabbed him, one on either side. Jack's legs buckled beneath him, but the men held him firmly in their grip.

"Easy does it, mate, we've gottcha," the taller man said

The men started to lead Jack away, towards their van. The street light flickered as Malcolm watched them retreat. Then, drawing again on his skills in objectivity, he considered how things must look from an external view. Were a stranger watching, he mused, they would note that he was wearing clothes covered in spots of grease. No wonder they hadn't listened, he must resemble a derro as much as Jack. Malcolm watched as the van drove around the corner and out of sight.

Chapter 7

There were not many short men Jillian could forgive for wearing platform shoes, but she could forgive Prince. She could also forgive Prince for his penchant for puffy sleeved shirts. She could forgive Prince because he was famous and talented and she loved *Purple Rain*, the title song to the album she was listening to as she drove. Jillian found it impossible to conceive that Prince was once not famous. She had read somewhere that Prince believed you had to act like you were famous, before fame would come your way. Jillian's adherence to this idea had found her borrowing her brother's Alfa. Besides, she felt, her staid stockbroker brother, Donald, couldn't look as good in it as she could, what with it its colour complementing her preference in lipstick. On parking outside Rubin's, she checked her hair in the rear view mirror. Her new bob looked outstanding, despite the drive. She had pumped so much product into that bob, it was positively sculptural. Indeed, she thought of it as art. Since she changed it, five weeks ago from jet, it glowed an Alpine, glacial hue. She patted down her skirt as she approached the entrance to the gallery. She knew people behind her back said she was 'arty-farty' or an 'elitist bitch', neither of which she would deny. Not that she heard these things, yet she knew people said such things because that's what Australians were like. She was an attractive woman, who read difficult books, and was aligned to the visual arts. Unlike ordinary people, she had quantities of style. Stylishness meant so many things, not just what one looked like, though that counted for a lot. Stylishness was about setting one's standards to a certain level, not the least being professionalism. On reaching the padlocked doors, she felt a rush of indignation as she scowled into her watch. Jack Blight was displaying a grave lack of personal style in not being here when he said he would, she felt. Just then, a ute squealed to a halt, and a gangly fellow came bounding towards her.

"Jillian Trembath? Sorry to keep you ... Jack sends his apologies, family emergency ...," Malcolm said.

Jillian raised a skeptical eyebrow, as he fumbled with the padlock and rattled on. It was one thing for Jack Blight to have been late, another for him not to show at all. Such a situation wasn't in the script. New critic gets stood up by Astroturf buffoon! No it was certainly not expected. People one interviews were meant to take one seriously. Fucking seriously. She was a representative of the *media* now. The other party was the *nobody interviewee*. In this case, the *grovelling artist nobody* requiring her good grace to grant him free publicity.

“Anyway, Jack thought another look at the work might assist you, and is happy to reschedule, that is to meet you at a destination and date of your choosing,” said Malcolm in an irritatingly ingratiating tone.

Although Malcolm offered to tour her around, Jillian insisted she would rather be alone with the work. Malcolm retreated to the office, leaving Jillian to her own devices. Jillian loved being left to her devices. She breathed in the calm ambience of the space, the works of Astroturf each lit discreetly with a halogen spotlight. Well, well, this work without a crowd to hamper one’s concentration wasn’t half bad. Last night had been a wearing event. Jillian was not one for crowds, not unless she was the centre of one, in only the most positive sense. However, being pushed into a corner with a fat, inebriated artist in a teepee wasn’t her idea of being at the centre of anything. She noted that on a nearby table was a pile of green covered folders exactly like the one she now owned thanks to Daniel Black. She smiled. The essay in it, ‘Astroturf Actually’, despite cheekily turning out to be his work, had been tremendously apt for her purpose. Jillian had undertaken Daniel’s radical course in Theory Unearthed, while a student at the Institute, and was well versed in the ideas she had found on Jack Blight’s recent shift into conceptual work. For a moment she pitied those who floundered in the face of the theory required to fully appreciate the contemporary arts, which could be very complex, she well knew. Then again, why pity those with less intellectual gifts than oneself? Those were simply the ordinary ones, she felt.

She strolled towards the nearest work, absorbed its title and prodded its surface. She then toured the rest, finally pausing at a work titled *To the Chagrin of Illusory Livestock*. She stared into the pure green expanse of unadulterated Astroturf and felt deeply moved. Being moved was not a thing that happened every day to Jillian. Yet this piece—indeed the entire show—roused her emotions. For Jillian was in love, of late, with minimalism, and there was nothing more uplifting, in her estimation, than a thing that answered the demands of this thrilling category. There was no arguing against the fact that a rectangular slab of Astroturf, with nothing to mar its pristine green surface, was nothing if not impressively minimal. Her current choices in fashion were all part of her recent conversion to minimalism. With her black clothes, topped with blonde bob, she aimed for a look that was neither nihilistic Goth, nor refined David Jones, and definitely not restaurant staff, but manifestly artworld. Since Jillian had taken up with minimalism, five weeks and three days ago, her flat was done up in black, white and silver. Furthermore it looked striking since it had been pared back to offer six items of furniture including her new white leather couch. There were no paintings on Jillian’s walls. No artworks at all in the flat. That’s how pure a

minimalist she was. Nothing interfered with her clean white surfaces. Not even art. There was commitment in that.

Jillian stood in front of *To the Chagrin of Illusory Livestock*, mesmerized by it, inhaling the poetics of the piece. Its simplicity crooned to her, its stylishness sang to her, and, as Daniel Black had written in his catalogue essay, she could sense “its relationship to the ironic is unerringly complex”. Its uninterrupted colour was commendable, uninterrupted colour being a thing in which Jillian deeply believed. She also believed in plastics and nylons and all things made *en masse* in factory surrounds. All in all she was a lover of the fake, and if there was one thing they did well, these works in Astroturf did fake. Who would have thought that that big lump of a man could produce such sophisticated work? In imagining the review she would soon write, the future looked appealing. She mulled over all the plusses. By covering this show intelligently I can say to all my readers: “Here I am, Jillian Trembath, your city’s youngest and most radical newspaper critic in the arts making you sit up and take notice. I am here to bring you art from the edge. You mightn’t like it. You might even hate it. Nevertheless, the postmodern has arrived, and I’m here to push it right into your face whether you are ready or not.”

Glancing at her watch, Jillian realised she’d better get a move on as dear brother Donald would be expecting his Alfa back. When Malcolm reemerged, he found her on her way out, trotting towards the entrance. The rapidity of her exit made him jumpy.

“So what shall I tell Jack you’d like to do about arranging the interview? I know he’s very keen to reschedule,” Malcolm asked.

Jillian flashed her piercing blue eyes at him.

“No need for that. I’ll let the work speak for itself,” she replied.

As she stepped outside she had an amusing afterthought. Whatever am I saying? What a joke. Whoever heard of contemporary art speaking for itself!

Chapter 8

As he watched Jillian drive off, the strains of *Purple Rain* fading from earshot, Malcolm marveled at the resoluteness of her hair. The wind wasn't making an impression on it. For Jack's sake he hoped this wasn't indicative of her reviewing style. On the way to Jack's he thought about the conversation he'd had with him first thing in the morning. Jack hadn't sounded too healthy on the phone, not after spending the night in the hostel. Malcolm imagined him now strung out on his faithful couch, nursing his hangover, the butts mounting in the ashtray. Yet on arriving he found Jack being productive in the kitchen lurking above a wok.

"Hi Malcolm, thought I'd knock up a veggie stir fry."

"Vegetables? Where did you hear about those?"

"I've had a conversion. I'm taking up green matter."

Jack wasn't looking like a man who'd spent the night at a refuge for homeless men. He wasn't looking like his usual self either. He was in freshly ironed clothes and his hair was neatly combed. He happily poked the wok's contents with his wooden spoon.

"Thought I'd improve my diet, improve myself all round."

"Why the sudden urge to reinvent yourself? I thought you were fine the way you were."

Jack didn't laugh, instead looking uncharacteristically earnest as he levelled the spoon at Malcolm's face.

"It's eye-opening spending time with the down and out. I don't know how I got to that hostel, but I do know I was in pretty bad shape when I woke. Do you know how I landed there? It is so peculiar, I just can't remember anything."

"I'm not entirely sure ..." Malcolm said casting his eyes to the ceiling, "Hey, let me help you with the cooking, mate."

Malcolm confiscated the spoon and began stirring frantically. Freed from the cooking, Jack began to pace the floor.

"That refuge, the stink of piss and poverty got me thinking, really thinking. You know about notions of success, and well, the lack thereof in my case. It's one thing being poor when you're young and robust. What I realised through this experience is being broke in your old age would be living hell. Being an artist is a big risk in the poverty-for-life department, Mal."

"That's for sure."

"Have you ever looked squarely at the dangers of being an artist working on the cutting edge? You and I could easily go down the gurgler. Go down and never come up."

As Jack strolled past, he paused in front of Malcolm before he uttered his next remark.

“I don’t welcome taking this trip down the gurgler. I want to avoid suffering in obscurity and poverty in the name of art. What’s the point of aligning to a brand new movement, if you’re trapped in that sad cliché? I plan to become successful. As in while I’m still alive.”

Malcolm paused for a moment before replying, the sound of sizzling now quite loud.

“So I assume you are planning to venture further on the cutting edge? That is stay with this new direction into more conceptual work?”

Jack nodded.

“Don’t you think, then, that it’s extremely unlikely that you’ll get commercial validation. I mean it’s a contradiction in terms.”

“You said it can be done in New York, so why not here?”

“It’s not exactly the land of artistic break-through, mate. The culture doesn’t welcome cultural innovation.”

“Ah, but surely the beauty of postmodernism is that it celebrates the banal, and the act of copying.”

“You mean appropriating?”

“Yeah, that.”

“Well I guess with that logic work of a certain postmodern bent could possibly make it in the financial sense, theoretically speaking.”

Whether Malcolm really agreed with Jack’s logic or was pandering to his fantasies wasn’t clear, as, a moment later the stir fry was ready and their conversation flow was thus interrupted. It was with grim determination that the pair sat down to their meal of vegetables, and even devoured a decent spoonful each before deciding to go out to a local fish and chip place.

OOO

Malcolm and Jack were on their way to Paddington with The Pretenders up louder than Jack considered civilised. Malcolm, who didn’t hide his obsession with Chrissie Hynde, began to list the merits of the band. Jack was not interested in druggie musical types. Besides, more important things were on his mind, like being called upon to cover the afternoon shift at Rubin’s.

“It’s degrading having to baby-sit one’s show.”

“Too right,” Malcolm said, eyes on the road, humming along to the track.

“If I was famous other people would look after it. No *serious* artist is expected to work as their own gallery staff.”

“Right again.”

At a set of red lights Malcolm began singing along to the lyrics. He paused at the chorus. It had been tough on him when the news came out that Chrissie Hynde had got involved with Jim Kerr of *Simple Minds*. Jack was tired of his star-struck nonsense. In all other respects Malcolm seemed so well-adjusted, for an artist. Jack lit a Camel and continued.

“If I’d sold even one work I bet Vivian would’ve been gentler on me roster-wise. She’s just punishing me.”

At that moment Jack remembered the matter of the missed interview debacle.

“So when did that twig of a critic want to meet up to discuss my work?”

Malcolm concentrated intensely on the road. Jack turned to stare at him.

“I presume you delivered the full details to Ms Trembath of my aunt’s recent tragedy and my dash to the hospital?”

“Yes, well, I tried.”

“Hell, Malcolm. You were under strict instructions to spin a decent story. This is my career we’re talking about. So the interview? When am I supposed to see the wench?”

“Actually, ah she didn’t want to go ahead with it. She said the work could speak for itself.”

“What! The work can’t speak for itself! What the hell would it say? Jesus, mate. This is a catastrophe.”

“Maybe it won’t be so bad,” Malcolm mumbled, feeling Jack did, however, have a point. Art wasn’t in the habit of speaking for itself, or why would anyone bother with catalogue essays? The last one written for him had been 48 pages. As they pulled up outside Rubin’s, Jack was experiencing the return of his old gurgling guts.

“Did she, at least, seem enamored with the work?”

“Well, you know. She was somewhat hard to read with those cold blue eyes staring into space. Unreadable, really.”

“Know what you mean,” Jack replied, “There are those cold females people call Ice Queens, but that Jillian Trembath is more of an Icy Pole if you ask me.”

As he stepped out of the ute, Jack was at least thankful to be granted reprieve from the tedious strains of *The Pretenders*.

OOO

When Jack minded his show that week, the only visitors were a smattering of fellow artists, none of whom showed the slightest interest in his work. Instead they grilled him about Jillian Trembath, rumour having circulated that he had met her in the flesh. It was understood her review about *Simulated Paddock* would

appear in print the coming Saturday for everyone to see. Or maybe it would not appear at all. Jack felt sick at the prospect either way. He was so anxious in fact, the last person he wished to talk about was the horrid little critic.

One afternoon Virginia Brunt appeared at the gallery in full post-Lacanian feminist drill, and straight away began to push the point about the Icy Pole.

“So what’s the story with Jillian Trembath? Someone told me she came straight off the news desk. Doesn’t that make her just a trumped up journalist? What do her credentials really amount to? Who did she have to fuck ...?”

Charming, thought Jack. He hadn’t considered the Icy Pole capable of fucking anyone to get anything, let alone ahead. She looked like any one of those pretty girls her age on the outside, he supposed, but there was something dreadfully off-putting about her emanating from within; something unnamable and deeply unnerving.

“So what do you reckon? Is she going to set out to crucify and crush us postmodernists like that bastard Peter Stiles?”

“Well, Virge, as she probably doesn’t know her Derrida from her Bouffant, she can write whatever she likes about *Simulated Paddock* as far as I’m concerned. No matter what she says she isn’t going to crucify or crush me.”

In reality, Jack felt the Icy Pole was already hard at work preparing to pulverise him, and what was left of his reputation, to pieces. He had slept badly that week thinking about how thoroughly she was going to do the job. His health kick had met a sticky end as he frequented his favourite bakery to stuff himself with delicacies like lamingtons and fudge.

On the final Friday at the gallery, his mum turned up in a dowdy brown dress that clashed dreadfully with his work. After saying hello, she solemnly pointed at the piece hanging directly above his head.

“I’d like to buy that one please dear.”

“Mum, don’t be silly. You don’t have to do this ...,” his voice trailed off, as he stared at the purse that had materialised, open to reveal a wad of bills.

“I don’t have to, I know. Well I’d *like* to buy it for the living room. It will go very nicely with the lounge.”

Jack knew the family living room *did* have very barren walls and a floral couch with strong accents that would complement his work. She held out a number of crisp dollar notes, which she had obtained, no doubt, by breaking her Long Term Deposit account. He didn’t look his mother in the eye as he put his hand out to take her cash. She was buying the piece for \$7,600. He tried not to think about how it had cost him a total of \$220 to make.

OOO

That evening, on leaving Rubin's, Malcolm picked Jack up. The plan was to head over to the warehouse armed with beer for a night in. Malcolm had to prepare for his forthcoming trip to the South Coast for his next devouring. Jack didn't want to go back to an empty flat, not with the fateful edition of *The Sydney Times* due out tomorrow. The Violent Femmes played on the stereo as Malcolm began working on a radiator. Jack sat nearby on the Holden car-seat couch.

"The question I ask myself is, how can I avoid annihilation by the Icy Pole? Critics like her see an artist like me bravely edging his way onto that precipice and feel compelled to push him off."

Malcolm nodded gravely as he continued with his work.

"I simply don't want to be slashed to bloody pieces in the public eye, just because that vicious little bit of fluff doesn't have a handle on the *avant-garde*."

"We're not, in actual fact, operating in the *avant-garde*. Bouffant says the term isn't applicable anymore, and Lyotard as well."

"Oh. Well ... you know what I mean, Jillian Trembath is just not versed in whatever it is we do, and I am likely to suffer as a consequence."

Spanner in hand, Malcolm looked at Jack solemnly.

"Even her worst review can't do you damage, in fact so long as she reviews you in any form, you can't go wrong. In some people's eyes, it would give you far more cred if she despises your work."

By this point, they had both had a few too many. Generally Jack took on board that Malcolm was insightful about matters artistic and cultural, sober or not. Yet at this point, Jack's thoughts had formed a gridlock of negativity, in which Malcolm's opinion couldn't get in. Jack believed Jillian Trembath was going to do him in, no matter what anyone said.

OOO

Malcolm's car-seat may be very cool and very retro, but it was far from ideal as a sleeping surface, thought Jack as he peeled himself off it on waking the next morning. No sign of Malcolm having yet woken, he staggered to the bathroom where a huddle of cockroaches scattered underfoot. He splashed cold water on his face and stared in the grimy mirror, remembering it was the morning of his undoing. As Jack returned to the couch, Malcolm entered through the front door, dressed in casual black, holding a fat newspaper and a buttery bag filled, Jack suspected, with croissants. Judging from the edition's battered appearance, Malcolm had perused its contents. He looked irritatingly poker-faced.

"My God, Mal, how bad is it?"

"Let's put it this way, that crucifixion you're expecting.... It's more like a beatification." he began to grin.

“You’re kidding,” said Jack.

“No. I’m not. She’s written up *Simulated Paddock* in very positive terms, glowing even. It’s nothing short of a miracle.”

Jack snatched the paper, and opened it to the place where he found Jillian Trembath’s name beneath an article, accompanied by an image of a flat rectangle of green. As he scanned the words, a stunned expression appeared on his face.

“Jesus, this is more than just a little validating. Look how clever she considers my foray into Astroturf!”

“Don’t sound so incredulous. It was my idea, remember? I knew it was apt for the times, I have intuition for these things.”

Jack looked up.

“Thanks, mate, for sharing your superb intuition, I really appreciate it,” he said.

“My pleasure. It’s all part of the postmodern adventure.”

Malcolm was a peculiar fellow, for an artist, Jack felt. Generosity with ideas and no desire to take credit were not usually on the job description. This postmodern caper wasn’t as bad as Jack had first thought, even if the work required had a tendency towards the vacuous. As Malcolm prepared the coffee in his ancient percolator, located the cups, plates, cutlery and condiments, Jack began to read the article aloud, adopting a good version of an ABC arts commentator, he felt.

In his exhibition *Simulated Paddock*, artist Jack Blight offers a celebration of the mass-produced, the copy and the fake. It is a timely move into the postmodern.

“I wonder how she defines the postmodern”, Malcolm cut in, “I mean does she draw on Eco’s view of double-coding, or Jameson’s interest in schlock and b-grade. Perhaps she’s into Lyotard’s death of the grand narrative. Yes, I imagine that’s her take.”

“Christ do we have to dredge up the bloody grand narrative again? Let’s get back to the point,” said Jack and continued reading.

The works are created from Astroturf, evoking notions of simulation and the banal. However, clearly, while the medium used is unmediated—the uninterrupted Astroturf pieces have not even a signature in view—in this age there is no such thing as unmediated art.

Jack looked up, puzzled: “I don’t know about that? Surely art can still be unmediated, or what’s the point?”

“No, she’s on the money. We’re feeling the influence of Bouffant again, remember his theory of the Absence of the Original?”

Jack nodded humbly and continued.

This show reverberates with references to the projects undertaken Duchamp and Warhol. Yet Blight brings art's relation to the ironic into a new and complex stage. He doesn't expect us to be shocked by notions of the commodification of art, he expects us to be immune to that. Rather he expects us to be prepared for his ironic smirk.

Jack paused to gaze into the warehouse surrounds, apparently lost in thought.

"Jack? You still with us? Is all the praise getting to you?"

"Well, it certainly is a shock," he said and laughed.

Malcolm leaned over to finish reading from where Jack had left off, getting louder as he went:

The Astroturf stands unashamedly before us. These are huge works, bold and brash. The work is unapologetic, our expectations are high as we face these mammoth canvases, our eyes constantly roam in search of some meaning, some suggestion of a traditional narrative which simply isn't there.

"She does love to rattle on," Jack said wistfully, "It is all good ... isn't it?"

"It is all exceptionally good," said Malcolm, "I mean this is not some suburban rag, it is *The Sydney Times*, and look how much space she has given you."

"Christ there's more?" said Jack, peering over Malcolm's shoulder as he headed towards the conclusion.

What can we find to appease this stubborn pointless drive for narrative? Outside the canvas there are titles, which evoke a 'story', albeit one drenched in mock regret for a pastoral age that is presented as nothing more than farce. This exhibition is a master stroke by Blight, and, as cultural theorist Michel Bouffant affirms, the original has been once more rendered obsolete.

"A master-stroke, I never thought that dreadful little critic was capable of such discernment," cried Jack.

"Indeed it bodes well for the future of the postmodern project," said Malcolm, and once again Jack marveled at the big picture tendency in his friend and fellow artist.

Chapter 9

When Daniel woke, a hefty newspaper, opened at the arts pages, was being dumped on him from a certain height, and with certain force, by the young woman in whose bed he lay, groggily.

“Cast your eye over my column will you?”

She sat down, kicked off her heels, and climbed back under the covers. It was early, very early. She had evidentially been out to get the first edition.

“So where’s the coffee? Saturday papers come with mandatory cappuccino.”

She scowled: “After you read it, you will be sent out to fetch it.”

Not liking this version of his once pliable ex-student, Daniel, nevertheless, did as he was told, though he did not read aloud. “In his exhibition *Simulated Paddock*, artist Jack Blight offers a celebration of the mass-produced ... a timely move into the postmodern...” His eyes roved effortlessly down the page. He was initially pleased to see some of his ideas expressed. Then as he continued, he noted that some of his ideas were more than just aired but housed in some of his very own words, and soon whole sentences leapt out at him, those he had written *verbatim* in ‘Astroturf Actually’. His jaw felt uncomfortably tight by the time he read the line: “The Astroturf stands unashamedly before us.” Thinking of this concept of unashamedness made him think of the young woman beside him. For in her review there was no mention, anywhere, of his name, no allusion to his contribution from his catalogue essay, no attributes at all in quotation marks in the entire piece. He felt his jaw tighten further. He should have known, he really should, he had witnessed these tendencies in Ms Trembath before, but in the past her antics, as an undergrad doing what it took for High Distinctions, had seemed almost cute.

“Well, congratulate me, Daniel. Surely in the days of Peter Stiles, it was inconceivable that work as radical as Blight’s would get even a small run,” she said with a bright laugh.

She may have been right, but Daniel was ruminating on the fact that there was nothing cute about the way she had played him, and indeed, plagiarised him. Yet what could he say? She was not a person whose feathers one wanted to ruffle, she was a *media contact* now.

“Well, Jillian. It is sophisticated. Also, of course, it is great to see conceptual art taken seriously in this mainstream context.”

What did it matter, he asked himself, if his quotes were not attributed to him? Was it really important in the long run? So what if he played an anonymous role behind this influx of new ideas, at least his views would be influential. Besides, if one thought about it, surely wanting one’s name in the paper was individual vanity at work? As everyone knows the individual is a construct, a fabrication of

the bourgeoisie, therefore he had not right to make such a personal claim to begin with. Then he thought of something more to add.

“In terms of building support for postmodern art in this country, it’s very promising.”

In pointing Jillian towards *Simulated Paddock* in the first place, in providing the *theoretical underpinnings* behind the work to guide her analysis, surely he had made a significant contribution to the greater cultural good.

“You know what irks me about the whole process,” Jillian said sourly. “Blight didn’t show up for his interview, and while your essay was at hand, you’d think the artist himself would make it his business to contribute. No it wasn’t at all ideal.” Jillian began to pout.

That is rich, thought Daniel. Now she was whining about drawing so heavily on his essay. Also, had she interviewed Jack, she wouldn’t have unearthed anything even remotely lucid about his practice. Daniel prepared himself to admonish her for her ingratitude. As he looked at the young woman pouting beside him, the truth was she seemed so terribly, well, so awfully— attractive. It was quite unfair that she looked so good, even while playing the spoiled little brat. In general it was unfair the way less self-absorbed, more ethical, generous hearted women so often looked plain old ugly a good deal of the time. It was unfair because Jillian never actually looked the slightest bit ugly. Even when she was being unbearable, she didn’t get close to ugly. Except the world didn’t do fair, Daniel reminded himself. Wheelers and dealers, like Bond and Mars, were in favour this decade, making big money, scamming on tax, scamming all around. Yuppies were taking over old neighbourhoods, tarting them up, evicting the old-timers from their homes, making profits from their trendy renovations, bringing with them all the signs—in the Bouffantian sense of the word—of *hyper-conformism*. Meanwhile even old Hawke himself was all surface and spin. Whether the media made him look the beer drinking, womanising lout or the sensitive soul issuing tears of compassion, everyone loved him. Anyone else, if he cried in public, would be bashed. Then along comes a hackneyed actor, who keeps forgetting his lines, and becomes the most powerful man in the Western world. No, the world wasn’t doing fair. It was busy doing something else.

Jillian was silent beside him, arms crossed, still in a sulk. Daniel suddenly realized he had gone too far, was risking too much.

“Look Jillian. I am sorry you felt there was pressure on you to draw on my essay, but think of it this way, these days, collaboration in terms of cultural production, is not such a bad thing. There’s nothing wrong with likeminded people helping each other along. Look at it as if you’ve entered a family—a postmodern artworld family—where you’re not meant to operate as a lonely individual, in fact rather in

this era where one questions the very validity of the individual, one can let go of all that pressure to be original and authentic.”

Jillian glowered at him.

“I am all for postmodernism, but I don’t want to enter some claustrophobic family style system, based on patriarchal rules of engagement. To state it simply, I don’t want this position to force me into compromising I plan to crack this job alone.”

Daniel inwardly winced. Jillian may consider herself a progressive feminist, but that was no excuse to think in reductive individualistic terms. It was no secret that her feminism was problematic. She hadn’t written any feminist articles, engaged in activities related to feminist causes or made any public feminist pronouncements. Wasn’t that all part of the brief? He also knew she didn’t happen to have a single female friend. Weren’t feminists supposed to band together and fight for mutually beneficial things? However perhaps now was not the time to criticise her feminism. He again considered her new position of power. Besides she did have spunk, and Daniel admired that. You had to hand it to her, there must have been some stiff competition for the job of critic of *The Sydney Times*, and whatever stunts she’d pulled, she had managed to trounce the other contenders. That inspired admiration in itself.

Daniel took a deep breath, hoping what he was about to say next wouldn’t be taken as condescending words delivered from the patriarchy.

“Mostly people who’re successful in the contemporary arts haven’t done it on their own. They have invisible people behind the scenes pushing them up those rungs on the ladder. So just think of people like me, who assist with providing the theoretical underpinnings of the movement, for instance, as pushing you up a ladder rung from behind.”

This encouraged him to imagine what Jillian would look like were she to be climbing a ladder in one of those short, tight black skirts of hers, with him pushing her *petit derriere*, and this spurred him to make an exploratory journey down the bed clothes.

“I spy toes!” he cried.

He tugged at the bedclothes until her toes were fully exposed. He started to suck the big toe of her left foot. Hers were very nice toes, small and pale, with chipped nail polish that gave the impression of feminine vulnerability. There was nothing vulnerable about the rest of Jillian, so it was pleasant to find a vestige of it somewhere. He went on to the second toe, and then the third, and by the fourth Jillian started talking languidly, as if to herself.

“Ah, that feels better. Much better, I didn’t realise how tense I’d become. Such a stressful week, all that negotiating I had to do, to get my column run exactly the

way I wrote it. You have no idea how brutal the newspaper world really is,” Daniel stopped sucking momentarily.

“What sort of negotiating did you have to do?” he asked admiringly.

“It was quite a job persuading Bob Herrick to let my article on Blight go ahead, that is once he heard what sort of work was involved. Once I’d written the piece, there was another struggle with him wanting to make substantial changes. It wasn’t easy keeping his hands off things.”

She snorted indignantly. Daniel was in the midst of sucking her pinkie. She did have a loveliness about her, though he knew if the need arose she’d turn on him. Turn very violently too, he had no doubt. He saw them all the time in his classes, this new breed of young women, hard as fortified steel, but at the same time so sweet to the taste. Jillian’s voice filtered down to him.

“It’s hard getting one’s point of view across to newspaper men like Herrick mired, as they often are, in old-world notions. One has to be adept at the art of persuasion.”

Daniel made a kind of snuffling noise to indicate that he was not only listening, but on her side. Jillian was definitely courageous tackling that corporate lot. He couldn’t even imagine how savage some of those newspaper types must be. Academia was bad enough. As he moved onto her second foot he felt another wave of admiration for her. Whatever happened, and whatever she did, he was going to keep a close watch on fierce Jillian Trembath.

Chapter 10

The only thing preventing Jack and Malcolm poring over the review of *Simulated Paddock*, unimpeded, was the constant interruptions. They were still hovering over the article at Malcolm's, well into their second pot of coffee when Vivian called.

"Such a review Jack—in *The Sydney Times* no less—by this surprising Trembath person. Who could ask for such a review!"

"Indeed, who," Jack said.

"After all your warnings about her capabilities—what is it you call her—the Swizzle Stick?"

"The Icy Pole."

"Yes, Jack, you had led me to believe she wouldn't know her Derrida from her Bouffant, but instead she's got it all. She's certainly gotten you. Nailed you, dear man, right down."

Vivian went on about her favourite new pet Jillian Trembath. On and bloody on, thought Jack, as he held the receiver. He rolled his eyes in Malcolm's direction.

"Such an injection of vitality in an otherwise dreary critical landscape," she said.

"The other critics have been so tragically stodgy; the tedious way they worship painters of eucalypt trees and those tiresome Australian myths. This Trembath is obviously determined to shake all that old rot positively loose."

Jack felt like shaking Vivian's tongue loose by that point, so it was just as well she changed the topic, telling him he didn't have to come to the gallery, today, or ever again, if he didn't want to. That morning, she'd heard from so many eager young artists and art school students volunteering to mind his show, there was no need for him to do it again.

"Is that so? Well, that does free one up to get back to the serious business of producing work," Jack said, in his new successful man's deep voice.

On hanging up, Jack noticed Malcolm was engaged in the spurious act of reading the newspaper. He wasn't reading the arts pages, as Jack believed a reasonable person would, but the general news. Radiators and exhaust pipes were one thing, but Jack could not imagine what sensationalist tripe Malcolm was devouring in newsprint. The news was so depressing; so propagandist; so ordinary and dull. Jack did his best to avoid it, as did most people he knew. Just then the phone rang. It was that tricky post-Lacanian feminist, Trudy Smee. Jack had heard on the grapevine she had moved out of puss, and back to menstrual blood of late. Which, in his books, was so disturbing it didn't bear thinking about.

“Tremendous write-up, Jack. Congratulations. I suspect bodily fluids were exchanged between you and this Jillian Trembath in the process of the review’s development ...”

When Trudy then laughed, Jack realised this was her idea of a joke. He laughed as best he could.

By the time Drew Gunn called, the table at which Jack and Malcolm had installed themselves was not only covered in leaves of newspaper, but plates with buttery crumbs and smears of jam, empty coffee cups, and a mounting ashtray.

“Congratulations, mate, cool review. How did you get that happening? Whatever you did, above board or not, I want your tips,” Drew said. Jack did not wait for Drew to start laughing to start up himself. As soon as Jack put it down, the phone rang again with Miles Faber on the line. Since his BBQ installation, apparently he had been working in bees wax.

“Congratulations, mate. That new reviewer is enamored with your work. Did money change hands between you two or what? Would explain a thing or two. Ha ha ha.” As Jack began laughing he felt a gut ache coming on.

Just as he was about to interrupt Malcolm, who was strangely still reading sections of the paper, to tell him that the last thing one needs on the day one is reviewed is friends and fellow artists calling to congratulate one, the phone rang again. It was his Mum.

“Jack, darling, my friends have been ringing all morning to congratulate me on you getting such a lovely review. It’s terribly nice, this sudden affirmation of my worth as a mother after all these years of being pitied for having an artist as a son.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying the affirmation, Mum. You deserve it if anyone does.” Elaine’s voice jumped a notch in pitch.

“When you become famous, dear, don’t forget to tell people I was the first person to buy your new art. Remind them I bought it when no one else liked it.”

“Okay Mum,” Jack said and although he knew she had the best of intentions, he felt like wrenching the phone from the socket.

OOO

While she had let him off the hook in terms of art-sitting, Jack felt a visit to Rubin’s was in order now that his work had been critically acclaimed. Malcolm had come to pick him up, and soon they were making their way down the dank stairwell.

“You hanging around when we get to Rubin’s, Mal?”

“Can’t. Off to see a doctor, and not one with a PhD for a change.”

Jack quizzed him if anything was actually wrong.

“A bit of a tickle in my throat I can’t seem to shake, nothing most likely.”

Once on the road they listened to The Smiths. Malcolm pulled up outside the familiar ivy-choked façade and Jack was soon stepping out of the ute. He came across Vivian in the foyer dusting the titles. She was in a complicated red latex outfit with an aggressively pointy Madonnasque bra. Jack felt art’s women were going astray when they gave up their genteel ways. He wished she would stay with crème linen like other gallery directors in the neighbourhood.

“Jack,” Vivian cried, and bent up to smack her lips on his.

Kissing Jack was a thing Vivian had never done before. Body contact of this, or any other nature, Jack wished to have with 99 per cent of the women he set eyes on, but Vivian was not in that percentile band. Nor was Jillian Trembath for that matter. Both were bony woman, and in Vivian’s case there was the added factor of her age. She was on the unpleasant side of 35, and she was unflaggingly intense. If there was one thing Jack found unattractive in a woman it was unflagging intensity.

“People have been arriving from the moment the doors opened. Simply *everyone* wants to see your work now Jillian Trembath has pronounced it works.”

Jack rocked on his toes, puffed out his chest and wondered if, with all this sudden popularity, he’d actually begun to sell. Naturally, he couldn’t let anyone know, nor could he ask openly about this matter, as it was not the thing one can be seen to do as a cutting edge artist, he knew. Word might get out that he had begun to think along sad commercial lines. He brushed past Vivian to take a look for himself.

While there was a disappointing absence of red stickers on his work, indeed only one which accounted for his mother’s purchase, what was not disappointing was the head count. There were 57 people in the gallery, striking various sophisticated poses before the work. Many stared at it wistfully, others murmured to one another in discreet tones. Vivian sidled up beside Jack and informed him that it was only a question of time before he “took off” in a practical sense.

“At this stage in the game, Jack, some articles in the art press wouldn’t go astray.” This prompted a professional chat between the two in her private office out the back, where it was decided that Jack needed to consider *marketing* himself as the leading figure on the contemporary front.

OOO

Jack looked up at the wrought iron gate stretching high above him. A row of letters, in foreign script, said something unarguably profound. As he saw it, one is always hearing how painting is dead and God is dead, and philosophy is dead, and the same with religion and morality, but there is nothing more dead than a

language like *Latin*. Those academic types think they're so clever, the way they do things to dumbfound the rest of us, he thought. He had called Daniel Black on the phone and arranged a meeting scheduled in ten minutes time. Once locating the building that housed the Human Arts department, Jack was keen to find the man who'd written 'Astroturf Actually'. He had only yesterday rescued the green folder from under the television table and had begun to read the contents, but had gotten as lost in it as he was now in these corridors.

Finally, he stumbled onto a small room with an open door, in which, surrounded by overflowing bookcases and mounds of paperwork, the runty fellow was seated in an armchair, his eyes glued to a book. As Jack approached he realised the book concerned was not the erudite publication he had assumed, but a comic book. Daniel looked up.

"Ah, hello Jack. You caught me re-engaging with the inspirational Belgian creation, *Tintin*. The protagonist, in visiting China, provides a prime example of the Orient represented as Other by the Eurocentric gaze. Are you, by chance, a follower of *Tintin*?"

Before Jack had time to reply that he was not a fan of a puerile comic book, and that he didn't understand why overeducated adults were reading children's comics and watching kids cartoons, and getting overheated about these facts, Daniel launched into a speech. Soon Jack had been informed about the latest critical debates regarding the adventures of the comic character *Tintin* and his trusty dog. Finally, to Jack's relief Daniel got to the point.

"So what was it you wanted to see me about?"

Finding the fellow in the maze of building in which the Institute was housed was one thing, but now came the hard part for Jack.

"Well, the thing is, I was hoping to ask you for a, well, a personal favour," he said.

With dozens of essays to mark, arrangements still to finalise for the Planet Postmodern Conference, a paper to begin, Daniel was in no mood to do anyone any favours. Except this was not just anyone. This was the emerging artist Jack Blight. The same fellow Daniel had written a very sophisticated catalogue essay about, material from which had been quoted—albeit not entirely to his liking—in the arts column of the city's most prestigious broadsheet. Jack Blight, put bluntly, had become a *professional investment*.

"How can I help?" asked Daniel.

"Vivian Rubin and I agree that some articles on my work in the art magazines and journals about the place would be the go. You know, to build my profile, while I'm a hot discussion point."

Daniel scratched his highly considered, three-day growth.

“As Vivian knows, art publications have staff writers and regular contributors for that. I don’t see why she would send you to me.”

Just then three lanky black-haired youths appeared at the doorway.

“Are there any tickets left to see this Michel Bouffant guy?” one said. The only girl of the trio giggled.

“There are still tickets, good tickets. Tell your friends. Excuse me, won’t you Jack?” As he spoke, Daniel’s eyes had lit up with an unnatural gleam.

Jack sat back as the *transaction* unfolded before him and began to crave a medicinal drink. Indeed he had built up a thirst. It wasn’t easy asking for a personal favor. Certain admissions would have to be made, things needed to be confessed that were not going to be pleasant to admit.

The youths, now replete with conference tickets, shuffled off.

“You don’t happen to have an alcoholic beverage on hand, mate?” Jack asked.

Daniel produced two glasses and a bottle of promising amber liquid that looked a lot like scotch to Jack. He poured a generous amount for Jack, and a tiny portion for himself. A warming whisky later, Jack was ready to tackle the thorny subject that was required.

“The thing is, as we both know, *theory*, it seems, is getting as big as art itself. So an artist is expected to know his Derrida, spout his Bouffant and all of that to validate his work. The thing is in this regard I’m a bit old school man, if you know where I am heading ...”

Daniel suspected he knew exactly where Jack was heading. It didn’t make him feel so good, in fact his jaw had begun to tighten and he had a cramping sensation occurring in his head. Perhaps, Daniel reasoned, once he pressed Jack to elaborate on what he meant, his inkling would be proven wrong.

“Could you perhaps be more specific, Jack?”

Jack leaned forward. Despite what people said about his searing intellect, he considered that perhaps Daniel Black wasn’t so quick on the uptake.

“You see my move into Astroturf was an accident of sorts. My shift from painting into this new medium happened so fast I didn’t have time to really nut out the details of, you know, what I am actually on about—conceptually speaking.”

“Ah ha,” Daniel said, at which point his jaw gave him a painful twang.

“In other words,” said Jack, feeling a little more confident since Daniel hadn’t burst into indignant protests, “I work, by and large, intuitively, which I’m sure you’ll agree doesn’t mean I’m not as much of a postmodernist as the next artist on the contemporary scene.”

Daniel rubbed his jaw and tried to relax. His mind was whirring too fast for that. He began thinking of all the ways Vivian Rubin had led him to believe this man before him was an articulate, well-read, highly strategic, sophisticated, Conceptual artist; someone working in the realm of ideas that challenge the

modernist tradition. Yes, Daniel was thinking of all the ways Vivian had led him to believe this, but there were too many ways to count. Then he considered some of the young artists around town who were currently emerging, or at least would be emerging more successfully, if someone like himself would give them a decent break. Bryan Lee's installation art successfully explored his experience of being marginalised in Australia. Lee explored what it was like to be gay, non-sporty and Chinese in the Antipodes. Yet his name had not made it in actual fact into currency. There was Dianne Tally who cannily dealt with dual notions of the everyday and the feminine in her huge sculptural renditions, in Clark rubber, of 50s household appliances for the average 'giant' housewife. Her room sized rubber gloves may well be daring, but she remained utterly unknown, with many of her best designs for installations not making it into actuality due to lack of funds. There were other young artists who flitted across his mind. All of them made work that was tuned-in, tongue-in-cheek, highly referential and theory rich, well conceived, competently rendered and conceptually spot-on—in other words their work was the real postmodern deal. Yet for a range of reasons that escaped him now, he had overlooked all of them when it came to giving them that extra boost of support that someone in arts academia these days can give. He hadn't written catalogue essays for their shows or whispered in the ear of someone like Jillian Trembath, or even less prominent writers on the scene, about their work. His jaw was very painful now.

"Another drink, Jack?"

His guest put out his empty glass and grinned.

"Don't mind if I do."

Daniel poured large glasses for both of them. They sipped for an extended silence, a silence that Jack was eventually compelled to break.

"Well what I'm getting at, Daniel, is that I was hoping you could lend me a hand in the *theory* department. I came to you because your essay about my work seems to be associating it with a range of ideas that are somewhat, are somewhat, outside my" Jack took a swift sip, before continuing. "What I mean to say is, perhaps you could help me to get my head around the theoretical side of the postmodern, you know assist me to articulate my move into Astroturf on an ongoing basis."

Daniel's thoughts raced on. What, he asked himself, is a writer's career, if not the choices one makes about what—or whom—one writes? Indeed, taking this into account, he also acknowledged that as a writer it was not good to have regrets. Right now he was trying hard not to regret every sentence, every word, every comma, every set of parentheses, and every hyphen he had placed in 'Astroturf Actually'. Daniel took a slug of whisky and stared at his scruffy visitor, who was—after all—not a scammer, as such, nor a charlatan, really, and not a cut-and-

dried case of *emperor's new clothes*, as the movement's enemies constantly accused it of producing. The man can actually paint. His *Black Goddess* series was technically and even conceptually very good, even if it was a bit lacking on some fronts people had been saying about the place. Then it occurred to him that maybe, just maybe, Jack could do with a helping hand. Knowledge of postmodernism isn't something you are born with implanted in your brain, he reminded himself. Surely people can be educated to develop an appreciation of the intricacies of such a movement. Daniel again rubbed his aching jaw. Maybe there would be some mutual benefits involved in such an undertaking. Perhaps Vivian Rubin would like to consider, well, *a fee* for such a service rendered to an up-and-coming artist in her stable?

"I guess I could offer you some assistance with theory, and other essentials," Daniel said.

"That'd be great. Really great," and then to Daniel's dismay, Jack summed up the situation in inappropriately brazen terms.

"Who knows where this could lead? You working as my Personal Theorist, me handling artistic output," Jack enthused, lifting his glass to toast the proposed arrangement.

OOO

Malcolm had finally hit the road south, his ute equipped with props and supplies for both his performance piece and his camping needs. On returning, despite his increasingly sore throat, he decided to throw a party to screen the footage he'd taken on a farm at which he'd camped. He called the piece *Digesting Spark Plugs in Farm Situ, Bermagui, 1984*, he told Jack on the phone, adding that things had gone well thanks to a herd of prizewinning cows that enhanced the piece, in both thematic and aesthetic ways. On the night of the screening, Jack arrived early at the warehouse to secure a place on the couch. He needed a decent resting place after the last few weeks, in which he and Daniel Black had worked the *art press*. Malcolm greeted him at the door.

"Ah the Astroturf Prince himself," Malcolm said in a rasping voice, while ushering Jack inside. As well as the expected equipment for a night of film viewing, Jack observed that several empty cages had been installed around the space.

"Intriguing. Is there some lion taming on the program?" he asked.

"All will be revealed," Malcolm croaked.

Once Jack had settled in, others started arriving. He was somewhat surprised when two attractive women artists from Rubin's arrived together and sat on either side of him.

“Hello Jack. I’m Joy Ridge,” the one on his right announced.

Jack already knew her by name and sight. What a sight she made with her purple streak in her mane of white hair, dark sunglasses, black trench coat, unbuttoned a fair way down, and ripped fishnets above thigh high boots. The best part, thought Jack, was the casual display of her not insubstantial cleavage. For some time Jack had seen Joy’s posters up on walls and hoardings about the place advertising gigs she and her band were performing in underground venues. Then one day, not that long ago Malcolm mentioned that Vivian was adding her to the stable.

“Why would Vivian throw a straight rocker in with her set of visual and performing artists?” Jack asked.

“Joy Ridge doesn’t really *do* rock. In fact she doesn’t perform any instrument, or sing, in the musical sense.”

“Surely she doesn’t mime when playing *live* like some tragic *Countdown* band?”

“No, Jack, what Joy Ridge does is a lot more complex and engaging than that.”

Finally Malcolm had explained that Joy Ridge was the adopted persona through which the artist Sharon Boils, from Brisbane, was exploring cultural perceptions of fame and media representation. Jack took this news quite hard.

“I liked her as a musician. She seemed more authentic than most.”

“Well Boils is authentic about her persona. What she’s up to is far more challenging than tedious old rock. It’s a fantastic project. Through the character of Joy Ridge, Boils is exploring the way we use fame as a drug, as an antidote to the death of God in the Nietzschean sense. I can see her taking this project a lot further yet.”

“Isn’t it just a sophisticated game of dress ups?” Jack’s tone was acerbic. He was annoyed at being duped so thoroughly. Jack’s reminiscences about this were interrupted by the singsong voice of the woman on the other side of the couch, Ruby Watson.

“Hello Jack. I’m Ruby, we’ve not been properly introduced, but I know your work.”

“I believe you’re the artist who works predominantly in red,” said Jack.

Jack had attended an opening at Ruby’s recently, in which the work was made out of human hair. The hair had been dyed a clotted blood-like hue that had made Jack feel feverish on scrutiny. Tonight Ruby’s shoes were red, her clothes were red and her hair was an alarming fluoro red. While her cleavage, what there was of one, was not of particular note, Jack could see she had a fine pair of long red-stockinged legs.

“So Ruby are you still working in, ah, hair?”

“No, I’ve moved into Styrofoam. It’s better for the issues I’m examining these days.”

“Ah, sounds interesting. What sorts of issues?” asked Jack.

“Big testicles—that’s what she’s exploring,” the husky voice of Joy Ridge, aka Sharon Boils, cut in. Jack swung around to find the woman he was going to call Joy no matter what, had lifted her dark glasses, revealing a set of mascara-heavy eyes.

“Yes, the latest work of Ruby’s features giant scrotums and enormous penises and associated male genitalia of extraordinary size,” Joy was obviously, it seemed to Jack, having a great time imparting this information to all who cared to hear. “She may mock my work,” Ruby snapped defensively, “but women artists would still be exploring simplistic notions of ‘the feminine’ if it wasn’t for critical work like mine.”

Jack didn’t like the sound of Ruby’s work at all, but he nevertheless found her interesting in other ways, for instance housed in bright red stockings, those legs of hers were something else.

“The screening has been unfortunately delayed due to technical difficulties,” Malcolm announced loudly to all present, as he fiddled at the projector with a group of technical assistants, and people who thought they were technical assistants but were actually not proving useful. As Jack surveyed the room, he noted all the seats were now filled with his friends and colleagues in the contemporary arts, mostly from Rubin’s, but there were some with other galleries too.

“So much for the reliability of Super8. Malcolm insists it’s a superior medium, but if you want reliability I suggest AstroTurf,” said Jack.

“Speaking of which,” Joy said, leaning in close to him, “I was intrigued when reading about your work in *Art Antipodean*, especially what you said about its relationship to the signifier and the signified.”

As far as Jack was concerned the signifier and the signified could take a flying leap. In actuality these terms had been made part of the article on Daniel’s insistence, in fact most of the content was due to Daniel’s insistence. Not in fact recalling the details well at all, Jack mumbled something vague in response, and was thankful when Ruby interrupted.

“In that piece on your AstroTurf venture in *Stressation*, your discussion got me thinking about how minimalism can be so rich with meaning, so latent with intention, and yet simultaneously so wonderfully banal.”

For a moment Jack had no idea what she was talking about, then remembered that *Stressation* was a magazine based in Melbourne, in which he had recently been featured. Daniel had not actually given Jack a copy yet, so he was even more vague about it than the *Art Antipodean* piece. Before Jack had a chance to reply, Joy interjected with a further remark about another article she had read in *On The Pavement* on his work. This was a local street style magazine, with a grunge aesthetic and an audience almost a decade younger than Jack.

While Jack felt flattered that the women were engaged in some form of competition, involving quoting the articles they had read about him, he couldn't help but feel quite ill at being reminded of the agony all this flood of recent publicity had put him through. Daniel, now operating unofficially as his Personal Theorist, had been the primary instigator of the spate of coverage on his work in the art press. He had written the material, contacted the editors, sent them images, plus arranged a number of short interviews with Jack. It was specified that any interviews were to be phone, only. So while Jack was present at the time of each one, he was not necessarily the *actual* person on the phone doing the talking about his work. Yet despite how little actual direct interaction had been required of him, he found the whole experience of obtaining a *media profile* an emotionally draining one.

"It's incredible, Jack, how you've provoked a wave of critical debate not just on your own work, but on postmodernism in general. People have really drawn on all you've said to ask is postmodernism really an extension of modernism, or does it mark a break. So central to consider, don't you agree," said Joy.

Before he had time to comment, Ruby butted in: "Yes, yes. So central and I've found it so enlightening to read about the processes behind *Simulated Paddock*, not to mention the process behind the process ..."

Just when Jack was beginning to feel he might really need to form some sort of reply to somehow put an end to the conversation, the lights went out, and with a few grinds and chugs, the projector kicked into gear. A gigantic image of Malcolm appeared in grainy black and white sitting cross-legged in a field. The haunting cello of gifted sound artist Dana Bleak started playing. Then Malcolm's hand went out of focus momentarily as it reached into the foreground, then reappeared, and refocused, clutching an object.

"My favorite for starters, a spark plug," Malcolm pronounced.

People laughed. The on-screen Malcolm, after placing the spark plug in his mouth started to chew it solemnly. Behind him was a hulking Four Wheel Drive. The haunting cello intensified. Suddenly a number of Friesians appeared from the right. The crowd cheered. The cows moved towards Malcolm and paused just inches away from him, and once settled, began slowly munching grass. Malcolm, not paying them the slightest attention, continued chewing. At moments where Malcolm's chewing synchronised with that of the cows, the audience roared and cheered. The piece suddenly ended after a few squiggly lines appeared. After enthusiastic applause, the speakers crackled. Suddenly the opening bars of Frankie Goes To Hollywood's hit single *Relax* came on, playing quite loudly. Jack was puzzling over the anomalies. Club music? At Malcolm's? People began murmuring. Then several girls slunk into view wearing miniskirts, halter necks and hair in bulging beehives. They slipped into each of the empty cages and

began to dance in a way that suggested to those who knew it, *the go-go*. A strobe light came on.

“Groovy,” Ruby said, getting into the spirit.

“If you like that sort of thing,” said Jack, who had recognized the dancers as some of those art school girls who had minded his show.

At first everyone was simply stunned, then when another track by Frankie Goes To Hollywood’s followed, and then a few *Madonna* hits came on, people realized this peculiar part of the evening was something Malcolm intended to prolong. A bunch of performance artists got up to dance, and they were swiftly joined by Bill and Tim, the video twins. Even some painters eventually took to the floor. Soon the space was crowded with all manner of contemporary artists giving up their usual cool under the influence of popular dance tracks. Madonna’s *Holiday* melted into a Michael Jackson medley starting with *Thriller*. After several attempts, Joy and Ruby finally dragged Jack up to join them.

“Who said you can’t dance?” Joy shouted over the music as Jack flung his arms and legs about, as best he could, to the beat.

“Yeah who?” Ruby chimed in.

Everybody who had ever witnessed Jack dance had said something along these lines, and this had eventually put him off attempting it again. However, Jack was not intimidated at this point. Rather he felt liberated. After all he had never before been written up in a host of art magazines and journals. Nor had he had two attractive women, and artists what’s more, giving him their undivided attention. Jack continued to let his arms and legs fly about, more or less in time to the beat, without restraint.

OOO

The next day Jack returned to the scene of last night’s crimes, those he felt primarily against decorum. He had danced to mainstream music, as had a lot of other artists, who like himself, should have known better. He arrived to find Malcolm, for some reason, reduced to a hoarse whisper. He said it was nothing, didn’t hurt, but that barely discernible voice did give him an added air of enigma, Jack felt. The place smelt of alcohol and cigarettes, as they strolled past a large pile of empties to reach the couch. Once comfortable, Jack told Malcolm how his companions of the previous evening had each, when the other wasn’t looking, given him her phone number and insisted that he call.

“I’m not convinced about their art credentials. Big testicles, pop persona, very odd, but I am definitely attracted to them both. Which one should I call?”

“Call both. Historically, artists set their own standards in this regard.”

“You’ve lost me.”

“Think of Gauguin leaving his wife in France for Tahitian girls, Picasso and his models, Sartre and his polygamy, Rivera’s womanising, and closer to home, the Heide lot with their libertine streak. When it comes to women, Jack, setting one’s own ground rules as a male artist is practically compulsory.”

“Have you forgotten the fact that there is a thing called feminism? They’ll combine forces and turn on me as a symbol of the patriarchy.”

Malcolm grew earnest.

“Like I said, feminism or no feminism, it can be done if handled delicately. Call both and establish your right to a different style of relationship, one in which you call the shots.”

Jack shook his head: “Why the hell would they agree to a lousy deal like that?”

“You have a *profile* now. Women will put up with a lot from a man with one of those.”

OOO

By the time *Simulated Paddock* had been taken down, Jack was seeing both Joy and Ruby, though not at the same time. However, if all went well, he hoped something along those lines could be arranged one day. Both women knew about his liaison with the other. Neither liked this polygamous state of affairs, but what could they do? They wanted Jack and those were his terms. Jack did feel that there was a spirit of competition growing between them, which so far had worked to his advantage, but which he needed to keep an eye on. Every time they saw him, each, evidently with the other in mind, donned her finest clothes, wore her best perfume and lavished him with sexual favors that left Jack reeling for days afterwards. That was not all. Sensing what was really important, they also went to town on the food preparation front. Jack was not getting any thinner as a result, he realised one day as he stood before the mirror, patting his growing paunch.

One afternoon, after returning home from Ruby’s, his feet smelling of the rose petal oil she massaged them with, Jack had barely stepped inside the flat when the phone rang.

“There’s an opening at that new gallery, ART. Care to join me?” It was his Personal Theorist.

“I might pass, mate, I’m pretty beat.”

“I’m all for progressive relationships, but these women are taking up a lot of your time that should be dedicated to networking. Jack, you need to be seen at other galleries besides your own,” Daniel insisted.

“Okay, I’ll come,” Jack said, wishing the world of contemporary art wasn’t so demanding.

On putting down the phone, Daniel scowled. He didn’t really want Jack joining him tonight, he was such exhausting company. However, taking Jack to cultural

events was a key item on his recent job description, a contract position he had acquired at Rubin's. Vivian had finally put Daniel on her payroll and the contract stipulated he must "provide the artist concerned with instruction and information to fill the gaps in his education in contemporary art theory and practice."

Fill the bloody gaps! Jack's art education is nothing *but* gaps. On the way to Surry Hills in the cab, Daniel wondered how Jack could be, on the one hand, so seemingly short of grey matter and yet, on the other, brilliant enough to start making work from Astroturf. As Daniel's cab pulled up outside the slate gray exterior, he hoped that one day Jack would stop his artist as dope routine, start saying things with insight and intelligence and have a laugh at the way everyone had fallen for his act.

OOO

Jack met Daniel outside the venue, which was far from ivy-choked. Beside the heavily faux rust front door was the single word in its own little stylish box: ART. Once inside they were soon gazing into another sign, garish and graffiti-like bearing the word: *Nausea*.

Jack snorted.

"Not exactly a great name for a show, makes me think of puke."

Daniel began stroking his neatly trimmed, three-day growth.

"That's where you're wrong. Jean Paul Sartre bangs up against the pop graffiti tag, thus we see the high culture, low culture clash. Nice. Very nice. Take note, Jack."

Jack didn't want to bloody well take note, he did not like to be lectured to like a child. Once inside, Jack fetched them some glasses of red. Then, on Daniel's suggestion, they began to tour the work, working from the catalogue list. Jack was having trouble finding a reason as to why they came, to him the works looked so unbelievably ugly.

"Look, Jack, how the colours swirl, merge and coalesce into one another without restraint," said Daniel excitedly.

It was the lack of restraint that made Jack hate the works, the unflinching way they ignored every rule of colour mixing. He couldn't help but wonder why Daniel seemed so pleased with them.

"It's about time someone around here pursued bad painting," Daniel announced.

"Are you saying these things are purposefully bad?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

"But why?" Jack whispered.

“So what’s bad painting? Look at what we’re dealing with: ghastly colours, nil content. The ultimate aim is to shake one’s sense of taste to the very core, to dash expectations, to go way over the top.”

By the time they’d passed a dozen bad paintings, Jack wanted to burn the lot. He made another trip to the bar. Things were getting rough. Only a horrid house white was left. On returning, Daniel again droned on favorably about the work.

“Can’t you see how wonderfully critical this work is,” he said, “How successfully it operates to question everything traditional painting stands for?”

“What’s the difference between work that brings on nausea because it’s critical, and work that simply makes you feel ill because it’s lacking all around, lacking in taste, in style, in everything?”

Daniel looked at him sternly.

“If you’re calling this work worthless, Jack, think again. It speaks of art’s excesses, mirroring our own in this decadent age. It is art that is exhausted, sick of itself, that has gone too far, that is pushing the envelope. What is an envelope for but to push against its confines? All in all, this work is very good.”

Jack walked across the room, away from Daniel, and stood cradling his half empty glass before a painting he found particularly revolting, dominated by a yellow the colour of rancid butter. Daniel sauntered over and read the accompanying title.

“Well, well. This work has actual *vomit* in it. Stunning!”

“Is that related to vomit by any chance?”

“It is merely the technical term,” said Daniel in his know-all way.

Jack felt decidedly sick.

Chapter 11

It is one thing to have women massage one's feet in aromatic oils and pander to one's every culinary whim, but a man needs space to nurture his genius. So thought Jack as he trudged towards home. It had been several weeks since he'd been at the flat, having stayed at his girlfriends' places for an extended period. On opening the door, he immediately realised that it did not feel as good to be home as he had imagined it would. Mites romped in the dusty air, it was more cramped than he recalled, the placed smelled stale and looked unutterably dingy. This was not the inspiring venue he had recalled. Besides ever since his last show, which was much like *Simulated Paddock* but titled *Astroturf Jouissance*, another obscure title Daniel had willfully concocted, Jack hadn't produced a single work. This was not simply because the girls had kept him busy, but because he didn't know what to produce next. Does the world really ache for more works in Astroturf, he asked himself, and yet if he didn't continue to work in Astroturf, what medium should he adopt next? He thumped down on the couch and got out a Camel. After three quarters of an hour of that, he admitted to himself that he was evidentially in the process of some sort of alarming creative block. He needed to discuss this revelation with his Personal Theorist, who had lately taken on a broader advisory role. However, on calling him Jack obtained a familiar answer machine message, one he'd heard several times in a row already without so much as a single response. He sensed that Frenchman, Michel Bouffant, who was due to arrive any day was somehow involved. He cursed Bouffant for taking up the valuable time that a fellow's Personal Theorist was meant to be dedicating to him, and him alone.

OOO

It was a rainy night as Jillian languished on her couch of soft white leather, looking at the water spattering down the window pane, ruminating on the unhappy fact that her critics were no longer as invisible as they had once been. Her critics had indeed become quite vocal of late, at least on the printed page. She reached for her glass of wine, and took a long and thoughtful sip. Over the last two weeks, seven letters, written in a similar vein, though not in a similar hand had arrived at the Letters Editor's desk in her office, and had caused the consternation of Bob Herrick and other staff. Not to mention Jillian herself. For now looking back, the letters were undoubtedly engaged in mounting some sort of campaign against her. They each accused her of something foul and treacherous, though none threatened a legal suit. One claimed she had been using

her sexuality as a “manipulative tool” to get “privileged information” from “cultural sources” in order to write her column, another said that her analysis of the postmodern did not “stand up to scrutiny” and that her tendency to draw from primary sources without acknowledgement was “second rate”. All seven letters were similar negative on the topic of her professionalism, while each took a different slant. One succumbed to the base tactic of name-calling, and it finished by denouncing her as an “artworld slut”.

It was obvious to Jillian that women were behind this *putsch*. In her experience, men didn't have nearly the same sorts of violent reactions to her ideas. She was almost certain too that these women had banded together and were operating in a group, one that had emerged from within an academic context of some sort. Perhaps they were that crowd at the University, the one down the road from the Institute, a sour self-righteous bunch, their spirit undoubtedly affected from being surrounded by all that miserably cold sandstone. Whoever they were, what was plain to Jillian was that they had aligned with the most banal end of the feminist movement, the one that fell into the trap of taking a superior moral stance on practically everything. As she thought this over further, and as the rain thrummed louder still, in her mind's eye, her letter-writing accusers began to take on physical form, until soon she saw them huddling together in their sinister way, in a darkened Newtown bar.

Naturally, for an intelligent woman like Jillian to form a mental picture of one's critics, it was important to avoid falling into the trap of stereotypical thinking. So before she even allowed herself to admit a certain fact about the huddle of women she saw in her mind's eye, she set about reminding herself of her credentials in this respect. When studying at the Institute, Jillian had made a point of becoming well-versed in the range of discourses that were emerging on the topic of the female body. Anyone whose interest it is to keep abreast of the influx of progressive ideas from overseas on such a topic, knows that what was alluded to as ‘the body’ is a very complex site of discourse indeed. From this terrain a range of related terms had been appearing, exciting Jillian's active mind. For instance, there was the ‘*monstrous feminine*’ to consider, the ‘*maternal body*’ to think about, and not to forget the fabulous ‘*vagina dentata*’. Indeed Jillian had made it her business to read all the latest theories by Kristeva, not to mention Cixous, and had made a point to be active in the Luce Irigaray Society as well. So taking all this into consideration, Jillian felt she was an authority, able to raise the possibility, perhaps simplistic to some, that on considering the most likely nature of her accusers, the probability was that the women involved would be somewhat overweight. It was not a discriminatory statement she was making, far from it. She was simply acknowledging a fact she had established through empirical evidence, that the critics she attracted tended to be not only of her own gender,

but from a community of women with considerable body mass. For women of larger proportions, she had discovered, had a habit of taking one look at her, in her short black skirts, and beating their substantial breasts, and railing against the heinous crimes she was committing not only against the Sisterhood, but in the world at large. This situation, in Jillian's view, one could explain through mentioning a few simple facts, one being that there were not many other women in Sydney, or even Australia it seemed, with something resembling a waistline, who could claim to know, as she did, the peculiarities of the Nietzschean eternal return. One may well ask, how many women, who wore size eight, could claim to be *au fait* with the Lacanian mirror phase? Another fact was that Jillian's theory on Foucault's theory of the Panopticon, which had obtained for her an HD in her final year, was unusual for a woman at all, but certainly a woman of her diminutive size. She may well be the only woman in Sydney, with good set of legs, who had a handle on Bouffant's notion of the Obsolescence of the Original. While she should have felt uplifted, realising how well off she was, how stylish and yet learned both, the sound of constant rain, the chill in the air and the enforced solitude, meant she was falling into a malaise.

Chapter 12

Daniel's impulse was to demand the driver "step on it", but instead he asked him politely to "go faster, if you wouldn't mind, please sir". The driver flashed a surly glance in the rear-view mirror, and didn't accelerate. Daniel's jaw tightened. They were going to the airport where Bouffant had been due 113 minutes ago. Daniel knew time was a fluid, questionable construct, but how could he have let it slip away from him like that? He had, in fact, been delayed by a call from a student, a blonde, who had threatened to file for sexual harassment, drawing on an incident in which he'd accidentally brushed her nipple when handing her a book. She said she'd think twice about it if he'd reconsider the "appalling" mark he'd given for her last essay. At the time of the nipple brush she'd laughed flirtatiously, he recalled. Even though her essay had been more appalling than the mark, Daniel couldn't hang up in case she was serious. With his eye on his watch, he finally folded, and threw in tickets to several Planet Postmodern events simply to get off the phone.

As the taxi ambled along the sleepy suburban streets, Daniel called on the random laws of a Godless universe for no more delays and tried to unclench his jaw. It was quite humid, to the extent others might be prompted to take off their leather coats. As well as his best black polo neck and trousers from Marcs, he wore an ankle length black coat bought for the occasion. He was sweating now—but what was a little perspiration in the service of looking good? Thankfully, not a red light appeared, and soon he was at International Arrivals, where he spotted a horde of young, chattering girls pushing themselves against a railing before a flight gate. Several held books to their breasts, and on nearing he realised they were written by Bouffant. Though the girls' dark, gutsy dress code made them look arty and streetwise, they were as brutal in intent as a mob of hormone-driven teenyboppers. At a discreet distance was a huddle of academics, their urbane masculine likenesses interrupted by a couple of dour-looking women with short hair. This was the Human Arts department—his own, with the three head professors, Tony White, Ian McGee and Sergei Petrov dominating the group. While everyone else was in their standard workday attire, the three profs were wearing black polo necks, trousers looking remarkably like those from Marcs, and new ankle length black leather coats. Thank God defiant individuality is no longer in vogue, Daniel thought as he strode up beside Tony, a lanky fellow heavily into the early films of Jean Luc Goddard.

"What's with the girls? You'd think the Beatles were revisiting, not a boring old philosopher," Daniel said wryly, well aware that Bouffant was many things, but boring wasn't one of them.

Tony smiled dryly. “Despite the enthusiasm, I doubt if they *get* Bouffant. You know actually *get* what he’s about. By the way, his plane has been delayed an hour.”

Daniel was relieved. He hadn’t wanted to miss the historic moment when a contemporary French philosopher set foot on Australian soil. For he thought, soon the set of uplifting ideas evoked when one utters the word, Bouffant, were going to transform into a man of flesh and blood. Yet he then chastised himself for falling into the trap of considering there was such a thing as a real person, who could surpass the media representations of the Bouffantian identity. Casting this aside, he joined in the other academics’ discussion in which he learned that Ian had found a publisher for his coffee table popup book on Jacques Lacan. Nearby, the crowd of girls rattled and shook the metal railings. At last the arrival of the plane from Paris was announced. The girls let out loud squeals and hoots. The academics tried not to look overexcited. After a lengthy wait, passengers finally started streaming through the gates. There were families with youngsters in tow, tired executives, 70s style hippies, two London punks with green mohawks, a group of scruffy surfies, and finally, among them, looking weary—but wearing a fetching black polo neck—was the man they had been waiting for. Michel Bouffant was far older than the photograph on his dust jackets testified: his hair was much greyer, and thinner wisps of it were stretched across his scalp. Daniel smiled wryly to himself. He knew better than to judge a person’s appearance in the flesh. He knew that it was important to pay more attention to the copies of them disseminated about the place. He knew this through the writings of Bouffant himself and recalled the pertinent quote: “In the contemporary age copies, that is the reproductions, are the new *real thing*”. Bouffant, Michel, *The Ruse of Reality*, PostX Press, NY, 1983.

Ian stood holding up a sign bearing Bouffant’s name. The Frenchman began walking towards him. A group of girls jumped over the railing and charged towards him, waving their books and, in shrill voices, demanding his autograph.

“*Merde!*” Bouffant cried, before he was swallowed up by the mob.

“Better go to the rescue,” Tony said as he jumped the railing. Daniel was shocked to witness Tony transform from someone so bookish, into an action man. Being almost a foot taller than Bouffant, he obtained an instant air of masculine authority. Daniel watched irritably as Tony deftly manoeuvred Bouffant through and out of the sea of teeming girls. He was even more annoyed when Tony pushed one last, particularly insistent leggy girl aside and set Bouffant free. Finally Bouffant and Tony arrived at the group, who had tightened ranks in anticipation of introductions. Daniel was thrilled at the prospect. He was imagining the great moment Bouffant learnt of all the effort he’d put in as conference organiser, not to mention the great number of students and staff, he

had introduced to Bouffant's work over the last six months. After Tony droned on and on about the French new wave, Ian obtained a courtly introduction in which the coffee table popup book was discussed at length. Then Sergei got to show off his vast knowledge of artists specialising in decay, and then the other academics, were each introduced, and spoke about their work, until finally it was Daniel's turn.

"And this is our youngest staff member Daniel Black who teaches a thing he calls Theory Unearthed."

The Frenchman's handshake was limp by then.

Meanwhile, Tony had installed himself by Bouffant's right side, with Ian on his left and with Sergei taking up the rear. Daniel noted that in their spectacles and polo necks, not to mention their long coats, they looked like Bouffant's three learned henchmen. Then Tony said something to Bouffant in *French*, something that Daniel missed. Bouffant answered quickly.

"Pourquoi pas? Dans tous les sens."

Then Ian added another remark in the foreign tongue that Daniel didn't catch. As the three profs knew no one else in the department but themselves spoke French. Rumor had it Sergei spoke seven languages, of which French was one, but as he rarely spoke at all, it was hard for Daniel to verify. As Daniel watched Tony and Ian engage Bouffant in some private conversation in his native tongue, he smiled to himself. What they didn't know, was that he had been attending classes for the last three months at *Alliance Francaise*. As Daniel's mind scrabbled for a single phrase to insert into the spitfire conversation they were having, he could only recall how to ask for a croissant: *"Combien est un croissant, s'il vous plaît?"* The futile phrase echoed round his head. Tony paused to look distractedly at the group.

"Ian, Sergei and I will go on ahead to settle Bouffant at the hotel. So we hope to see the rest of you for set-up for the launch at Buchannan's."

Then Tony guided Bouffant and the profs away. The remaining academics started murmuring in disgruntled tones. Daniel stood apart from the others, perspiring under his coat. By the time the profs and Bouffant had reached the luggage carousel across the vast airport hall, Daniel was desperately tugging at his collar. Finally, he took a long breath, and began to sprint. Sweat was soon trickling down the nape of his neck, and his back. As he arrived, Tony swung around aggressively, Ian and Sergei were, slower, but their eyes flashed no less irritably behind their spectacles at the sight of him. Bouffant simply looked dazed.

"Perhaps, I may join you on your way to the hotel?" Daniel said, gasping for breath.

"Look, Daniel. That's not necessary, but thank you for offering," said Tony.

“I insist. Ticket arrangements, there is an urgent matter to discuss before the launch.”

“Not now, Dan,” Tony snarled.

Daniel stood before them with his feet planted on the ground and glared murderously at his department heads. Tony looked nervous that Daniel might make a scene in front of their international guest.

“Okay. Then,” Tony said, jovially, “We will make an exception to our *exclusive media event*, and invite Daniel, here, to join us at Bar Prank at six. That is the hour Michel will be presented to the Sydney press.”

After a cordial farewell in impeccable French, Daniel departed. Later, as he hailed a cab, he wondered why Jillian, who would probably be at this exclusive event, had told him nothing of it. The secretive little bitch! He thought. He had allowed her to believe a thinker like Bouffant was even possible; did she imagine she would be speaking to him without Daniel finding out? While stumbling into the back of a taxi Daniel realised he was soaked in sweat. Yet he did not believe in casual acts conducted by ordinary people, such as taking off one’s coat for comfort’s sake.

Chapter 13

With daiquiri in hand, amid a sea of men in white t-shirts and matching jeans, Jillian was annoyed. She deduced that the Institute men had chosen this particular venue to give Bouffant a shot of Sydney's homosexual-hip. Yet that didn't mean Bar Prank suited her. It was not that she was homophobic. It wasn't the 70s after all. No one who was anyone was homophobic any more, she reminded herself. It just wasn't any fun being surrounded by Village People and mustached clones, not to mention all those buff, tanned young men who had a better handle on grooming than she did. Besides, everywhere she stood, they were behaving as if she wasn't there, which she was not at all used to in the broader world. It was irritating to be straight in a gay gay world, she felt as she looked around. Though early by most people's standards, several white-t-shirted-and-denim-jean clad men had started dancing along to a mix of hits by Boy George, The Pet Shop Boys, Queen, and Frankie Goes to Hollywood. They flirted in pairs by batting what, she felt, were unfairly long eyelashes at one another, while moving their taut bodies to the beat. All of which could leave one feeling decidedly left out, Jillian sniffed. Besides, this was meant to be an *exclusive media event*, so where were then were the *media players*?

Just then a reporter from the ABC she'd seen around appeared, someone dull, more attached to news than arts. He was wearing an outfit involving office-style tan slacks. You'd think the Australian Broadcasting Corporation would employ people with their finger on the pulse, not those who'd wear tan slacks to meet a pivotal French cultural theorist, she thought. The man concerned drew up next to her, recording equipment slung on his shoulder.

"Hi, Jillian Trembath isn't it? I hear this Bouffant character does philosophy like ads"

"I don't know about that," she said raising an eyebrow.

"He's supposed to talk as if he's stringing sound bites together. Should make for good radio."

Sound bites! Jillian was outraged at such cheap accusations. Bouffant was not some copywriter, he was central to the postmodern project, didn't Tan Slacks realise? Jillian was working herself into a private lather. She couldn't wait to see Tan Slack's face when she revealed her intimate knowledge of Bouffant's work. Just as she was thinking this, the critic from *The Oz*, Hamish Dove, appeared wearing one of his flashy bow ties.

"Hello everyone," Hamish drawled in his faux-English accent, "I presume we're here for this dubious Bouffant event."

Jillian rolled her eyes, and was just about to engage in another private rant when she spied the hulking Russian professor from the Institute making his way towards her. Behind him were Professors White and McGee, and in between them, there he was! A not so tall, not so young, not so hirsute version of Bouffant. It was then Jillian realised that Bouffant might have arrived at last, he might in fact be coming her way, but he was not the dashing figure his dust jackets promised. On second thoughts, who cared! He was the most famous man she had ever set eyes on, and French, and an intellectual, and that in itself was enough to make her breathless.

When the Profs and Bouffant—each dressed in variations of basic black—were suddenly slowed down by a cluster of dancing white-t-shirted men, Jillian began to daydream. Obviously she and Bouffant were both breaking new ground on the cultural front. Thus once introduced they would instantly sense a deep connection between them and commence an unprecedented affair, both physical and cerebrally charged. Think of going to bed with Bouffant! she thought. Imagine the elevated pillow talk! Just then she sighted Daniel Black, pushing through the crowd towards the group of most importance. Tony was in fact, right now, arguing with a drunken Billy Idol look-alike. Daniel, Jillian mused, had evidently wormed his way into this private *tête-à-tête*. On seeing her, he sneered. She averted her gaze, to show how little she cared. At that instant Bouffant and his entourage of professors formed a ring enclosing Jillian and the other two media representatives. A track by *The Cure* began playing. Daniel arrived and squeezed his way into the ring, just as Ian began a speech.

“The Planet Postmodern Conference, for which the Institute is the host, is proud to introduce our keynote speaker, directly from Paris, Michel Bouffant....”

There were a few measly claps. It seemed like such an oddly formal introduction for such surrounds, to Jillian at least.

“However, first, let me clarify the context in which we find him here today ...”

The popular song *Relax* came on, accompanied by cheers from those in white t-shirts in the background.

Ian raised his voice a little louder: “We will offer an unprecedented smorgasbord of papers and performances relating to the postmodern project. Which brings me to address the complexities of what is meant by the *postmodern*.....”

“Yes, quite,” said Tony, noting the bored faces in the ring, “Perhaps we should get on with it. I would like to hand over the moment to Michel Bouffant himself, esteemed philosopher ...”

At this point Bouffant held up his hand as if stopping traffic. All eyes were fixed on him.

“I am sorry, but I insist that I do not call what I do strictly *philosophie*. Instead, my work, how you say *en anglais*? is *multi-disciplined* in ways that I shall discuss for your elucidation ...”

Multi-disciplined? Jillian thought this perhaps was not quite the term he meant to use. As Bouffant elucidated away, Jillian also noted that not only was his English patchy, Bouffant’s accent was far heavier than she had hoped. Once he finished saying whatever it was he had said, she realised with delight it must be her turn to be introduced to him. Instead, however, a waiter appeared with the cocktail specials on a blackboard. Bouffant pointed to an item and laughed loudly.

“*Multiple Orgasm. Mon Dieu! C’est parfait, non?* A fine example of the Obsolescence of the Original.”

He looked around him with jet-lagged eyes, and added with boyish enthusiasm: “Do you see how it operates! *Le signe* here, on the board, stands in for *le véritable orgasme* of the multitudinous variety!”

Jillian was searching desperately for something witty to add, to what she hoped she’d understood he had said. However Ian got in first.

“Note also, the cocktail *Manhattan*. Its name evokes the notion of ‘Americanness’. So in this Sydney context we can buy the identity of the USA, its very sign, for under ten bucks!”

Everyone laughed uproariously. Although Jillian’s laugh was the loudest, she cursed herself for not being the one to say such a fascinating thing. Boy George’s hit *Do You Really Want to Hurt Me* came on. Some of the white t-shirted ones, particularly a bunch near the bar, began singing. The academics ordered drinks, after which, to Jillian’s consternation, Tan Slacks pushed in front of her, thrusting his mike under Bouffant’s nose.

“Professor Bouffant, I believe you claim reality is a ruse. Could you explain this to those whose experience of the harsh realities of Australian life, with its floods and droughts and fires, could surely put this in doubt?”

Jillian inwardly groaned. One shouldn’t refer to Bouffant’s radical theory of the ruse of reality with these banal Australian clichés. Besides who did she know who had suffered from floods or droughts or fires? Everyone who was anyone lived in Sydney, or was sensibly overseas. Call himself a member of the ABC! How could Tan Slacks live with himself, she wondered. Bouffant started some sort of reply. Yet due in part to her inner rant, not to mention the music and Bouffant’s accent, Jillian realised she somehow managed to miss the gist of Bouffant’s response. Never mind, she told herself. One as versed in the current discourses of cultural theory as she didn’t need to hang on every little word uttered at a dreary press conference. She had all her reading as a mainstay. In fact, now would be an ideal time to let the full extent of *her* knowledge about Bouffant be unleashed. What an impact her theory of Bouffant’s theory of the

Obsolescence of the Original would have on the tenor of this sad little event. Yet just as she was about to begin to do her unleashing, she hesitated. The sad fact was Bouffant did look quite short and old, flanked by Tony, Ian and the hulking Sergei, not to mention all those white-t-shirt clad young men dancing away behind him.

“What do you think of the Ned Kelly myth in Australian art?” asked Hamish sternly, eyes glaring at Bouffant.

Naturally, this comment from the man of the bow ties, took Jillian off guard.

“If there is anything mythical, or indeed, *fictif*, about art, *en Australie* or in any western culture, it is the myth of the art itself.... It has become eaten up by the capitalism ... it is commodified, it isit is... *une hypocrisie de la bourgeoisie.*”

“Excuse me!” Hamish spat. Jillian felt instantly jealous that Hamish obviously had a better understanding of French than she.

“Indeed, it is a *bourgeois* fabrication. Thus art is *immoral*,” Bouffant shouted.

“Immoral!” Hamish cried.

New Order’s *Blue Monday* came on. The white t-shirts went wild.

Bouffant had to shout to be heard, which he had no hesitation doing.

“Indeed did you not know, already, I consider *les Beaux-Arts* are a counterfeit? Are you not familiar with my paper, ‘The Image Fakers’, as it is dubiously called in translation to the English?” The arrogance in his tone was not lost on the critic from the *Oz*.

“Tell me how does it feel, when your heart grows cold. Grows cold, grows cold, grows cold,” sang the white t-shirts to the music.

“It strikes me as unbelievable,” Hamish said at last, “that as top ranking Australian writers we have been invited here to listen to you debase the name of art.”

Bouffant simply shrugged.

Jillian was feeling more than a little embarrassed by her professional peers. What a philistine Dove must seem to Bouffant, Tan Slacks too. In desperation, she caught the Frenchman’s attention with a clearing of her throat.

“Michel, may I call you that?” she began.

A Madonna track came on, and the white t-shirts jumped for joy.

Bouffant nodded in a resigned way, as the white t-shirts sang: “Holiday, it would be all right!”

Jillian took a breath and got on with it: “Yes, well, Michel, thanks to the ideas you establish in such texts as the *Fundamental Fake*, for me what you call ‘*the hyper-actual*’, an idea through which you make it clear that reality is not in fact actual at all, but a construct, is something I embrace.”

With all in the ring focused on her, including Bouffant, Jillian was quickly gaining confidence. She spoke for a few minutes without a break. Then reached her conclusion: “Your writing has opened my eyes to the fact that we do not need to live with false notions of actuality....” The waiter suddenly appeared with a tray of drinks. Hands reached out to take hold of appropriate glasses. As Jillian took a sip of her *Victory Gin*, she congratulated herself for proving to everyone, not the least Bouffant, how well she understood his position. Bouffant took a long draught of his *Multiple Orgasm*, then spoke.

“Jeelian isn’t it?..” She nodded.

“This *cette interprétation n'est pas vraie*, sorry, what I mean to say is what you have spoken is a misinterpretation of my ideas, and one that I find typical of the novice. Surely, the true conclusion to be reached of my specimen is”

Jillian was confused. Specimen? Did he really mean to say that? Why was he giving her a reprimand? She did not understand.

“I am not saying that the definitive word on actuality is...” she began.

“*Ecoute!*” he cried fiercely, “You have, like so many readers, taken my words too *littéralement*. You have missed the poetics, not to mention *l’ironie* ...” Bouffant continued on, shouting intermittently, to emphasis what were perhaps key points, except that as his voice grew louder his words were less discernible as they became more characteristically *Française*. Jillian dared not look around the circle, as she suspected some of those in it, might be enjoying this incident.

Clutching her straw, Jillian stared into Bouffant’s face with disbelief. He seems so unreasonably angry, so unutterably hostile. He had so swiftly become someone else from the Bouffant she felt she personally knew. He did not resemble the considered, congenial, refined man the dust jackets of his illustrious books had indicated to her. Besides, what true intellectual working in the West has such a poor handle of the English language, she wondered. It was hard to make sense of what he was saying. What should she say? She needed to defend herself, she represented *The Sydney Times*, its reputation as well as her own, were at stake. She wanted to respond, really she did. She needed badly to do so, but how could she? For Bouffant’s accent was so heavy, his pronunciation so miserable, the music and background singing so loud she wasn’t certain of what he had actually accused her. How can one retort to a criticism if one is not sure what exactly has been said? Finally, inspiration struck. She flung one limp hand to her face and tried to look helpless, not to mention wan.

“I feel odd,” she murmured, while allowing her glass to slip from her grasp. There was the sound of splintering glass. Eyes closed, she let her body gradually buckle beneath her, as if caught in a slow-motion dance to the floor.

She was at once acting in actuality, and at the same time watching herself act, all the while considering that she was likely pre-empting a post-feminist trend.

Though she could imagine her critics scoffing very loudly at her decision to carry out this act of what appeared to be feminine vulnerability, she knew she was not behaving like those tedious women from history. No she was not like those women who had used their feminine wiles to manipulate men. She had concocted a plan that simply *simulated* a lesser woman's act. It was, all in all, a very witty, ironic undertaking, this particular swoon she was in the process of enacting. If one has a feminist understanding of the history of swoons, and takes a *postmodern* perspective on such a history, then it was not an innocent act.

To Jillian's delight, in that moment before she fell to the floor Bouffant stepped forward to break her fall. For a wonderful instant he held her steady in his stocky Gallic arms. For a fleeting moment she was certain, as he looked into her eyes with his tired ones, as hers fluttered open, whatever he thought of her remark on his theory of the actual, this did not stop him from desiring her. He may be famous, he may be French, and he may be working on the forefront of intellectual thought, but he was still a man after all, with all the usual responses, she felt. When Jillian regained her composure and her footing, she noted the other men in the ring, bar none, were looking irritably her way.

"I'm afraid that about wraps things up," Tony announced.

Jillian bit her lip. She mustn't let Bouffant leave, not now that they had developed a physical rapport. She had established a connection, after all.

"Well, then," Ian said, "thank you all for attending. I look forward to your coverage of Bouffant's Australian tour."

Sergei was the first to turn away. Jillian watched on helplessly as a cluster of white-t-shirts stopped dancing to a vibrant track by Haircut 100, long enough to let the black clad men walk across and out of the bar.

Chapter 14

West End Girls, by the Pet Shop Boys, was playing as Daniel entered Luscious, the revamped downstairs bar in Buchannan's Hotel. The conference was soon to be launched in the upstairs part of the venue. He had spent many weeks here preparing for this night. When playing out this scenario in his mind, he had considered he would be drinking now with Bouffant in a group, exchanging ideas at the bar, making an impact on the Frenchman. He scanned the familiar faces, but as Bouffant's was not among them, he headed off, in a sulk, to get a drink. On queuing, *Relax* came on, the chorus making him feel irritated, what with the word 'relax', echoing repeatedly, just as it had earlier at Bar Prank. Although it had been satisfying seeing Jillian humiliated in public, she had still monopolised the Bouffant press conference. In his view that cheap trick of hers, that pitiful fainting act she had bunged on, for attention, to get her out of a jam, was an outrage. Call herself a feminist! Thanks to her, Bouffant had now been in the country for seven and a half hours and Daniel was yet to speak with him properly, let alone to present the germane question he had ready for the occasion when they finally got to speak. This question, in fact, had quite a history. Daniel had been refining it for over a year, and had come to realise it was a question that was likely, once aired, to change the course of his career. After ordering a *Stoli*, he stared at the door to concentrate on new arrivals. Three more *Stolis* later, the place was crowded with artworld people, and wanna-be artworld people, and students and their friends, but Bouffant had not appeared. This notable absence was worrying to Daniel, very worrying, as the opening event would be commencing soon. Ten minutes later, and still no sign of Bouffant! Daniel finally made a dash up the stairs, pushing through the general mob making their way up. "Move aside, please. Conference organiser coming through. Move aside, thank you thank you," he hissed.

He might not be accompanied by Bouffant right now, he might be caught among the rabble, but, as a key event organiser, he was sure as hell going to get a decent view of the opening event. When he entered, the room was already bursting. He pushed through to the front. He knew, by rote, the order of appearance for the night. Janet Crow would present her radical *Housekeeping* piece, after which Guy De Vries would do his stark new work—*Deconstructing Skin*—with sequences in which he would plunge fishhooks, as usual, into himself while nude. It was during Crow's powerful shouting spree that Daniel turned to towards the back of the room, to notice that Bouffant was near the door, perched on a chair, with Tony and Ian on either side, and Sergei lurking in the background.

Daniel tried to watch the performance, and also note Bouffant's responses, without swiveling his head around too obviously, which wasn't easy. He was thrilled to note a wry smile from Bouffant when Janet began her *KittyCuntKittyCan't* routine. Just as Guy began inserting the first fishhook, Daniel realised Bouffant and company were leaving. Daniel began pushing his way from the front through the crowd, but it was slow progress, and soon they were gone. He kept pushing through, irritating more than one conference attendee. He told himself that hopefully Bouffant and company would be loitering downstairs. As he headed down the stairs towards Luscious, Billy Idol's *White Wedding* met his ears. On entering he was relieved to see Bouffant and those three professorial bastards he had the misfortune to work with by the bar. Between where he stood, and they sat, was a thick arty throng, far bigger in numbers than earlier. Daniel noted that Ian, Tony, Sergei and Bouffant looked like they had formed a self-enclosed quartet, something insular and tight. Just as if to hammer home the point, they suddenly started laughing as if at some uproariously funny joke. He needed to get to them fast, to intervene before any further intimate moments were had by all. He needed to change the frivolous tone by airing his question, the question that was so brilliant in nature it was eating him from inside. He began pushing his way through the crowd, indeed was making good headway, when he struck something large and soft.

"Err sorry," he muttered, before realising he had run aground on the paunch of Jack Blight.

"Daniel, mate, you are a hard man to track down that's for bloody sure," said Jack.

Daniel didn't want Jack tracking him down. Jack was an impediment to his current plan. Daniel was desperate to get across the room and unburden himself of his question. Yet he sensed that Jack had a certain desperation of his own. This was a man who had left him seven messages on his answer machine, which he had neglected to answer. This was a man who probably considered he, Daniel, his Personal Theorist, had abandoned his duty.

"Hey, Jack, want to meet Michel Bouffant? I think you two might hit it off."

"The French theorist everyone blithers on about incessantly, without seeming to make the slightest sense? Me and him, hit it off? That's not bloody likely."

Daniel rubbed his well-considered, three-day growth.

"He's a highly respected, immensely intelligent, articulate man with innovative ideas. Not, ah, unlike yourself, Jack," Daniel said.

Jack rocked on his toes and puffed out his chest. Then he recalled something disturbing Daniel had told him once about the fellow.

"You said this Bouffant doesn't believe in the future, in actuality or in art. What sort of person doesn't believe in art?"

They were both yelling above the music and noises, the crowd which was swelling rapidly, the door constantly opening to let newcomers in.

“Bouffant’s ideas are very complex. You can’t judge them at face value,” said Daniel.

“Yes I can. Why would a man who doesn’t believe in art want to meet a man who has dedicated his life to it?”

While Jack did have a good point, Daniel felt, he couldn’t afford to countenance it. *Wood Beez* by Scritti Politti began playing as Daniel began formulating an escape plan. Yet just as he was about to dash away from his encounter with Jack, he saw the four men in question across the room leave their seats at the bar and head out the exit. There were dozens of semi-drunken artworld types blocking Daniel’s swift escape.

OOO

Over the next few days Daniel saw everything on the conference menu that was possible for one person to see. He attended the pivotal paper on ‘Defecation and Kristeva’ given by visiting expert Karla Drom, he was at the ‘S and M/Nietzsche’ event, and in the front row at the ‘Foucault Evidently’ paper. While many people saw him dash here and dash there, no one once sighted Daniel in the company of Bouffant, either at the conference or at its post-event gatherings in the local eateries and cafes he attended. This wasn’t due to passivity on Daniel’s part. He constantly asked those who considered they were in charge of the Frenchman’s itinerary if he may be included.

“Sorry, Daniel,” Tony said on the eve of a dinner with Bouffant at the Oxford Street restaurant, *Platter*, at which Daniel had asked if he could attend, “The one seat left was just given to Karla Drom. What did you think of her defecation and Kristeva paper?” Daniel had been disappointed by the paper, as in his view, it had not gone beyond the standard theoretical position on Parisian urinals.

“It was interesting, very interesting,” he said politely, “Perhaps I can join you all tomorrow morning at the Death-of-the-Author forum? I want to connect with Bouffant as soon as possible. There is a particular question I want to ask him, a question of the utmost significance for everyone in the movement...”

“Of course you want to speak to Bouffant. Everyone in Sydney would like to get a piece of him. It’s just not possible, Dan, he’s fully booked ...”

When Daniel emitted a low animal growl, Tony added hastily.

“All right, I’ll see what I can do.”

Despite Tony’s promise, Daniel did not obtain a chance to spend time with Bouffant, in fact he barely set eyes on him. It was dawning on him he may not

actually see the fellow until the time the cultural critic delivered his keynote address. In other words, the conventional forum known as ‘question time’, which would ensue after Bouffant had delivered his much awaited paper, may have to do. Although not the personal encounter he had envisaged, the hour long discussion with the eminent fellow, at the delivery of *1984 is Not Taking Place* would involve cameras whirring and journalists ready with notebooks from the mainstream press to document the occasion. Thus Daniel, dedicated his spare moments, rehearsing his delivery of his burning question in front of his bathroom mirror.

Chapter 15

On entering the Grand Hall, off Institute Road, Daniel was filled with burgeoning hope. In his mind he was running through the sets of events that lay in store for him tonight. After absorbing every word of Bouffant's landmark paper, he would be granted his chance to shine in question time. He would unleash his brilliant question then, the one that he had developed since reading Bouffant's paper *Replication Revised* for the 5th time. This moment would elevate Daniel in the eyes of Bouffant himself, not to mention his bastard department heads, and all his other contemporaries in the arts and cultural sector in attendance. For indeed tickets had a long time back sold out, and everyone who was anyone would be there tonight. As he swept down the aisle towards the front of the hall, noting seats were not yet filled, in the front row he caught sight of the familiar trio smuggle seated. On either side of Tony, Ian and Sergei were less significant departmental colleagues, including several women with cropped hair. Each of those in the row seemed to be wearing a near-identical black polo neck sweater. He gave his own a smoothing down and rushed over, only to confirm a fact that was slowing dawning on him.

"Where's my reservation? There must be some mistake," he said, trying to curb the rising hysteria in his voice.

"No mistake. You're right there, Dan," said Tony pointing to a seat in the second row.

From his place, Daniel was directly staring at the backs of Ian's head, with Tony, then Sergei to his left. On either side he observed, were reservation notes for less significant departmental colleagues, including several women who had recently had their hair cropped. To compensate for this fucked-up seating plan, Daniel admired the giant screens placed high on either side of the stage. They had been *his* idea, these examples of *new media* at work, and were, of course, appropriately Bouffantian in concept. They would soon display magnified images of the critical theorist himself broadcast *live*. Similar arrangements had been made outdoors for viewing by the general rabble.

Daniel was aware that people in healthy numbers had begun to flock in and fill up seats. This went on for some time, until even the insignificant women, with their protruding ears, had arrived. Once the seats were filled, other less fortunate ticket holders, many of them those airport girls, were being shunted to the standing section which was cordoned off with fancy theatre ropes. A line of burly security guards stood patiently by the back wall. Then Daniel spied that bitch-face, Jillian Trembath, among the media turnout now clogging the aisles. To

avoid the magnetic pull of those legs of hers, he turned to face the front. He was determined to gather his emotional resources to be ready for that hallowed moment when Bouffant would at last appear. However, time, being the fluid construct that it was, had slowed to an unbearably lethargic pace.

Suddenly Tony leapt up and commenced a lengthy welcome speech, then Ian joined him to add his equally tedious say, at which point some rowdy foot stomping began.

“Bouf-fant. Bouf-fant. Bouf-fant,” people chanted until the floor rumbled. Tony lowered the mike and looked off stage.

Finally, to cheering from the audience, Bouffant dawdled on and settled his notes. Then he peered over the podium, and at the same time his image loomed in mammoth size on either side of him. Daniel marveled at how on screen he looked grand, larger than life, magnificent—unarguably Bouffantian all around. However, on stage, he appeared like any other unprepossessing little man.

“*Bonjour* Sydney,” Bouffant said, “I am here, as you may know, to present my paper, *1984 Is Not Taking Place*, an investigation of notions of the contemporary *histoire*.”

As the cheering died down, Bouffant continued. “*Qu'est-ce que l'histoire?* ... as we say in France, or indeed as I ask you, Sydney, what ... is ... history?” as he pronounced the term ‘iss-torry’, the audience again cheered, “It is certain that we face *une période d'histoire* both violent and *actuelle* ... yes, a period dominated by *la guerre*. Yet can we distinguish between this *véritable phénomène* we call war, and *une construction* as media spectacle?”

The sound of Bouffant’s pleasant accent floating through the mike, the way he slipped from English to French and back again, reminded Daniel of the time his French teacher Madame Bouvier, a very admirable and attractive woman, with a sensual mouth, had said that in order to learn French one must learn to *think* in French. After a few moments of letting Bouffant’s voice wash over him, Daniel came to the conclusion that he had, in fact, despite merely studying for a couple of months, adopted a Gallic mode of thought. He felt comfortable with the way in which Bouffant was speaking, so comfortable he let it continue to flow through and over him, without struggling to attend to its every word specifically. In that respect it was like the experience of watching a foreign film, when the subtitles are too small, he mused happily to himself.

“In this age of *grandes résurrection* ... of great resurrections, of revising our ways of thinking, we find ourselves pushing against staid notions of the *réel*” said Bouffant, in such a way that it reminded Daniel of some of the other marvelous things Mme Bouvier had said. Suddenly Bouffant’s voice was drowned out by a loud conversation struck up between those of Daniel’s department heads directly in front of him.

“Such a dull delivery and yet he’s so seductive in print,” Tony said.

“Yes, give me his textual dexterity over this disaster, any day,” Ian quipped drolly.

“His accent isn’t helping,” Tony added.

“I think his accent lends a certain *je ne sais quoi* to things.”

A woman with spiky black hair in the row behind Daniel told Tony and Ian to shut up. After a moment, Ian spoke even more loudly than before.

“I’m dreading the reviews.”

“Oh God, yes, so am I.”

“How vicious do you think they’ll be?”

“Maybe so pointed as to not appear.”

“Didn’t I tell you bastards to shut up!” the spiky haired woman spat.

She was only a few seats away from Daniel, and after a thorough appraisal, he noted that she had a good pair of legs. Just then shrill noises from the back of the hall caused Daniel to swing right around. He saw that a hive of activity was taking place back there. A host of those airport girls were chattering away behind the fancy rope, a group mid-way down the hall were engaged in some a heated debate and a couple of black leather types were kissing feverishly some rows down. Daniel was outraged to see so many signs of disrespect towards Bouffant. When he righted himself again, he discovered Tony and Ian were again talking as casually and volubly as if they were conversing in the staff room. After a few moments, Daniel spied the woman with the spiky hair leaning so far forward in her seat one could tell that under her shirt, she had some fairly decent cleavage.

“Didn’t I tell you two fuckwits to shut up?” she growled.

The pair fell silent. Daniel kept waiting for them to speak again, concentrating on the backs of their heads daring them to do so. They didn’t make a sound. Then he started wondering just what that spiky haired woman was up to now she’d managed to get Ian and Tony to shut up. On a full appraisal, he observed she was more than just moderately attractive, thanks to her legs, that cleavage and that funky hair of hers. He began to hope she was not a lesbian, as so many women were these days, or tied up with a husband or jealous lover, which led him to wonder what she’d look like without clothes. The sound of Ian’s voice broke through his train of thought.

“It would be good to write a paper titled ‘Bouffant: Persona Non Gravititas’,” Ian said.

“Now *that* has a certain *je ne sais quoi*,” Tony retorted.

The spiky haired woman jumped to her feet.

“Talk about insensitive jerks!” she was jabbing a forefinger their way.

Ian, Tony and even Sergei turned towards her, each with a horrified expression, as she let fly with a series of hostile remarks. A security guard approached, a

fellow full of purpose, characterised by bulk. By the time the guard had pulled the woman from her seat, she'd issued an inventive string of insults largely at Tony and Ian, but at anyone else, it seemed, who looked. Daniel felt simultaneously attracted to her and, yet, appalled. That is he felt a thrill hearing her say such dreadful things to Ian and Tony, things he had often thought about them privately at times, but it was not so thrilling watching her transform from an attractive, if strident, woman, into a deranged harridan before his eyes. After she was forcibly removed from the hall, Daniel was at liberty to turn his attention back towards the stage again, from which, he noted, Bouffant was now smiling benignly at the crowd. His smile was made all the more benign by being replicated, in giant form, on the dual screens.

"I have proven here tonight that the year we consider is taking place right now, this year we call mistakenly 1984, is not indeed taking place at all, and will never take place.... *L'histoire est un mythe*. Thank you very much, Sydney. *Vous avez été merveilleux comme un auditoire*. You have been a wonderful audience."

Loud applause rang out all around him, accompanied by hoots and cheers. Two people whistled. A mob of airport girls suddenly tore past down the aisle, jumped up on stage and began clamoring around Bouffant. Several beefy security men jumped past, and onto the stage. The guards began tussling with the girls. In a flash Tony was on stage as well, standing in front of the melee, speaking coolly into the mike.

"Due to unforeseen circumstances", as Tony was speaking curtains came down behind him, and the sight of all the ruckus was displaced by the ruffling of heavy fabric, "I'm afraid question time has been cancelled. We hope you have enjoyed Michel Bouffant's keynote address at the inaugural Planet Postmodern Conference, hosted by The Institute. Bouffant will be available for autographs outside."

Question time! Cancelled! Daniel was gutted by this news. When the curtains again parted, not a single person was left on the stage. As he remained as if glued to his seat, his brilliant question felt like a lump of cold hard lead beneath his ribs. As people shuffled along the row, and down the aisle around him, he couldn't think or feel or move.

At that very moment, not far away beneath the large screens stationed outside the Great Hall, Malcolm and Jack had been luxuriating under the stars on the picnic blanket Malcolm had brought. The coats and beanies, not to mention the bottles of fine red they'd brought had helped to assure that the evening, despite the cold, had been thoroughly enjoyable. While Malcolm had derived great illumination from Bouffant's talk, Jack had merely enjoyed the biting air, the wine, plus the chance to let his thoughts wander whichever way they liked.

“That was utterly inspiring,” Malcolm said, as they stood up and he began folding the blanket.

“I don’t know, Mal. There’s no denying whatever Bouffant says to the contrary, as a year, 1984 is actually taking place. I mean he may be French, he may be a cultural critic, but get a grip, we’re here, now, right in the thick of 1984, whether he likes it or not.”

Malcolm knew better than to try to argue such a complicated theoretical point with his friend. Jack had many fine qualities but understanding the nuances of a piece of difficult, contemporary cultural theory wasn’t one of them.

OOO

It was later, in the foyer, that Daniel finally got his yearned for break. When he, at last, wandered out of the hall into the foyer, there was Bouffant at a desk, piled high with books, without minders anywhere in sight. It is nothing short of a miracle, Daniel thought as he pushed through a throng of girls waiting for Bouffant’s autograph. When he reached the front of the queue, sure enough Bouffant was unencumbered by those three controlling men Daniel now officially loathed. He spoke over the heads of a couple of girls wearing similar coats in shaggy black fur.

“*Professeur* Bouffant, I’m Daniel Black, from The Institute, on the committee that hosted tonight’s event. I’d like to say it was a great honor to hear you speak at last.”

“Ah ha,” said Bouffant, looking up from a signing, “Thank you.”

“I was hoping to have a private word. There is a specific matter I would like to raise. A question I wish to put to you ..”

Daniel could barely contain his excitement as Bouffant began nodding in a friendly manner.

“Please, is it possible to stay back, I am happy to talk about this matter,” he said, after I’ve finished the signing.”

Just then Jack Blight came sauntering over. The three girls in shaggy coats moved aside for him.

“Well what do you know, my very own PT. How are you Dan my man?” said Jack.

Daniel had a very strong urge to simply tell Jack to get lost, to berate him for interrupting this important moment, to give his words weight with a bit of a shove. Yet, Bouffant, he noted had looked up from his task with inquisitive eyes. “*Professeur* Bouffant,” said Daniel, “may I introduce you to Jack Blight, an influential artist in the contemporary movement.”

When Bouffant formed a sneer, Daniel remembered this was a man who had publicly denounced art. He had read the *Image Fakers*, and a number of associated papers.

“Might, er, I add that Jack is not your average sort of artist. He’s what one calls a, well, a *post-art* practitioner.”

The words had simply jumped out of Daniel’s mouth. On cue, Jack sucked his cheeks in, and rocked on his toes.

“Anti-object art makes radical claims, but is as limp as a wet *baguette!*” cried Bouffant. The girls remaining in the autograph queue were wide-eyed.

“No, this is *post-art* we’re talking about,” said Daniel.

“What does this entail, this post-art? Does it rip the bourgeois notion of art apart at its very core?” Bouffant demanded with bulging eyes.

“Oh, but of course,” Daniel said swiftly. “That is, in fact, the very basis of Jack Blight and his radical move into *post-Art* ...”

OOO

While trying to lean casually on a wall, schooner in hand, Daniel was regretting that he hadn’t had a misspent youth. He wasn’t the type, when young, to truant class to visit sordid pool halls. Yet here he was, in just such a place in the back streets of the Cross, dreading the moment he had to leave the safety of the wall. For on doing that he would have to actually pick up a cue stick and make a go of playing. He was in this predicament thanks to a request made by Bouffant to Jack at the book signing.

“Jack, all I’ve seen so far is the *bourgeois* aspect of the culture *Australien*. Would you show me your city’s seamy side?” Bouffant had asked.

“So Michel, you would like to explore our nation’s underbelly,” Jack had replied.

“Yes, but no strip clubs *s’il vous plait*.”

“That can be arranged,” Jack had replied.

Trust Jack, thought Daniel casting his gaze over the tattooed, no-necked men and denim clad, brassy blondes at surrounding tables. Nearby Bouffant was preparing to make the break. Jack and Bouffant had formed one team, with Daniel on the other. Just because it was two to one, he told himself, the outlook wasn’t entirely grim. Surely someone from a country of cheese-eating wine swillers was unlikely to be as skilled as one from the rugged Antipodes, even someone slightly rusty, like myself, he thought. As soon as Bouffant dispersed the cluster of balls, sinking one of his in the process, Daniel was filled with dread.

“Not bad, for a frog, *non?* I follow the trends American,” Bouffant announced and beamed at Jack. The big man grinned back. Daniel acknowledged that this sort of sickening exchange was not the first of its kind either. From the moment

Bouffant had set eyes on Jack he'd seemed strangely, not to mention alarmingly, smitten with him.

Such signs of admiration were not, in Daniel's view, only grotesque, but unwarranted. If only Jack didn't have the heroic aura of post-Art about him, that Daniel himself had imbued him with! Daniel knew that if Bouffant realised Jack made ordinary old art for sale, he wouldn't be so enamoured with the man. Although there was no time to dwell on this, as with Bouffant having had his follow-up shot, it was Daniel's turn. He sauntered over to the table and took aim, with much consideration in keeping his body taut in a manly sort of way. At the last moment his cue slipped. The white ball flew past its mark, hitting—and sinking—a ball of *theirs*. Jack laughed.

“Thanks mate.”

Daniel slunk back to the wall.

Jack then lowered his bulk to table level squinting down his cue. Daniel realised it was the perfect opportunity to finally talk directly to Bouffant. In that instant, Jack looked up and directed his gaze at him.

“Go fetch us some beers would you, Dan my man.”

Bouffant pointed to his empty glass. As far as Daniel could tell there was no way out. On his way back with drinks Daniel observed Bouffant and Jack chatting gaily.

When Jack took aim again, Daniel quickly sidled up to Bouffant.

“*Professeur*, as a serious follower of your work, I would like to ask ...,” just then the sound of Jack's ball dropping into a corner pocket overrode his voice.

“*Incroyable Jack!*” shouted Bouffant.

Daniel tried not to glower. “As I was saying, in my understanding you propose that...” Bouffant's attention remained strictly on Jack's game.

“*Professeur*,” said Daniel again, and launched into the preamble to his question. Bouffant didn't hear a word, was instead mesmerized by the process of Jack sinking another ball. At that moment Bouffant jumped up with boyish glee, and on tiptoes, leant up to kiss Jack on both cheeks. Daniel stared in disbelief. The next few minutes dragged horribly on. Jack then had the decency to bungle his next shot. . Thank God, Daniel thought. His bladder had for some time been urging him to take a moment out, but at this point it was now his turn. After aiming with the utmost care he sent the white ball rolling feebly around the table, hitting nothing at all. With considerable flair, Bouffant then sunk two balls in a row. Daniel felt not just his bladder irritate him with its pressure, but his jaw grow taugh. During his next turn the white ball hit a few random balls before grinding to an underwhelming halt.

By now Daniel's bladder was beyond ignoring. Although, he was not leaving the room, not while Jack was on the black ball, not while these two men in his

presence were hitting it off so damned well. By the time Jack had sunk the black, with a victory fist thrown in the air, and Bouffant in raptures about the fact, Daniel was left with no choice.

“Excuse me, just off to the Gents.”

On his return he found Bouffant wiping tears of laughter from his eyes.

“Jack, he is funny, *non*?”

Jack stood nearby his chest puffed out, rocking on his toes. He had evidently made some marvellous joke. Daniel tried to remember when he’d last found Jack funny. It was Jack himself who provided a distraction from his mental block.

“When you were gone, Michel here told me he would like to see firsthand how a *post-artist* lives and works. So I’ve invited him to stay at mine overnight.”

Daniel’s mind began racing. He needed an excuse to explain why he really must join them in their journey back to Jack’s place. He well knew the Darlo flat was too cramped for three grown men and besides, feeling wrung out from his recent slaying, he had run out of creative excuses. Down at the busy taxi rank, Jack and Bouffant scrambled happily into the back of a cab. As it left the curb, Daniel consoled himself with the thought that once Bouffant saw Jack’s Astroturf art in actuality—three works, he knew, where hanging on the walls—he would realise he had been posturing as a *post-art* practitioner all along. He also hoped that the fact he himself was implicated in such a posture would be somewhat overlooked. As the taxi receded in the distance, with Jack and Bouffant inside, Daniel was surprised by the sound of a rasping female voice nearby.

“How about it, lover boy?” said a woman as she jiggled a well-seasoned bosom in his direction. Daniel couldn’t draw on a single word, from his considerable vocabulary, with which to respond.

Chapter 16

Jillian was near the entrance to the Sebel Townhouse, in the shadows, behind a clump of palms. Were her critics watching, she would let them know that just because she was lurking in the dark for Bouffant to make an appearance, it didn't mean she was stalking him. It was in fact a sign of her commitment to engaging with his work. It proved to what lengths she was prepared to go to find a way to speak to him about his theory of the Obsolescence of the Original. Ever since that night at Prank, a delicate situation rescued with an inspired act, on seeing Bouffant after this or that conference event, those goons from the Institute, Professors White, McGee and Petrov, had ushered her away. Bouffant is not available for unscheduled interviews with *the press*, they had said. Please come to the next press conference, they had added. Otherwise Bouffant is fully booked, they'd claimed. Please accept our apologies, they mouthed. All she wanted was a word with him, alone, she had insisted. It was all to no avail; they would not be swayed. She could not understand what made them think they had the right to be so bloody-minded. She was a member of the *fourth estate*, didn't they realise how seriously they should take her? The public had a right to know certain things about Bouffant, such as any refinements he might have made to his theory, and access to his personal habits, likes and dislikes. She was outraged that these academics could remain so deluded about the power they wielded in society. Just then Bouffant himself stepped out through the revolving doors. He stood not very far away, in the semi-dark, and lit a cigarette, though, naturally, as it was a *Gauloise*, and as he was Bouffant, smoking it, she did not judge. As she stared at him from this vantage point, she again verified with her own eyes, that he was not as handsome as she had once imagined. Neither was he as tall, nor as young, nor did he have a plenitude of hair. As he was indeed, Bouffant, much lauded by the Americans, not to mention everyone she knew in the arts and Humanities, each of these quibbles about how he presented in person evaporated from her mind. After all for a person like herself who had been forced to grow up in the dull cultural wasteland that is Australia, it was not every day that one got to see a *French cultural theorist* up close. It was in fact like sighting an endangered species, so much so Jillian held her breath. For over the last few weeks in particular, Bouffant's heady ideas swam about in her mind, keeping her awake at night. As did the recollection of the moment he had caught her fall with his stocky Gallic arms.

She recalled the intensity in his jetlagged eyes as he had stared down at her. The fact was she never had quite stopped imagining the promise of that

elevated pillow talk. Jillian was aware, that for this particular occasion, she had dressed in particularly high stilettos, a very stylish skirt, quite short, and with her hair freshly done, she felt she could only present a picture of seduction. He may be French, but indeed he was a man after all, and if it was one thing Jillian understood it was the other gender. At that moment he saw her. For a moment, it seemed to her he looked aghast, almost as if he had set eyes a lunatic, but that would be ridiculous. He was simply not expecting her to be there, but of course why should he? One usually doesn't expect one's greatest admirers to have to resort to such tricks. Again she cursed those Institute men who had pressed her into such a corner. She stepped up beside him.

"Hello Michel. I hope you don't mind me turning up unannounced like this..."

He narrowed his eyes as she continued breathlessly, knowing that the essence of success lay in her gaining his trust as quickly as she could under these trying circumstances. "I couldn't find another way to speak with you alone. We got off on such a bad footing, you know, when we first met. I am hoping we can rectify this."

He narrowed his eyes further, took a deep drag and looked incredibly weary.

"What is it you want to speak to me about?" he asked.

"As I said, I feel we misunderstood one another. Or rather you misunderstood me. I am a postmodernist, a proponent of your ideas. Fully versed in your theories. I would like to iron things out between us. Would you please join me for a drink?" He had started to shake his head, when suddenly to their left a throng of arty girls appeared at the street corner, and began rapidly approaching armed with books. Then from behind him there was a noise, and suddenly Ian, Tony and Sergei appeared. Bouffant, after sighting the girls, swung around and saw the academics. Being absorbed in conversation, the three men hadn't seen Bouffant but it was only a matter of seconds before they would. Jillian grabbed Bouffant's hand and steered him away, through the palms, down a slope and into a nearby alleyway just in time to dodge both sets of potential intruders. His relief was evident, in that he let her guide him swiftly along a city street, and into a bar, where she sighted a corner booth.

Several drinks later Jillian and Bouffant were immersed in conversation, with Jillian growing increasingly impressed by what he said, that is, what she hoped she understood he said, what with his accent to contend with, and the way he was now slurring his words on top of that, and the way the alcohol she had imbibed, in the form of *Stoli* on ice, was impacting her mind. Soon they were lurching back to his hotel. With no sight of those who called themselves Institute academics in the lobby, they took the lift unimpeded to the third floor. Sometime later Jillian lay in the bed, with its lovely hotel sheets, her blond hair nestled on a plump pillow. She was thinking wistful thoughts, while beside her Bouffant lay

fully clothed and snoring. Oh well, there was always the morning to look forward to, she mused, recalling how as soon as Bouffant's head had hit the pillow he had, somewhat impolitely, passed out. She decided that the best move for her to make next was to make sure that when Bouffant eventually woke—alongside her luscious naked self—he would be without the impediment of clothes. She started to unbutton his shirt. Her young fingers worked carefully at the buttons. As she struggled with them she brushed his skin, hoping this might arouse him, and begin a night of amorous adventure, but he slept on. Once his shirt was off, she turned her attention to an ancient, once-white singlet. Then it was down to the business of his trousers and, that done, onwards she bravely ventured towards the removal of his Y-fronts—which did not, she must admit, live up to her expectations of the undergarments worn by a man of searing intellect. His body, bereft of clothes was not altogether pleasing to the eye. Not caring to dwell on negative details in this otherwise promising situation, she quickly wrapped him within the bedclothes and pondered her next move.

It was obvious that, on recounting this adventure in days to come, some minor embellishments might be required. It was further evident that great things were awaiting her. First thing tomorrow morning, after quantities of memorable sex with this famous Frenchman she would find herself immersed in an enlightening conversation, in which she had persuaded him to commit to making an amendment to his theory on the disappearance of 1984. Given the intimate nature of this conversation, she felt that Bouffant was bound to offer her an original slant on his ideas. Think of what she could do with that! It was hard for Jillian to get to sleep, while thinking such agreeable thoughts about the future.

Once the day had well and truly dawned, Bouffant groaned into consciousness, waking Jillian from the slumber into which she had finally fallen. Though groggy and rancid mouthed, she smiled her most alluring smile in his direction, or so she hoped. Yet Bouffant, now nearing full consciousness simply stared at her and blinked. He lifted his arm from the sheets, and on noting it was bare, groaned loudly. Then he raised the sheet above him just a fraction, in order to peer down towards his feet.

“*Merde!*” he shouted. After this, his utterances came in a flood: “*Mon Dieu*. I refuse to believe this ...this reality, is taking place. Perhaps this is some ... some .. universe parallel, into which I have stumbled.”

Then he gripped his head like a ham actor doing a sad rendition of Macbeth.

Jillian could tell Bouffant was in some form of deep distress, she wasn't blind. She had read in several interviews that he was proud of his marriage of 36-years, one based on the cherished principle of monogamy. If it was the thought of infidelity behind this tirade of his, Jillian had no sympathy. Fidelity was not a thing in which she believed, and certainly didn't think leading edge thinkers,

those who called themselves cultural critics, what's more, in this day and age, should believe in it either.

"*Mon Dieu,*" he cried again and instead of smiling at her, looked at the ceiling with outstretched hands, "What have I done to deserve this...this .. disaster of fate? ..." How appallingly rude! Jillian thought. Not only that, here was this man famous for a sharp and querying mind, calling on God to sort him out, talking to the heavens, of all things, drawing on some questionable notion of fate. Jillian was not impressed. How pathetic, how self obsessed, how lacking in perspective, how dull of him, she thought.

"*Comment en suis-je arrivé là? Dieu est cruel.*"

It was obvious to Jillian that she had the means to put Bouffant out of his misery by setting the record straight. She could have easily told him that nothing sexual in nature had taken place between them, not so much as a kiss in fact had passed between their lips. Indeed, Bouffant was behaving so badly, she felt, she was not at all inclined to ease his level of distress. Not only was he ignoring her, and showing no sign of gratitude for waking with an attractive woman half his age, his monologue, which was continuing on relentlessly, had, in its final stages, descended into *French*. Jillian wasn't happy to be reminded that she didn't speak the language so popular among the intelligentsia these days. She knew it was an oversight to have not taken it at high school, nor at Institute level, and had never gotten around to attending classes at *Alliance Francaise* as she had promised herself she would. Yet as he kept up with his babble in his native tongue, Jillian might not have understood the content, but she certainly got the gist of what he was ranting on about. The curses he peppered his sentences with gave her a decent clue, and his agonised tone was a give-away that he was far from pleased. Jillian was considering whether she should throw a few curses, of the earthy Australian variety, back his way. Even if he was meant to be the great Bouffant, in many respects, close-up, he really was an unpleasant little man. Just as she was planning to utter a few home truths, and mention his deplorable underwear, she had a better idea. She let the sheets fall from her shoulders, until her nipples, small and pink, were fully exposed. That, momentarily, shut him up. Then while looking deeply into his eyes she spoke in a tender voice.

"Thank you for such a wonderful night of pleasure, Michel. Please don't fret. If it's privacy you're after, I can keep our little secret. I promise you I am not the type to kiss and tell."

Chapter 17

A layer of crud carpeted Daniel's tongue and a near empty bottle of scotch was rolling about his shins. He thrust the bottle aside. It was the coldest, foulest thing he'd ever brought home to bed, bar Jillian Trembath, not that he'd make that mistake again! It was obvious to him that she was so up herself these days, due to sliming her way onto all the invitation lists, she thought she was God's gift to the contemporary arts, not to mention believing she was the most desirable thing on legs. He tried not to recall those very legs, reminding himself of her snub at the party of the previous night. It had indeed been a party thrown as Bouffant's farewell event, which while overseen by those deplorable department heads of his, Daniel had considered would provide him with the opportunity to shine, by being given a significant role in the proceedings. Ian, Tony and Sergei could swan about all they liked supervising, as far as Daniel had been concerned, but everyone knew that it was the details of an event that make it stand out. He was in charge of Decor and Costuming.

Now from his place in bed, the following morning, and on rubbing his gritty eyes, he recalled what that grand title had really meant. He had been at the club from early yesterday supervising the wearing of berets by the bar staff, and the placement of an '*Au Revoir Bouffant*' banner over the bar. By 9 pm, guests were dribbling in, however none were core identities, most significantly absent being the guest of honour. Daniel had meanwhile spied the young Tiffany Lamb biding her time on a bar stool in an interesting dress, he felt, a thing with not much to it, fabric-wise. She was alone, this student from his Theory Unearthed course, one of many females who sat in the front row, with cleavage far more evident than signs of sharp intelligence. He had sauntered over and, on taking a stool, offered her a generous glimpse of his unorthodox views on the writing of Gilles Deleuze. His conversational flow was interrupted when the three profs escorted Bouffant into the room, with the academics looking too smug for words and the visitor wearing a gold lamé suit.

Daniel was alarmed on realising he was not where he should be, among those milling around Bouffant by this point, especially when a photographer suddenly appeared. The fellow had a swarthy look, wore Cuban heels, and was wielding a Nikon. He began clicking frantically at Bouffant and those around him, as if, thought Daniel, he was a possessed character from an Antonioni film. Daniel watched as those closest began pressing up next to Bouffant, transforming themselves from everyday people about the place, into those types you see in the society pages of cheap flimsy magazines. As they jostled for prominence before the camera, their eyes hardened and adopted a celluloid shine, their features set in

photo-purpose smiles, their bodies froze into stock celebrity poses, their hair looked as if straight out of a fashion spread in *Vapid* fashion and lifestyle magazine.

Daniel found this transformation curious, and being a thinking man interested in cultural phenomena, he started to wonder deeply about what he saw. Was it that having seen so many pictures of this sort before in the society pages, in throwaway publications with snappy cover lines, these people posing for the camera knew exactly how to mimic the look required? Or was it the camera itself, its tendency to flatten and conventionalise a person's appearance, itself had the ability to transform the appearance of those before it into *media clichés*?

Suddenly Jillian Trembath appeared right next to Bouffant, placing herself right before the aura of the camera's flashing light, inserting herself between a tall eagle-faced woman and Bouffant himself, who looked much more like a show-business type than the last time Daniel had seen him, what with him wearing his suit of garish gold. Jillian was in a shimmering black dress, that through the deft use of slits exposed sections of her petite frame at key places of interest such as breast, navel and upper thigh. She was both ghastly and fascinating to Daniel's gaze, as she began flinging herself at Bouffant, while purring into the camera. The photographer's clicking became wilder as Bouffant, with a deer-in-headlights look in his face, gazed frozenly ahead.

Naturally Daniel had taken leave of Tiffany Lamb by this point, determined to make his way towards the place where all the action was taking place, planning to insert himself as brazenly as that bitch-face had, into the dead centre of things. As he walked to reach Bouffant, he had to pass the photographer, and as he was making his way to do so, he noted that Jillian was now directly before him, rubbing Bouffant's pate, while pouting into the flashing light. That's when she saw him. He watched her set eyes right on him, but rather than offer an expression of recognition, her eyes went dull and glazed, as if she were seeing through, and beyond, the column of empty space that he had become. Just then the music halted and a horrid buzzing replaced the sounds of Billy Idol, who had been boasting until then, from the same speakers, that he was dancing with himself.

Daniel looked over to the DJ's booth, where there was a man waving his arms about madly, and frowning into a fellow's face with a mowhawk, who was yelling angrily, while holding up a cable. The buzzing continued. Daniel raced over to locate the Technical Manager, and together they dashed over to the DJ booth to rectify the situation, whatever it was. The problem was a political one, between the DJ and the shouting fellow, who wanted to hear some *Sex Pistols*, and "not the disco shit that had been playing all night". There was no reasoning with the man. By the time the problem was ironed out, and security had come and taken

the mohawked one away, Daniel was exhausted. He still found the energy to race back to where all the photo session had been earlier. No one was there by the time he returned, in fact the only evidence of that heady little scene was a single gold thread lying on the floor. He picked it up, then Daniel saw another a little further away, and another, further away still, until finally, after following a trail of gold thread, he saw the backs of some hanger's on from the earlier entourage, heading up the flight of stairs at the back of the venue. Having visited the hotel before this, he knew that nothing of any consequence lay up those particular stairs. There was but an old broom closet, a leaking toilet and a storage room full of broken chairs. Nevertheless up the stairs that original crowd was heading so it seemed, and as Daniel strained to see further up he thought he caught a flash of gold lamé at the top. He pushed through people to reach the upper landing where he discovered Ian, Tony and Sergei were seated at a long desk in front of the storage room, the door to which was shut. Muffled music was emanating from inside, something by The Eurhythmics was his guess.

"Gold card please," Tony demanded, with all three profs staring downwards fixedly into lists.

"What? What card?" Daniel demanded.

The trio, in unison, looked up.

"Oh it's you, Dan. I thought it was a VIP," Tony said.

"Yes, me too. A VIP, but it's you," Ian said.

Sergei glowered.

"What do you mean you mistook me for a VIP? I am a core member of the Party Committee you may recall," said Daniel, "Anyway, what the hell is going on? Did Bouffant come up here?"

"Of course. He is inside enjoying himself, they all are. Our VIP event is going very well."

"What VIP event?"

"Don't be cute, Dan."

Daniel was not being cute. He was no moron either, as his publication list proved. They were throwing some sort of a party within a party up here. They must have cleared out the storage room, invited guests, created secret cards. They must have planned the whole thing behind his back. His jaw twinged painfully.

"Why I wasn't informed! This is an outrage! Your event is hardly valid, while true VIPs, like myself, have been left out!"

A row of professorial eyebrows rose from behind their spectacles. Even Daniel was surprised just to what extent, in addressing this superiors, he had lost his usual *sang froid*.

"Calm down, Dan," Tony said, "No one has left you out of anything. It escapes me how you seem so unaware of the VIP event's proceedings. All of which is

clearly documented in the minutes, copies of which have been properly circulated to you.”

Ian was nodding in time to each of Tony’s key points. Sergei looked silently at him, as if in agreement. With each nod of Ian’s head Daniel felt a little bit worse. He was recalling the stack of unread items in his overflowing In Tray at work. The sounds of the latest *Human League* track started up from behind the door. He noted it clashed terribly with the strains of *The Cure* from downstairs.

“So Dan, let me remind you that you actually have an official role to play,” said Tony. “And that is to meet and greet the VIP guests. Yes, you were allocated the job of directing them from downstairs to the upper floor.”

Daniel emitted a strangulated growl.

“Good. We’re glad that’s cleared up, now head on down there Dan to do your job,” said Tony, with Ian and Sergei’s eyes flashing from behind their spectacles.

Looking back from his place in his bed the following morning, Daniel recalled that in fact he hadn’t spent the remainder of the party meeting and greeting guests, as had been expected. He had instead left the premises forthwith, purchasing some scotch from the bottle shop next door before heading home on foot. He had, in fact, started drinking well before he arrived at his flat, which may not in retrospect have been the best of ideas. No matter how bad he presently felt, no matter how furry-mouthed and groggy, he could not give in to the temptation to stay in bed and nurse his hangover. It was Bouffant’s last morning in the country, and he must make the most of it. His department heads had not invited him to the send-off at the airport, he recalled. It was something he was planning to make them regret. As he sat there, he hatched a plan. A brilliant plan, the thought of which prompted an inner rant, one similar to other rants he’d undertaken over the last 18 days marking Bouffant Sydney stay. Those bastard department heads may believe they would monopolise Bouffant for one last time, monopolise him for their own personal gain, but they hadn’t accounted for his newfound streak of cunning. This new version of Daniel, this dangerous fellow he’d become, was going to romp onto that little stage they imagined that they had set just for their little private group, and he was going to come along and blast their tidy final airport scene to bits.

With that Daniel leapt to his feet. He probably didn’t look so dashing, not while wearing last night’s crumpled clothes, but that was not the point. The point was soon he would utilise his final chance to air his brilliant question to the great Bouffant. He told himself that he would not only get the opportunity to deliver his burning question, but in doing so he would have his moment of pure revenge on those bastard department heads. He began rummaging around the chaos of his flat, scrabbling about his overflowing desk, his messy drawers and shelves, poking inside stray tins and boxes, in jam-packed cabinets, inside and on top of

overflowing cupboards and books shelves abundant with books and papers and the odd set of paper clips. He was looking for the thing that would assist him in delivering his brilliant question to Bouffant with aplomb. It was a question that was not only so brilliant it would stagger the cultural theorist himself, but one that would, on utterance, spark a series of favourable outcomes for himself. In other words the brilliant question, once iterated, would have an afterlife of great import. It would indeed launch him, Daniel Black, into a bright and shiny future in the Humanities.

Then he found it. He grunted with appreciation as he lifted up his battered cassette recorder, after locating it in the linen closet, half-buried under a section of his Film Noir collection, awaiting filing. Some 20 minutes later, with a towel wrapped around his waist, freshly showered and shaved, Daniel stood before the bathroom mirror, stared earnestly into his foggy reflection and began to speak out loud. As he spoke into the mike, in the most earnest and impressive version of his voice, he commended himself on having a question with an approach so utterly sly, so brilliantly clever, and well contrived, that when it was articulated in his company, in the face of it Bouffant would only be left to writhe and squirm. Later, in the back of the cab, armed with briefcase and tape recorder, Daniel mused over what lay ahead. Despite that he had been expressly told, by Tony, and then Ian, and topped off by a grunt from Sergei, that he was not to attend the airport farewell, with their excuse being that numbers had been limited on Bouffant's request, and knowing the departure details had thus been withheld from him, Daniel nevertheless felt confident. He felt confident because little did anyone but he know, that he had 'borrowed' the official document concerned with the schedule of this event from Ian's office last week, photocopying and replacing it. It was the very document that listed Bouffant's flight details. He had also called the airline concerned, and more than once, this morning, he was no fool, to verify the flight to Paris was running according to schedule.

The cab passed some red-brick houses, identical in style and shape. He might have failed to impress Bouffant over their pool game, or even at their first meeting, but for Daniel things were about to change. He was dressed in the black polo neck sweater, trousers purchased from Marcs, and his long black leather coat, an ensemble which was now over three weeks old. He was not, it must be said, perspiring under his coat, a fact that to him at least signified his new sense of self-control and inner calm. He fiddled with the cassette player, uttering 'testing, testing, testing' into the mike, playing it back, pleased by the poignancy in his tone. The driver, though perhaps a little recklessly, was responding well to his earlier demand to "step on it". Some scrubby trees flew past the window. Another row of dull houses appeared and were replaced by blocks of flats. A woman in her dressing gown stood gaping at a post box, as they flew past.

Everything, no matter how banal, looked as if heightened, radiant, as if some form of epiphany was taking place within Daniel mind. Not that he believed in such outmoded modernist states as epiphany, he mused.

By the time planes were swooping down low beside the road, Daniel's mind was creating pleasant scenarios, in which he had the leading role. After ambushing the three amigos' *tete a tete* at Mascot, where they had gathered to see Bouffant off on his flight to Paris, Daniel would arrive and corner Bouffant, only to hurl his brilliant question his way, with tape recorder whirring. There would be no excuses accepted, no denials allowed. Bouffant would be forced to answer him outright. Daniel realised one thing about himself: he was no longer the naive and deferential man he had been a mere 18 days ago. He had sharpened all around, was leaner now, become a thing of sheer purpose and will. He had all the skills needed to lure Bouffant into his sophisticated trap. What result could he expect? He envisaged the Frenchman blanching and stammering, before conceding intellectual defeat. Thanks to capturing the exchange on tape, Daniel's question and Bouffant's historic response, whatever form it took, would provide the basis for a ground-breaking paper, no perhaps a book, which Daniel would have published at one of the great publishing houses on the Continent. He saw himself at conferences, talking to audiences over a thousand strong in venues in New York, London and Antwerp.

The cab drove speedily towards International Departures. Would the arty girls be there to witness Daniel in his defining moment? They seemed to have tapered off of late, had not been visible swirling so fervently around Bouffant; perhaps a rival popular identity had come to town. What about that hub of professorial smugness in triplicate, those professors White, McGee and Petrov, how astonished they would be, not to mention envious. For Daniel's question had the rare ability to challenge Bouffant, using Bouffantian ideas, that is his question was designed to challenge the thinker on his own terms. The cab slid to a halt outside the airport's entrance. Daniel, with tape recorder, marched inside. The foyer was clotted with people dressed for travel, lugging bags and hauling overloaded trolleys. Daniel marched past a family from the Indian sub-continent, in which grandmothers, mothers and girls, of every size, were wearing identical pink saris, and all the men were in long white shirts. He passed a large collection of men in dark suits wearing nametags. Three young women with Jackie O sunglasses smiled at him, their heads turning in unison, as he strode past. Gripping his recorder, he gazed at the flight information board. The relevant flight was listed, but was not due to depart for four more hours. So he had been a little over eager about getting there on time. So, that was not going to bother him.

Once he reached the spot concerned, where people left the airport to board, he noted that there was no sign of anyone waiting. Nor any planes on the

airstrip near the windows. He realised that four hours might seem to some a long time to stand and wait, with little to do, especially when one was holding onto a brilliant question in one's mind, but he was confident he had come to a place in himself of complete acceptance and surrender, a place in which he could wait

100 years if he'd been asked. He clutched his trusty recorder, feeling unusually composed, almost Zen-like in countenance. He relished his newfound sense of deep resolve.

Time passed slowly, but passed indeed. He did nothing but breathe, mentally preparing for his big moment. A couple of planes swooped in, and rolled up beside the windows. People arrived around him, large numbers, forming in groups. He had his eyes half shut, and grew aware of their voices, a lot of clutter and fuss around him. He remained unperturbed. Despite no sign of Bouffant or the others, he remained calm, deeply centred, breathing, just breathing, occasionally opening his eyes fully, just in case they were lurking around a corner. He felt none of the usual fury when a group of noisy children, overexcited about some school tour, got too close. He felt himself as if gathering within. At last the flight was called. The passengers began to tighten into an actual line, beginning at the departure gate, in a coiling snake, but Bouffant and the others were still not in sight. The customs people were busy, with their little gadgets and their meticulous methods, and they pushed people through in their officious way. The passengers streamed through customs to the back gates, and then were gone. Still no sign of Bouffant, or those bastard profs, though this was definitely the only flight to Paris at this time.

By now Daniel's breathing had become jagged, a bit disturbed, his hands had started to clench and unclench. His jaw was tight. He strode over to the nearest desk and started arguing with a flight bureaucrat, a pretty brunette in a crisp uniform, who was determined not to answer his questions, no matter how reasonable. Had a man named Michel Bouffant called in to say he was delayed, and if so, was the plane being held at the airport accordingly? Was a Michel Bouffant, a professor as it happened, listed as a passenger at all? The woman would not answer, claiming confidentiality was strict about such things. Daniel, naturally, made clear the significance of the man concerned in the broader cultural sphere, and what a mistake by the airline at this point in time could mean to the future of cultural theory around the world. Daniel began to tug at the collar of his coat. He had started to sweat lightly, just lightly, under it.

Tugging again at his collar, Daniel marched over to the best place to view the planes take off, his nose not far from the large glass window. Eventually the plane to Paris ambled up the runway and, as if without effort, glided into the air.

All the while Daniel's tape recorder hung limply by his side. Back in the foyer, on leaden legs, he located a public phone.

"Professor Anthony White, Head of Human Arts speaking."

It may have been done to death in films, it may be a sad cliché, but Daniel had no compunction about putting his handkerchief across the mouthpiece, and adopting an accent. He aimed for New York.

"Dave Poppenmyer's the name, I'm a writer for *F*Art*, hoping to locate Michel Bouffant for a piece I'm doing, you know, I'm calling it, *The Man With The Golden Suit*. It connects Bouffant to Bataille, with James Bond references thrown in..... So is Bouffant still there in Sydney?"

"I am afraid he left this morning for L.A."

"L.A? Err, I thought he lived in Paris."

"He does" said Tony. "However he's taking a three-day tour of American theme parks before heading to Paris. He was thrilled to receive the tour package as a farewell gift from our Institute here in Sydney, a gesture of our esteem. Could you find a way to put that in the article?"

Daniel muttered a few more hoarse words, before hanging up.

By the time he was in the back of a home-bound taxi, he realised there was a time in every man's life, when it may well be appropriate to take off one's sweat drenched coat.

OOO

Daniel burst into the lecture theatre, bristling up the aisle. He was clutching a folder as he staggered towards the lectern, aware that as he made the journey students, left and right, were staring rudely. He recalled, with a nostalgic twinge, the inaugural Theory Unearthed lecture he had given. On that first day, he'd arrived punctually, wearing a black ensemble from Marcs. From that moment on, he'd been someone for the students to emulate. He'd created the image of an urban, metropolitan, well heeled man. Yet now he was unshaven, and not in a considered three-day growth sort of way. He was wearing clothes rescued from the dirty wash pile. Furthermore he wore a pair of last season's sunglasses, not even Ray Ban's, to mask his stinging red-rimmed eyes. He couldn't locate this year's shades, so it was embarrassing all around. How standards had slipped, a matter for which there was one person to blame: that trumped-up popular theorist Bouffant. Since that humiliating wait at Mascot back several months ago, in July, he had formed some questionable morning rituals. He'd washed down his cornflakes this morning with swigs of Johnny Walker. Suddenly Daniel recalled how, before he'd started the course, one of his colleagues Bradley Marsh, who taught Australian painting with a Marxist perspective, had cornered him in the

staff room and pestered him about bringing ideas associated with postmodernism into the department. The staff room was a fractious place, a problematic venue, Daniel found, when all he hoped for was to digest his lunch in peace. On this particular occasion, Daniel's goal had been to eat his ham sandwich just once without a bout of indigestion affecting him all afternoon. However Bradley Marsh wasn't acquiescing to his plan.

"So Daniel, you're offering a course I hear in postmodernism for first years? Don't you think all that jargon-saturated theory that's spewing out from Europe, all that faddish stuff, will be a bit rough on them?"

Daniel swallowed hard.

"Not at all, not at all. You have to assume that first years have some semblance of intelligence."

"Are you providing a glossary of postmodern terms? That might help orient the poor things."

Daniel felt a bitter taste rise in his throat.

"These are arts students, not babies sucking off their mother's tit. The brightest will stay up all night reading to keep abreast of things, the rest will go dull-eyed in class and fall behind. If I am lucky, they'll drop out. A useful Darwinian process at work. Who wants the dullards to pursue the call to postmodernism? Let me tell you, Planet Postmodern is a very demanding place, only appropriate for the mentally alert."

"Isn't that just plain old fashioned elitism?" Marsh snorted. Daniel would have told him to get stuffed, if it wasn't a breach of Institute policy. Instead he bit into his sandwich.

Back in that first class, rather than giving them a glossary of terms, Daniel had treated the students as the adults they were and proceeded to read from his Masters thesis on the death of the grand narrative. Not even Francois Lyotard himself could have provided such an inspired introduction to the topic. The death of the grand narrative interested Daniel very much. It was usually, in some form or other, at the forefront of his thoughts. When lesser men were thinking of life's trivialities, Daniel was pondering some intricate question relating to the grand narrative's demise.

Today, however, as he staggered up the aisle, under-slept and red-eyed, the death of the grand narrative was further from his mind than the demise of his own brilliant career, something that he could thank Bouffant's love of theme parks for inducing prematurely. On arriving at the lectern, he thumped down the folder he had brought causing a couple of nearby girls to jump, thus creating a pleasant jiggling-of-breast effect. Then from within that folder he pulled a large document. "Mr Black, sir. You don't look so crash hot," one of the duller student's sang out.

“I may not be crash hot, but that is of no consequence today. Everyone pay attention. We have a lot of pivotal work to get through in this final lecture, so please prepare to take substantial notes.”

Such a sense of power he derived from the sight of all those students, moving in unison, opening folders and producing ballpoint pens.

Then he opened the document and started reading from it in a monotone. He read, and read. After a good eight minutes of this, he looked up to see with satisfaction that several girls held pens poised midair, with expressions of confusion on their faces. Boys in the back rows looked more loutish than usual. By all the evident inertia, his plan was working well. Although three pairs of hands had shot up in the air, Daniel ignored them and continued reading aloud. The voice of Tiffany Lamb broke his flow.

“This is obviously not the work of Michel Bouffant or about him either. What the hell?”

Daniel continued to read.

He was well aware that the students had been expecting him to deliver his final lecture on Bouffant. It was written clearly on the course outline. This lecture had been planned as the concluding one in the series titled: Michel Bouffant: Reality in Its Death Throes. He had already given the first four lectures, which the class had absorbed with enthusiasm, and a hunger to learn more.

Just as he was getting to a plot twist in the text, a lanky boy piped up.

“Yeah. This isn’t about Bouffant, it’s Rémi. This is *Tintin* you’re reading from, the comic series.”

“No way, what’s doing?” another student remarked.

There were loud murmurs from a number of students, and the shuffling of chairs. Daniel sensed the beginning of class unrest. He also sensed he was entering very tricky territory. A lot rested on how he handled the situation at this point. He had to keep the students with him, couldn’t let them slip away. They had looked up to him all year, been in awe of his handle on all things postmodern, no matter how they felt about the movement personally. He knew very well that with postmodernism, students could hate its premise, could reject it with dogged arguments, but that there was so much heavy reading involved, and so many difficult concepts to absorb, whatever they felt, it intimidated them, and because he knew a lot about it, it was enough to make him seem superior. Daniel cleared his throat and looked earnestly around the room.

“I was forced to change the lecture program overnight because news from France arrived to inform me that Michel Bouffant has had his day. He made some great breakthroughs at the start of the year, came to a peak in July, but his theories, on the Continent, have played themselves out ...”

“Are you saying that Bouffant is yesterday’s news?” interrupted Tiffany Lamb.

“That is exactly what I’m saying. Ideas move fast in the contemporary cultural sphere.”

There was more murmuring.

“Everyone overseas is now engaged with deconstructing the popular text, and by the text we mean the pop song, the advertisement, and, yes the simple comic book. This movement is big, really big in France. So I am giving you a very pivotal lecture on it. So as I said earlier please take substantial notes. After the reading, we will practice analysing it just the way they do in Paris.”

With a sense of triumph Daniel watched every one of the student get swiftly into gear. All traces of cynicism had evaporated from their eyes, as they put pens to page *en masse*. He thought of how Bouffant writes about ‘the mass’, ‘the public’, words that evoke ideas of the herd, and never uses terms like ‘the self’, ‘the individual’, in other words terms that conjure the singular human entity. He saw in this classroom of students writing as if in unison the beauty of the concept of the constructed subject. If his mouth wasn’t so sour from the remnants of his breakfast, he may well have experienced the sweet taste of revenge.

Chapter 18

By the time Michel Bouffant was on the plane to Los Angeles, his tickets, brochures and accommodation details for the tour of theme parks safely packed in his hand luggage, he'd already made his secret purchase, one that had been an unprecedented move for him, a man notorious for his aversion to fine art. As everyone who read his work knew, he had by then written many papers on the subject of art's failings and counterfeit claims. In one he referred to, and set about proving, how art—just like the cultural critic himself—was in the process of *gradual evaporation*. Later people would say it was his adherence to this concept that provoked him to make the controversial purchase. Everyone in the Sydney artworld found out soon enough about the private exchange thanks to a certain anonymous press release being sent out to a range of artworld editors and gallery directors not long after Bouffant's departure. It began thus:

Last week, controversial French cultural theorist Michel Bouffant purchased, *The Grass Blade Laid Bare*, 12' by 12', in Astroturf, by Sydney post-art practitioner, Jack Blight, for an undisclosed sum.

The press release went on for two more informative pages, in which the objective of Blight's post-art movement was explained. By the time the release was in the hands of the usual arts editors and writers, Bouffant was back in Paris working on his new book. He was planning to have his very own Blight piece of post-art grace the publication's cover.

OOO

Some weeks after the farewell party for Bouffant, the recently dubbed 'post-art practitioner', was just arriving at the Chippendale warehouse of his closest friend and fellow artist. When Malcolm came to the door he had another one of those enigmatic scarves tied across his throat, that he had been wearing a lot of late. Malcolm had told Jack he was having trouble with his larynx yet again.

"If the problem's serious you should see another doctor, a specialist perhaps."

"Putting myself in the hands of the mainstream medical establishment is not going to happen, mate."

Jack screwed up his features in dismay.

"Mal, I understand how you feel, but you need to put your health before your misgivings about the quacks."

“No way. I have my work to think about,” Malcolm croaked defiantly, “I’ll get none of that done while hanging about doctor’s waiting rooms. Besides they are always trying to get me to give up my path.”

“I reckon this might be the time to put your health before your work for a change. What if it’s serious?” said Jack.

Malcolm grimaced. He was from the old school in which one didn’t put anything before one’s work, not one’s creature comforts, not women, not one’s livelihood, certainly not one’s health. The famous international artists he admired had lost body parts on account of art, and there was Guy De Vries and his fishhook performances on the local front.

“Enough about me. What about this sale of yours to Bouffant? Who would have thought? How much did you make?”

“A packet, a bloody bundle. Bouffant found it amusing to pay so much money for a work that people might mistake for nothing more than a slab of ordinary old Astroturf.”

Malcolm laughed a croaky laugh.

“You know I actually got to like the man,” Jack said. “Unlike the hangers-on, he’s got a decent sense of humour. You can see it in his work. He read me out a bit one time and you could see the cheek in it, and you’d never credit it, he’s not a bad hand at pool either.”

OOO

Through their array of delicious meals and foot rubs, not to mention praise, Joy and Ruby let Jack get the idea they were both pleased about his sale to Bouffant. Privately, though, both had their reservations about the incident. Ever since Jack had sold his piece, everyone in town had stopped talking about Bouffant and started on about Jack. As Joy, aka Sharon Boils, from Brisbane, prepared the bean mix for her famous nachos she was preparing for Jack’s visit that night, she began to once more doubt the validity of Jack’s new claims about his work. The way she saw it, whoever heard about an ex-painter suddenly doing something as extraordinary as starting up an art movement, and one that wasn’t even a valid art movement, *per se*, but something that undermined its status as art? Surely if something like *post-art* was coming in, a performer, like Joy herself, would be at its helm, she reasoned. Everyone knew that art that was based on the creation of objects had been challenged a long way back. She threw on the grated cheese aggressively. She began to dwell on all the publicity Jack had been obtaining of late, something that as far as she could see was making his already big head swell all the more. She ran through all the venues in which Jack had been written up of late. His work had graced the cover of *Art ETC* and, albeit reproduced in the

wrong shade of green, another piece was represented on the cover of this month's *On the Pavement*. She shoved the dish in the oven, turning it on particularly high. Then she reminded herself that *she* had been committed to performing her pop persona for four years now. Four years was a serious and earnest commitment in the world of contemporary art. Besides, her work was well conceived, everyone agreed. So all in all, one would think she would obtain more credit for it. Had she been on the cover of a single publication? When Jack arrived, he was presented with the somewhat burnt nachos Joy offered him with a frozen smile.

Later in the week, in the premises decorated in various shades of red inhabited by Ruby, as she put the last rose petals into the tub in which she would soon soak Jack's feet, the artist whose work evoked male genitalia in Styrofoam, was mulling on a particular matter. When one is a committed contemporary artist, and a feminist, it was not right to repress mounting evidence of inequality and sexism operating right under one's creative nose, she felt. Though Ruby mightn't say as much out loud to Jack, she was becoming less impressed with his foray into AstroTurf, and the theory he was pumping into the art press to accompany it, the more attention he obtained for it. As far as she could see, her giant genitals were far more compelling aesthetically speaking, conceptually speaking, in all manner of speaking, than his boring old rectangles of synthetic grass. Yet, she asked herself, were her works on the cover of *Art ETC* or *On the Pavement*? Not in the boys club that masqueraded as the fair-play cutting edge artworld she inhabited they weren't! That night, Jack had to tell Ruby, more than once, to loosen her grip as she delivered her famous foot massage.

OOO

Vivian knew, as well as anyone in the business, that Jack was facing a risk at this crucial point in his career. When he next strolled into the gallery, looking overly full of himself, it was clear. She pointed a bony, big ringed forefinger at him.

"You don't want to get all *cult* on me, Jack."

"Pardon me, Viv?"

"That article in *Vapid*. They made you look like a weirdo. I strictly told you and Daniel to manage your image."

She dragged Jack into her office, and soon they were both staring into the pages of *Vapid* magazine, the issue sporting a six-page feature on Jack amid its glossy art and lifestyle pages. The photographer had portrayed Jack in black and white, made his eyes look like they were popping out, and he had clouds of eerie smoke whirling about his head. His hair looked like something live and feral was nesting in it, Vivian pointed out.

“You don’t look that peculiar in life, Jack. You look ordinary. Like a sort of chubby chap next door. Let me tell you, these days, that’s an asset. The eccentric, oddball artist thing is so yesterday. Why didn’t you let the people at *Vapid* see the real you?”

Jack scratched his chin. He didn’t know why he hadn’t let the *Vapid* people see the real him. What he did know was that he wanted to find out what was so bad about being a cult figure, if that was what she meant. It sounded quite appealing to him. He got up the nerve to ask.

“Cult doesn’t sell, Jack. People sit around and admire you, but no one forks out any cash to buy your work.”

“Well I guess that is fine in the short term, but at the end of the day, we can’t have that, Viv.”

“No, Jack, it’s not even good in the short term, it can be very hard to shake.”

It was true that not selling might be a risk, if he thought about it. As despite all the media attention he had been getting to date, no one besides Bouffant and his mum had actually bought Jack’s work.

Chapter 19

Jillian pulled out the invitation from the debris on her desk. It was 10am. The office was cranking into gear. All six TV sets, in their stack, showed the suburban warrior visage of Margaret Thatcher. Nearby, the news journos were flicking through papers, getting out notes, picking up phones. Bob Herrick was out, leaving Jillian to her own devices at the arts section. Even though it could mean more work, she loved her own devices, in the workplace as much as elsewhere. The invitation, from Jack Blight, was different from the usual ones he sent. It seemed he was having a show involving Astroturf again, but this invitation was discreet, on white card, with Jack Blight's name in slim black font, nothing more. She turned it over. The details of time and date were barely discernible, embossed as they were as if in Braille. What were Blight and Black up to now, she wondered? When she received that anonymous press release, she had been certain that Bouffant sale had been a stunt of theirs. She was livid about the fact Blight had been pronounced a *post-art practitioner* in every art journal and magazine around. How dare they dream up an art movement! It had been her intention to do just that! How was she to get onto the pages of the history books now? She still blamed Daniel for the way she'd been humiliated at Prank. He'd taught her to interpret Bouffant the way she had, and to speak her mind on the subject, and yet did he defend her from attack at the crucial hour? The bastard had simply stood there smirking into his Manhattan. She'd never forgive him. Never! That aside, there was the matter of the enigmatic invitation. She opened her trusty contacts book and dialled.

"Daniel Black speaking."

"Daniel, how are you?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Jillian?"

"You sound surprised to hear from me. How are you? It's been so long."

"Oh, fine. Fine. Yes, it's been a while."

He was obviously rattled to hear her voice. Good, she thought. That she still had the power to unravel him was crucial to her plan.

"So tell me about this new show of Jack Blight's. What's the story with the wedding invitation he sent out? ..."

"You'll have to come along on opening night to find that out."

She tried to prise information from him in her usual charming way, but he remained tight-lipped. So irritatingly tight-lipped, and so irritating all round, she made a mental note that her top priority would be to hasten up her plot to bring on his downfall, along with that irritating Astroturf buffoon friend of his.

On saying farewell to a little Japanese man, Vivian rushed back into the gallery where Jack's new show *Entropy in Astroturf* was hanging. Jack found the sight of her coming headlong his way—in a white vinyl catsuit—terrifying.

“Guess what, Jack? You've sold out!” she announced discreetly.

Jack was not fast enough to avoid the kiss that ensued, which landed mostly, and somewhat moistly, on his lower lip.

“Indeed I just said farewell to Mr. Tamiyoyo, who as it happens, has bought the entire show,” she announced. Then before Jack could even comprehend this fact, she dashed off in a whirr of white vinyl, saying she must attend to the books.

Despite the nature of the news, Jack was not impressed. The fact was he wished he'd produced the show he'd intended from the start. As he recalled Daniel, in his role as Personal Theorist, had badgered him to pull in, tighten up and think slim for this particular show. Daniel had been so insistent on this point you'd think his greatest wish was for Jack to produce nothing much at all. In the end Jack had complied. So now there it was. His show had sold out. Five whole pieces of work had been bought.

The entry of a well-known platinum blonde, someone very familiar in this corner of the artworld, was noted by all in the gallery. This included Daniel, who prior to catching sight of her had been staring into one of the pieces, caught in deep thought, or at least hoping that his pose would indicate as much. As he turned to see Jillian, his mind was filled with wonder. You'd think the grind of a daily newspaper would wear a person down, he thought. Considering the interminable deadlines and nasty people one dealt with in such a context, day in day out, you'd expect such a life would take its physical toll, he felt. You'd consider it would make a person haggard, washed-out, prematurely aged. However Jillian Trembath looked as young and fresh as ever, much to Daniel's chagrin. Without hesitation, Jillian walked directly across the room to arrive by his side, smelling of some sort of perfume, something expensive and perplexing.

“Hmm. *Entropy's* sold out?” she said, and as there were no red stickers up, Daniel marvelled at her ability to find things out. It was not just her usual nose for news that typified her now. Something about Jillian, Daniel noted, had changed.

“Quite sparse, in a good way. This show. I like it.”

It was her voice, he realised. It was more refined, cannier, lower in tone than before. It had become like those throaty voices from ABC radio, Radio National to be precise.

“Yes. He's refining his approach.”

“Just five works? Hmm, interesting move. Did you write the catalogue essay again Daniel?”

That voice, it really could rattle a person, no matter what that person thought of its owner, Daniel felt.

“Yes, I did as a matter of fact.”

With her skin looking smooth and her hair shiny blonde, Daniel became aware that he had started wondering if she would ever consider having him back in her bed. It was thoroughly awful, the way the mind of a rational highly educated, sensitive man, such as himself, could do such a thing. That is leap to such a set of base thoughts without a shred of hesitation. Disappointing to find his mind wandering, in such a familiar and ill-fated manner, despite his inner resolve in recent days to stay far away from the world’s manipulating bitches. He didn’t want to want her. It was deplorable, unprincipled, pathetic.

“So, in your view, the thrust of this show is ...?” she asked with her new sultry voice trailing off.

How he wanted to hold his tongue. How he would love to make Jillian work hard for her living, like everyone else. He wanted her to do some of her own research for a change. He wanted to withhold the information that she wanted from him. The sort of information that in the past he had so easily given away. Except his tongue didn’t seem to want what he did. His tongue started telling her things, despite him.

“Jack’s pushing the minimal envelope. You know, paring down, playing out the Bouffantian notion that art is in the slow process of evaporation ...”

She had whisked out her notebook and pen by then, and begun to scrawl the words that fell unwittingly from Daniel’s lips. He watched on helplessly as he gave her his ideas all over again, handed her his insights, threw his hard work her way.

“Ah yes I see.... He is embodying that theory nicely then... tell me more Daniel, yes do go on ...” Jillian asked in that new sultry voice.

OOO

In the aftermath of Jillian’s favorable review of *Entropy*, and with all the pieces selling to a mysterious Japanese collector, Jack finally took off in a consistent manner, in the commercial sense. Collectors began to visit the gallery at all hours to talk to Vivian about that new post-art practitioner of hers, getting out their Bankcards before she even began explaining the complexities involved in his work. Jack might only have shown five works at his last exhibition, but Vivian now had enough of his Astroturf pieces in stock to sell to buyers for decades. The

next time she spoke to Jack, after updating him on his healthy financial standing, she delivered an imperious command.

“You need to get a Melbourne gallery, Jack, something very contemporary, very, you know, Melbourne. Oh, and you need one up north as well. People underestimate the vibrancy of the Brisbane scene. I want you to have a presence there.”

They were in the gallery, in the stockroom, where she was organizing some of his works. In her dress of a green the colour of split peas, a shade that clashed terribly with his work, Jack didn't know if he found her words or her dress the more distressing.

“Isn't that like sending me off into the jaws of the competition?”

“Not at all, Jack. Your success on the national front is my success. You really must spread your little Sydney-centric wings. The more galleries you have in the country, the bigger you become.”

Without further ado, she made arrangements.

Chapter 20

Jack soon found himself on a plane, heading southwards. Having not flown since he was a child, he liked the way the flight attendants offered him alcoholic beverages. He didn't like the way he had to sit next to Daniel, who droned on and on, in the name of his art education, about all sorts of movements involving neo-this and post-that. Melbourne was not the miserable place everyone warned him it would be, even though the weather lived up to its reputation. Although who cared about intermittent drizzle when one had an all expenses-paid hotel, with a stocked bar fridge, and was being taken out in free taxis to the best parts of town. On their first night they did a crawl of the eateries and bars in Lygon Street. The next day they set off for Gertrude Street, as Vivian had stipulated in their itinerary. It wasn't hard to build a rapport with the owner of Gallery F, a chap called Frank Morrison. Due to his association with Vivian, not to mention all the good recent press, he seemed to approve of Jack before he opened his mouth. While Jack showed his slides to Frank, Daniel delivered his spiel about post-art, which had come a long way since its first incarnation for the ears of Bouffant. As Daniel rattled on, Jack began to dream. If he kept selling his work at the rate he had been, he'd soon be purchasing more than just a new couch, which he ordered in black leather just last week. The meeting wound up with Jack booking his first Melbourne show, and joining Daniel and Frank at *GlutTon*, a place that had only been open a week, for a celebratory meal.

The Brisbane experience was not unlike the Melbourne one in many ways, though the weather was dependable. It was unarguably vibrant, with the hibiscus out in bloom, and the artists in the scene having read so much about Jack already, he simply had to look the part of a man working in material as radical as Astroturf. He secured a solo show at a large new contemporary gallery run by an enthusiastic Hungarian gnome called Sandor. Glass of champers in hand, Jack marvelled at the stunning river views at Sandor's Contemporary Gallery, and didn't realise until too late he had overdone it with the bubbly. On the way back to Sydney he nursed a hangover so fierce, that sitting next to Daniel and his stream of artworld blather was unbearable. The flight was such a misery, Jack didn't remember to congratulate himself on becoming more than your average Sydney-centric contemporary artist.

OOO

On his return, Jack was not prepared for Vivian's news, but then what could possibly have prepared him? Once at Rubin's, he found her standing before a

painting of a giant pink squirrel in the foyer. She was wearing something violet and too tight. On seeing Jack, she beamed at him in an alarming fashion.

“So good to see you, Jack. Travelling agrees with you I see.”

“It was only Melbourne and Brissie, Viv.”

“Still. It’s all been such a grand success. Speaking of which, you’ll never guess the marvellous thing that’s happened.”

She had clasped her hands around his waist, with her eyes blinking up at him intensely, a situation that prompted Jack to pull away.

“Should I be worried?”

“Definitely not. Randolph Mars wants to hire you to produce some work. I gather he has something rather big in mind. An entire project of some sort, that he wants you to oversee.”

“What! You mean *the* Randolph Mars?”

“How many of them are there? It turns out one of your keenest buyers has been working on his behalf. You know that Mr. Tamiyoyo who has kept buying, well it wasn’t his real name at all. He isn’t Japanese, he’s from Taiwan. He is actually Randolph’s man. Locates works for his contemporary collection.”

Jack was struggling to absorb all this.

“I’ve booked you an appointment to meet Mars in October. It was the first spot he had vacant in his diary. Oh to be a media mogul.”

“Randolph Mars is coming over here to see me?”

“No, you’re to go to his offices. Don’t worry, Jack, we’ll find something appropriate for you to wear. Daniel, naturally, will escort you there so you two can do your thing. Isn’t it exciting?”

Jack had never seen Vivian looking so flushed with happiness. With her habit of taking a healthy slice if her artists were commissioned, he realised she must be smelling the promise of money, big money, in the air.

OOO

Not many people in Sydney knew about the joys of sushi, but Vivian was one of them. She had a favourite little sushi place, *Godzilla*, to which she had invited Daniel to dine with her to stage a particular conversation. He accepted her invitation outwardly with good cheer. Though he tried to be worldly as a rule, he was secretly averse to devouring raw fish. When Daniel arrived he found Vivian already seated, wearing a tangerine outfit reminiscent of the Hari Krishnas. Shortly after their meals arrived, Vivian introduced him to the concept that a meeting was scheduled to take place between Jack and Randolph Mars.

“You’re kidding?” Daniel replied.

“No. I am certainly not. Isn’t it thrilling? So I want you, of course, to accompany Jack. To help him perform his post-artist thing, the way only you can.”

A lump of sushi stuck in Daniel’s gullet. Flattery was one thing, but for Daniel not enough. He’d spent enormous amounts of time and effort on Jack Blight so far. Right now he had student essays to mark, an idea for a paper but no time in which to write it, and plenty of other plans. However, this Randolph Mars connection did have possibilities.

“I presume whatever it involves in relation to art-making, it will at least involve Jack charging an obnoxious fee?”

“Of course.”

“So I can presume I will get a better rate for my involvement, also?”

“Don’t get all worked up, Daniel,” Vivian was quick to respond, “this is a regular assignment. You support Jack as you always do, in the usual way. No pay rise need be involved.”

As Vivian attacked her sushi dexterously, Daniel’s pulse hammered at his throat. He chomped for a bit, then even surprising himself, in a fit of pique, watched as he thumped his fist down on the table.

“As Jack gets rich for doing work he doesn’t even understand, I—who make it happen in a marketing sense—remain hidden behind the scenes, not to mention abysmally underpaid for my significant role.”

As he finished speaking, one part of him knew he had gone too far, way too far already, but his tongue wasn’t listening to that part of him. His tongue had loosened in his mouth and had further ideas about what needed to be said.

“Here *I* am making it all happen for Jack, and for what? I should be paid a sensational amount just to endure his company. Let’s face it, Vivian, if it weren’t for *me*, Jack would still be just a dumb painter.”

“You’re making a *scene*,” Vivian hissed, and once he looked, he realised he had done just that. Everyone in the restaurant was staring. While on the one hand he didn’t care, on the other he feared he might be out of work with Rubin’s Contemporary Art Space by the time they left Godzilla. Despite all his gripes, Daniel *did* like some elements of the work that Vivian offered. The pay might be terrible, but writing on Jack gave him a certain prestige, a level of artworld credibility, and all-around *hip* in the Sydney sense of the word. He had never before spoken to Vivian like this, and soon the question sprang into his mind: “What have I done?”

Vivian pointed her chopsticks and began to admonish him.

“You writers have a nerve. Certainly you’ve done your bit in this little Astroturf success story, but you’ve underestimated the artist’s central role in it, the artist being—of course—our Jack.”

Our Jack, he thought miserably, *our Jack!* His jaw was terribly tight, and that vein in his throat that he could feel right now felt like it might burst. It was always about Jack. Everything always revolved around Jack. The hell with Jack! Just because Daniel was the *writer* didn't mean he was not an artist in his own right. In Daniel's eyes, Jack's work was more of an adjunct to *his* artful writing than *vice versa*. Although in the corner of the artworld in which they operated, one was not encouraged to have such ideas. One was supposed to worship the artist above all else. This artist as Godlike entity was a problematic modernist posture, so outmoded, so superfluous and dull. Daniel, while thinking this, was pushing the remnants of his limp sushi around his plate, poking at the disgusting stuff, utterly revolted. There was no point complaining to Vivian. It would make more sense to do something. Take action for once. Perhaps by refusing to attend the thing with Mars, Vivian would be forced to reconsider. Jack needed Daniel, relied on him to pull off his post-art routine. Vivian knew it, even if she liked to pretend he was not central to Jack's success. So if he simply refused to participate, Vivian would surely have to rethink her crappy rate of pay. Daniel looked up from his plate with calculating eyes.

"In that case I'm not interested in going to see Mars."

Vivian, remaining unruffled, looked more like a Hari Krishna than ever, with her steady gaze emerging from the sea of tangerine her garments formed.

"It's your funeral. Jack will be just fine without you. He's come a long way since the start of your collaboration. It's sad, though, to see you break up your darling little team."

Daniel didn't feel well. He pushed his plate away so as distance himself from the fleshy clumps still on it. It was clear what was going on. Evidently, Vivian and Jack had banded against him behind the scenes and planned to get rid of him. He was filled with rage. He began dwelling on all the writing he'd done on Jack, all that fabulous, insightful analysis he had produced and here he was about to be discarded like old refuse. While the very man he had helped to turn from a bumbling fool into a credible postmodernist, obtains the financial blessing of a media baron, not to mention public glory, Daniel was being cast aside. He gazed into his hands in despair. As a pair of hands, they looked unattractively pale and useless. They were emblematic of the hands of a writer whose work has lost its value, the hands of someone soon be wrenched from his pivotal role in the contemporary arts. Vivian's voice interrupted his train of thought.

"What say, Daniel, I raise your pay, by say, \$2.50 more per hour. It's not much, but I have a budget to consider, and it will add up..."

That meant Daniel would be earning, taking into account the extensive reading he had to do, almost \$15 an hour, which was still a whole lot of crap, as far as he was concerned, for a man of his education and skills, but not as crappy as it had

been looking, he supposed. Daniel managed a wan smile, and a word, that could be read, he supposed, as some form of agreement. Vivian smiled.

“That’s more like it, Daniel.” she said.

As they stood up, Daniel felt a wave of bitterness sweep over him on recalling that Jack had sold his last series of work for \$9,999 each.

Chapter 21

On entering the foyer, while Daniel did his utmost to remain unmoved by its grandeur, with its walls and floor of Italian marble and a water feature at one end in which plump carp swam lazily, Jack's enthusiasm was unrepressed.

"He's got giant goldfish in his personal pond."

"Carp Jack, they are carp," said Daniel.

Vivian had dressed Jack in a *Gaultier* suit for the occasion, which had the effect of making the suit look less elegant than it might on another man. After speaking to a serene blonde receptionist, Jack and Daniel took the lift to the 19th floor where they were shown to a waiting room in which, on a nearby coffee table, was an array of glossy magazines featuring cover images of Randolph Mars. Daniel noted there were photographs of Mars in a boardroom, playing polo, opening a marina, and simply up close. In one publication he was pronounced businessman of the week, in another, man of the decade and a final one, innovator of the century. On the walls were posters on a similar theme. There was no denying, in every representation, Daniel could tell, he looked powerful and rich.

"Mars must have a bit of an ego, mate," Jack said, loudly. Daniel flinched at Jack's vulgarity of speech.

Finally they were ushered by another serene blonde through a pair of solid oak doors, and after walking for some time across a vast room, on luxurious carpet, they arrived at the room's far end, at a large polished mahogany desk on which there sat a computer, switched off, and a cup of silver pens. The blonde departed. Nearby, standing by a wall of glass, hands clasped behind back, face averted, stood a man, presumably Mars, in a navy suit, gazing at the panoramic view of Sydney harbour and skyline. Then he turned around, and as he did it was as if Daniel was drenched in a flood of warm light. Jesus Christ, thought Daniel, as that was exactly who sprang to mind. The experience was unsettling. Indeed, the man emanated some sort of palpable spiritual force that made Daniel think of Jesus as the personage he believed in as a pious Catholic pre-pubescent boy, not the construct created through a grand narrative fiction Daniel considered Jesus as a man. As Mars smiled their way Daniel realised it was not only his face that seemed to radiate, but the air around him. Dozens of paintings of Christ with halos flashed through Daniel's mind, even those ridiculous ones with flat golden discs, prior to the invention of perspective. Just look at this man, he seemed so much more extraordinary than an ordinary man! Whether he believed in Christ or not, Daniel had to admit while all the media images of Mars had presented a man of unarguable power, wealth and stature, nothing had prepared him for the presence of the man in the flesh. It was strikingly clear that Mars, the man, was so

much more *convincing* than Mars presented through the process of simulation. Daniel's head had begun to pound. Naturally he was developing a headache, this situation was enough to give anyone a headache. He had been studying Bouffant's theories doggedly in which the media image takes precedence over the actual, to the extent that the actual is under threat of disappearing altogether into shadowy form. There was nothing shadowy about Mars. How could it be possible that in the case of Mars Bouffant's theory was not applicable? Daniel was spared more crazy-making thoughts by the distraction Mars's actual voice provided as he spoke.

"So which one of you is Jack?" he asked. Strangely again, Mars's voice was more melodious, richer in timbre, more lulling to the ear than any Daniel had ever heard.

"That would be me," said Jack.

Mars put a large masculine hand forth for Jack to shake.

"Aha. You have good working artist's hands," Mars said.

"Indeed," said Jack.

Jack, Daniel observed, was beaming with pride. Daniel wanted to throw up. How could Jack have artist's hands, he wanted to know. For Jack no longer bought materials for his work, no longer cut the pieces out, did not staple the Astroturf onto these canvases, did not sign his work, nor did he hang the works on the walls. He didn't even read his own catalogues. Furthermore, Daniel knew that not only did Jack not lift a finger to make his work, he didn't open his own wine bottles these days, or do his shopping, or make his bed, or cook his food. He had minions to do it all for him. Art students, would-be artists and a bunch of other hangers-on followed Jack at all hours, slavishly attending to his needs. Daniel knew this because Daniel was one of them. As Mars and Jack exchanged pleasantries, Daniel focused bitterly on the fact that Mars had so far made no effort to find out who *he* was, nor shake *his* hand, let alone remark on its artistic qualities. It was up to him to change all that.

"And I'm Daniel Black. I'm Jack's associate and versed in contemporary art theory," he interjected.

Mars looked surprised, but complied, as Daniel held out his own white writer's hand for the shaking.

"Please make yourselves comfortable gentlemen and let's get started," Mars said gesturing to two plush chairs nearby. He sat benignly on a large chair, which resembled, Daniel thought, in height and stature, some kind of throne.

"I have invited you here today because I have a vision, one I have been harboring for some time," Mars began.

Daniel noticed on the mention of the word 'vision', Mars's features had lit up with enthusiasm, and a certain inner light. Daniel was amazed to see a man of his

years, because everyone knew Mars was 53, which was young for a media mogul, but old in another sense, look so very illuminated and, thus, alive. Daniel, whose headache was now splitting, didn't feel alive like that. In fact Daniel never felt as alive as Mars evidently felt. Daniel didn't get even close to such an empowered and vibrant state. Though he was 29, Daniel usually felt old and ragged. How he wished he felt as powerful, as energised, as positive and looked as radiant as Randolph Mars. Daniel had recently obtained a raise of \$2.50 an hour. Such a pittance of a raise, he felt, was not conducive to feeling any of the above.

Mars continued with his speech: "So to realise this vision I turn to you for assistance, Jack." His voice continued to have a certain dramatic, potent ring, "I have been following your career for some time. It strikes me that you have just the very mental acuity and brilliance I need to assist in realising my dream."

Jack was still beaming away like an idiot, Daniel noted.

"Let me be explicit. I want to build a tower from Astroturf. A visual monument for the existing Mars Corporate Block you find yourself in now." He chuckled a little.

"A visual monument?" spluttered Jack.

Daniel inwardly groaned. Surely Jack knows what a visual monument is, surely he isn't that much of a philistine? He thought.

"Yes a visual monument, along the lines of a copy of the building in which we now stand. I want a tower of Astroturf to match in shape and essence, this existing corporate block. It will, of course, be a miniature in relation to the real, but still a sizable structure ..."

Mars gazed at his visitors with a broad and benevolent smile.

"The idea is to place it in front of this corporate tower to show my support for the contemporary arts. I want to let everyone in Sydney, no in the world, know how impressed I am with the idea you have been pursuing, Jack, of the Obsolescence of the Original."

Daniel noted the irony involved, as judging from what Mars had revealed, he knew more about Jack's work than the artist himself. Then Daniel started making rapid calculations. This project is ambitious, he thought. Really ambitious, in a way that would require a great deal of planning, a great deal of manpower, a great deal of effort, and a mountain of Astroturf. Ultimately, it will cost Mars a small bundle, he deduced.

"Ah," said Jack, "It is very interesting, your proposal, but while I am in the business of making work of Astroturf, I am not in the business of making towers of the stuff."

Not only was Daniel's head thumping, he could feel the panic he was experiencing hit his throat. That familiar sense of his oesophagus tightening, the air not getting in, it was something he often experienced in the company of Jack.

What the hell will Jack say next? he wondered. Daniel realised whatever it was he had better step in first.

“Nevertheless I’m sure, and I’m certain Jack will agree, while as a rule he isn’t in the business of making towers, an exception can always be made ... because in truth this idea of yours appears to be consistent with his underlying concerns.”

Daniel glared at Jack, who, on realising his mistake, decided to consider what was possible in a more open-ended way.

“Yes. It *is* consistent with my thinking....of course it is” Jack said, “so let me rephrase what I was saying. I am open to starting working in the business of tower making. Which means, naturally, I am open to hearing more about your proposal Mr. Mars.”

“Jack, please call me Randolph...”

Three quarters of an hour later, Jack and Daniel were heading back along the marble floored foyer of the Mars Corporate Block to the building’s main entrance. Although his head was still thumping in a very nasty way, Daniel at least now had tucked in his briefcase a signed contract. In it Jack had been commissioned to create a giant tower of high grade Astroturf within six months, for which he would be paid, as Daniel had predicted, a vast amount. Daniel believed he had a right to obtain some of that vast amount for his supporting role in getting Jack the contract.

OOO

“That JR really is a rotten egg. You know what he’s gone and done now?” Elaine Blight asked her son. Jack said he didn’t know, because—as he reminded his mum—he didn’t watch *Dallas*, or other mainstream shows, as he was an artist on the cutting edge. She filled him in on the details of the last episode. Ever since Jack had bought her a television, Elaine had called him daily to report on the soaps. The TV and other gifts had been given in the name of motherhood appreciation. This was for having put up with him for those years while he had remained penniless and obscure, in other words a topic of embarrassment when talking to her friends. He was no longer obscure, nor broke. Now he had money coming in, Jack was beginning to appreciate why people liked it so much. These days Jack was eligible to become a property owner. It seemed unreal that Jack Blight with a background living in scungy rental premises on Liverpool Street since God Knows When, was about to be a property owner. For he was the very man who only this week replaced his brown velour couch for one of stylish black leather. It was the very same item of furniture he sat on now, near his new phone with the keypad. He may still be Jack smoking Camels, but sitting on this couch sure did cheer him up. Things had never looked so good, and now here he was on

the private payroll of the corporation owned by Randolph Mars. Surely there was no way further to go but up. However, then he cast his mind back to the time he had last seen Malcolm. He had gone to see him at the warehouse. It had been one of the performance artist's better days, one in which his voice was almost its old robust self.

"Hi mate, come in, come in," Mal had said at his warehouse door, a spanner in hand. They had had a few refreshing ales by the time Jack told Mal the full extent of the tower situation.

"Randolph Mars? As your boss? For a whacking great building project? I don't know. He's wrecking the calibre of the Australian press, if you ask me. Not one for scruples. I predict trouble."

Jack had laughed off Malcolm's concerns and changed the subject by telling him the news about his property ownership plans. Thinking back, it did rankle to note that his friend and fellow artist was not one hundred percent behind his future plans to build what he had started to think of as the Tower of Turf.

Chapter 22

Before he knew it, Jack had bought a penthouse, with a kidney shaped balcony, overlooking Bondi beach. He decided to throw a penthouse-warming to lavish some attention on his friends and fellow artists. He threw money around, making sure there would be plenty of alcohol available at his new retro style bar, as well as enough nibbles to last for weeks. Jack then hired a DJ to do some music thing, not so much for himself, but for those who liked to dance. He even made a roster so the girls could attend the party at separate times. Well into the evening, Malcolm came striding up to Jack, beer in hand, and suggested they step outside for a private chat. Being chilly outside, the balcony was devoid of other people. The men stood side by side, their backs to the partygoers, staring into the sea below with its choppy waves revealing small white tips. Jack had brought some champers with him, which he drank straight from the bottle. Success didn't have to alter one's more endearing personal habits, he felt.

"Didn't think you were the sort to buy in the Eastern Suburbs, what's more get a place with a *designer* balcony," Malcolm said. He uttered the word *designer* as if it were a curse.

"You didn't think me the sort to buy anything by way of real estate full stop. For most of the time you've known me I've been lucky to make the rent."

Malcolm didn't offer his usual ironic laugh at this point, in fact he offered no laugh as he might have once. Jack had no idea what had come over him lately. As if to prove the point, Malcolm continued in his earnest new tone of voice.

"I'll cut to the chase. I feel it's my obligation to tell you what people could be saying about your recent moves. That is, behind your back."

Jack's instinct told him that something unpleasant was about to take place. He took a long swig of the champagne, and braced himself.

"With your work selling as if there's no tomorrow, and you and Randolph Mars becoming so tight knit, it could be seen by some that you have become a bit of a sell-out."

"I don't know about that?" Jack said, with a hollow laugh.

"I hate to be the one to let you in on it, but Jack, by buying into the corporate world, you run the risk of being seen to be compromising, becoming *pedestrian*. You used to have edge."

Jack, who had been downing a mouthful of bubbly, practically choked. After a bit of a splutter, he took control of himself.

“I’ve still got edge. Despite my sales, and despite the Mars thing.” Jack wished for a moment his Personal Theorist was present, but he had been too busy to attend.

Malcolm shook his head slowly, his hands turning white from pressing into the balcony railing. Before them, the waves grew choppy, their tips as frothy and peaked as tufts of meringue.

“It’s not just a matter of sales or who you align with. Along the way you’ve lost your sting, your bite, your grit. At the beginning, your plunge into AstroTurf, people thought you were on fire.”

Speaking of fire, Jack recalled that it was Malcolm who had managed to create one of those, and thus miss supporting Jack on his opening night. It was Malcolm also, he recalled, who had been present when, for reasons that had never been clear to him, he was carted off to spend the night at a hostel for homeless men. Jack started to feel a wave of resentment towards Malcolm that formed a knot inside him, a knot that was hard and cold.

“In many respects, I’m still on fire.”

“Would a man on fire get profiled in *Vapid* magazine? Would a man on fire sign a contract with a corporate player like Mars? Would a man on fire choose to live in such cushy surrounds? Would he own a kidney shaped balcony? This is the Eastern Suburbs. The way everyone sees it, you are no longer on the cutting edge.”

Jack, having reached the bottom of his Champers, felt his mouth go dry, hellishly dry.

“Well that’s about it, mate,” Malcolm said.

Both men turned back around to face the large glass doors that led back into the penthouse. There were his friends and fellow artists paused from their various activities, staring at them, staring hard. Among them was his girlfriend Ruby Watson, performance artists Janet Crow and Guy De Vries, and the painters Drew Gunn, Tom Burn and Dale Spin. Trudy Smee and her gang of post-Lacanian feminists were present, as were the video-making twins Bill and Tim. Everyone was watching them, while trying to look as if they weren’t.

Earlier in the evening, Jack had seen these same people loafing on his new leather couch, dancing on his recently polished floors, hanging about at his retro bar emptying it of its alcohol. After consuming all the nibblies that had been served, they had ransacked his industrial sized fridge until there was nothing in it but a container of pickles. Not content, they had seen fit to send Malcolm outside to do their dirty work, which, as it transpired, was to throw him off their precious cutting edge! Jack turned back to face Malcolm, before stepping inside.

“So this is the word about the place, that I am losing my edge? That I am a sell-out?”

Malcolm nodded gravely.

“I’m afraid that’s the word.”

“Look Mal, I have been told, more than once, that we are all out there on the cutting edge together dealing with the same sorts of notions, slicing through all that modernist bullshit. Well, just whose fault is it that my work is selling and theirs is not?”

OOO

A week later, when Jack entered her office, Vivian gave a start. Here was her artist of the moment, her great success, her top seller in the bunch, having quite reverted to his former self. Gone was his recently adorned chic black outfit, five of which she’d sent to his penthouse from Marcs. Gone were his smoothly shaven cheeks and neatly styled hair. Gone was the man who wore aftershave. Before her was a fellow with red-rimmed eyes, unshaven cheeks, and not unshaven in the good way, and he was wearing clothes that were grubby and worn. His hair, she noted, looked like it might have a rodent hiding in it.

“Jack, it’s not appropriate to foster that down-at-heel look. You live in a penthouse now. Your work is selling out. Dear man, you simply need to keep your grooming up.”

When he looked at her with hangdog eyes, she grew alarmed.

“Spit it out, Jack. Something’s the matter. You are doing so well, what can it possibly be? It isn’t some romantic problem you’re having with the girls?”

It was hard to bring this topic up for Vivian, and it was the first time that she had alluded to his situation to his face. While it was well known Jack had two girlfriends from her stable, Vivian hated admitting something so unethical was going on under her nose, something complicated and dubious, that she hadn’t orchestrated herself. Jack stood before her looking particularly pitiful.

“No the girls are fine. ...It’s just ...it’s just ...”

“It’s just what Jack?”

“It’s just I didn’t want to go and get successful just to lose the respect of my friends and fellow artists. They are accusing me of straying into crass commercialism, while they remain on the cutting edge. Even Malcolm disapproves of me for getting involved with Mars.”

Vivian sat him down, with a few maternal pats. Then due to the state of the emergency she whisked out her secret stash of Scotch. He brightened slightly. She was being particularly generous. Everyone knew how little she approved of mood altering substances in an artist’s life. All that, she told anyone who cared to listen, was so yesterday.

“Now tell me everything. You must not think of me just as your gallery director, but as a dear friend and confidante, and what’s more, someone who can banish all artworld ills.”

Jack rattled off the story involving his party and Malcolm’s speech that had taken place on his balcony. By its end Vivian was ready, more than ready, to have her say.

“Look, Jack, these things are common in the artworld. One person’s success is another person’s nose-put-out-of-joint. You don’t have to be passive about it, you know. I have an infallible plan to win back the loyalty of all your friends and colleagues, and it doesn’t involve throwing in the towel with the Astroturf.”

“Yes, I did consider doing that.”

“Thank God you didn’t act on it.”

Vivian then unfurled her plan in all its strategic glory. It involved, she made it plain, a new way of looking at the project sponsored by Randolph Mars.

OOO

Later that night, Jack was in his apartment, standing over his designer bathroom basin, dabbing a towel across his freshly shaved face. He splashed on some aftershave. Across the corridor, in his bedroom, laid out on the bedspread, was a black ensemble, purchased from Marcs. Once dressed, he sauntered over to the telephone and picked it up. He had a proposal on his mind that would be best articulated via this mode of communication to begin with. He hesitated, receiver in hand, as he mentally prepared to make a range of phone calls to his contemporaries in the arts, but first he needed to approach the most difficult task, that of calling Malcolm, whose role would be pivotal in the outcome, that is if he agreed to it.

“Malcolm speaking.”

“Hey Mal, it’s me, Jack. Got a moment to listen to an idea?”

“Just a short one.”

“Well,” said Jack, soldiering on despite the unusually formal tone he’d noted in Malcolm’s response, “you know how concerned I am that so many of my friends and fellow artists, such as yourself, are struggling to make ends meet. Of course I am highly aware of the privileged position I have fallen into of late. Well, I am in the process of forming an artistic team to undertake this Mars project. I can’t do it by myself. It really needs a factory style operation.”

There was a slight pause.

“Factory operation? Are you referring to the sort of thing Andy Warhol instituted?”

“Yeah, I reckon I probably am. Everyone involved on a salary of course.”

“Well, I get where you’re coming from. It has a certain logic to it, in this day and age. Art as pure production.”

It was so unusual for Jack to voice an idea, and for Malcolm to be on the receiving end of it, the interchange seemed surreal to Jack.

“Malcolm, the reason I am called you is I’d like you to supervise the operation.”

“You mean run the thing?”

“Yes, be the head man. The pay wouldn’t be half bad.”

“Well, that sounds interesting, I suppose. Perhaps we should book a game of Putt-Putt to shoot a few and nut this idea out.”

It had been a long while since Malcolm had suggested a game of mini-golf.

Chapter 23

Jack's factory was set in motion. It was heartening the way everyone he approached leapt unreservedly on board. Good old Vivian. Who would have thought her so insightful regarding matters of psychology? Her idea to get everyone he knew involved in the Tower of Turf project had resulted in him being everyone's best friend all over again. He didn't want to ruin it all by thinking too hard about the motivations involved, or about mulling on how fast they'd altered their opinion of Mars accordingly. You had, after all, to give people room to grow, and keep in step with the fast changing pace of the contemporary arts. Even Ruby and Joy agreed to join the team, so long as a good roster was developed, and they weren't expected to work on the same day. It was well known they couldn't bear to be at the same opening as one another anymore, even at separate times.

After a solid hunt, Malcolm and Jack, their camaraderie of old restored, located suitable premises for the factory in the form of an old Post Office in the Inner West. Then, down on site, the team of 33 artists gathered to brainstorm a name for the place. They considered calling it The Factory, to refer to Warhol, but privately Jack wanted something more original. After a full day's work, with plenty of well-earned breaks, they came up with the perfect name. They would call it The Post Office, a decision that promoted a night of celebration, with plenty of champagne. While their first success had come easily enough, deciding on how to tackle the project itself proved much more trying. Building a tower of Astroturf certainly was a bigger task than they had experience undertaking. Jack assisted proceedings by filling them in on the specifications: it had to be free standing and ensure that lights from within came on at a specified time. It would be seven stories high. Some of the team felt that architects, engineers and professional designers should be called in, others were adamant their combined training at various art schools provided more than enough know-how for the job. There were heated disputes about this. The disagreements were so intense at times, Jack found it hard to sleep after attending them, with the arguments aired flying around his mind. After a few sessions of unpleasant infighting, he decided to remain home until things settled.

Back at the penthouse, Jack sat on his soft couch and smoked. As he smoked, he pondered his role as a project head. Let them carry on without me, he felt. Malcolm was the appointed supervisor, and what use is an appointed supervisor without a decent thing to supervise? Besides, wasn't it the role of artists, in these contemporary times, to handle the big picture end of things in a creative pursuit? This meant the artist was less likely to get bogged down in trivialities and

intrigues. Besides, being at home now wasn't like it had once been, when it meant sitting alone, with no prospects, on his couch of brown velour. It was not only the fabric and style of his couch that had changed, but his state of solitude. Since he'd become successful, Jack was rarely left alone. There were always at least half a dozen people hanging about the penthouse lighting his cigarettes, fetching him beers, and attempting to start interesting conversations with him on matters relating to art and cultural affairs. As far as he was concerned, a work of art either worked or it did not, and all the other things of conversational merit were best left to one's Personal Theorist, who had of late thankfully been free to hang about in Bondi.

Today at the penthouse there were three young art students, whom he couldn't name if asked, Joy Ridge, who had volunteered to supervise the kitchen staff, a young emerging painter, who worked primarily in sand, and a writer from some obscure art magazine, who had interviewed Jack weeks back and simply stayed on.

OOO

A few months had elapsed since Jack had signed the contract with Mars. After the first few Post Office meetings, he had not set foot in the place. There had been little word from those employed about progress on the Tower of Turf, a fact that had started to make Jack nervous. He telephoned Malcolm on site.

"The deadline is looming, Mal. What stage are we at with the Tower?"

"We've finally reached a consensus about whether to outsource."

The word 'consensus' filled Jack filled with frustration. It was hard to accept that Malcolm was still influenced by the political drivel of the 70s, but Jack knew only too well that he was. For he had, indeed, insisted on running The Post Office as *a collective*, which meant every little thing had to be agreed upon unanimously, which in turn resulted in the fact that they were running late.

"Jesus. In all this time, no actual work has started! So what decision have you reached? At least tell me that."

"No to outsourcing. We artists know what we're doing. So now we're free to start drawing up the designs."

"That's a hell of a lot of time you've taken deciding you're ready to start the job. So get a move on. I need results."

Malcolm set a date for Jack to visit. This visit did indeed occur, on said date, conducted with the entire team, the cracking open of Champers, plenty of speeches, applause, and concluded with Jack signing off the plans. They weren't half bad either, not half bad at all, he felt. In fact the visit had been such a

success, on leaving the premises Jack was convinced his Tower of AstroTurf was as good as built.

As Mars had paid Jack half the fee up front, they needn't waste any more time before purchasing the required rolls of AstroTurf, he decided. Exactly 233 rolls of high-quality AstroTurf were purchased at a bargain price. Further materials were obtained including bulk supplies of wooden beams, metal girders, chicken wire, nails, hammers, staple guns, staples, metal snips, giant scissors, brushes and vast quantities of industrial grade all-weather glue. The artists each were doled out gloves, aprons and heavy-duty boots. They would have never had uniforms such as these before, in fact most of them had not worn uniforms since school. As they were about to make a significant work of serious contemporary art, uniforms seemed appropriate to conjure the requisite work ethic.

The excitement among staff at the Warehouse had been mounting for some time, but mounted even more when Vivian turned up one day—in a startling crimson outfit, backless no less—to acknowledge the official commencement of work. Many of the artists were shocked to see her out of her habitat, and some did not recognise her outside the confines of Rubin's Contemporary Art Space.

“Here I am! Come to see the grand postmodern project begin,” she cried, with a flourish of her bejeweled hands. Soon there were artists cutting, sawing, hammering, with some poised with staple guns and others ready with brushes and pots of glue. So the Tower swiftly went from being a set of conceptual designs to a solid work in process. As the work proceeded, the artists' pride swelled. In fact it swelled so much it was easy to ignore the fact that the space, which wasn't vast, was fast filling with sawdust and AstroTurf debris. It was indeed easy to ignore the fact that the noise of hammering, stapling and sawing was terribly loud, that that there was a devilish heat in the premises, and all of these things were topped off by the stink of industrial glue.

Malcolm kept in touch with Jack through a series of phone calls that took the form of shouting sessions down the line, in which neither man could hear the other very well.

“The Tower's progressing beautifully, Jack. You really should drop in and see for yourself. Plus the workers could do with your support.”

Just as Malcolm had to shout over the noise of art production, Jack had to shout above the noise of the party he was hosting at the penthouse.

“Ah. Great. Yeah. I will drop over. Soon. So glad it's coming along. Can't wait to see the thing. You are doing such a fabulous job. I knew you were supervisor material.”

Jack hung up and sighed. He wasn't looking forward to the day he visited. The last time he had been there it had been so dreadfully dirty and noisy he couldn't

wait to get away. Besides, the truth be known, he wasn't really very much interested in producing a Tower out of Astroturf, to him it felt somewhat absurd. Meaningless, even. He was, deep down, a painter still. Yes, if ever he thought about who he really was, what activity he actually identified with, he realised he was simply a painter, someone who liked to work with paints, colour and shapes and lines on a flat surface, which could all be achieved in state of silence and deep calm. He simply couldn't get attached to this sculptural sort of product he'd agreed to make. Just as well Malcolm was the type who *could* get excited about almost any art form. Thank God for good old Mal.

Chapter 24

Thank God indeed! So thought Jack on receiving the phone call from Malcolm at the Post Office with the latest bad news.

“There’s dissatisfaction among the workers, Jack. They are unhappy with conditions.”

It seemed to Jack that Malcolm was becoming fond of clucking like a chook over every little thing to do with the Post Office and its staff. He was furious. It occurred to him that Malcolm was deluded. He seemed to be insinuating that Jack was treating his workers poorly. Yet he’d been spoiling them from the start, making sure their working conditions were comfortable and safe. Only last week he’d had an old urn delivered, allowing them the liberty of making hot beverages for free.

“What do you mean there’s dissatisfaction among the workers? How could they possibly be unhappy? I gave them that urn just last week.”

“There’s bad ventilation in here, it’s such a problem the fumes from the glue are causing skin complaints, and worse.”

“I don’t understand what you’re suggesting. It all sounds suspicious to me. Surely they’re finding things to whine about, the way workers do if you give them your ear.”

Jack expected Malcolm to turn back into the man he used to be, and agree with him. Lately Malcolm had not been agreeable at all. Lately Malcolm had a sort of bitter note to his voice, as if he were wearing a scowl.

“Well, it’s not suspicious. These claims are real. Some people are getting asthma, others rashes and still more pustules. You should see for yourself, Jack. All they’re calling for is improved conditions and that you cover their medical costs.”

“Bloody hell, Malcolm! They’re meant to be artists, not the whingeing bloody proletariat,” Jack roared.

He hated all that worker’s rights’ rhetoric Malcolm had been carrying on with ever since he started being the supervisor at the Post Office. Jack felt it was so passé. He recalled how in the 70s everyone interested in visual art had been forced to read Marx and Engels, and it was mandatory for the painters in the scene to knock out tasteless, social realist pictures of muscular workers in the fields. Malcolm was a couple of years older than he, and had, he realised, been heavily influenced by that stuff. Yet now they were in the 80s, where things had progressed well beyond that tedious Marxist us-and-them rhetoric. So you’d think Malcolm, who was so sophisticated and up with the times, would realise he was not in step with the times.

“Look Malcolm, I’m too busy for this....”

“Busy. With what, Jack? You’re not making any work, well not personally. This is an issue involving the health and wellbeing of your staff. It should be your top priority.”

“However ... ah you’re not taking into account that as the boss of an art enterprise, there are many hidden demands facing me of which you are unaware. Yes, many hidden demands ...” Jack stammered, as he gazed about at his penthouse surrounds. Ruby was reading an art magazine, as she sat curled on the other end of the couch. A few art students were lolling about on his designer chairs, the fellow who worked in sand was creating a sculpture in the far corner, a wonderful creation resembling a giant dog. A couple of writers were playing a game of chess at a table nearby, and as it was the French chef’s day off, someone or other was in the kitchen conjuring up their lunch.

“Look this isn’t going to go away just because it’s inconvenient, Jack,” Malcolm said sternly, “As you are the project manager, the head honcho, the big boss, this should be your most pressing issue. You simply must come down and sort things out. Your employees, some of whom are pivotal artists in the scene, are angry, not to mention sick, and getting sicker by the day.”

Jack felt his face flush with anger. He wasn’t a total fool, he could see through these bogus staff complaints. The team was clearly not sick from any glue fumes, but balking at the hard work required. Look at all the time it had taken them to begin the thing, thought Jack. It was clear they’d been mollycoddled by Vivian for years, pampered by her to the extent they were unfit for any normal workaday use. In other words, as far as Jack could see, what they were suffering from was simply an allergy to work. Yet as Malcolm was such a bleeding heart, he couldn’t see, as Jack could, through their ruse.

“Look Mal, you are the appointed supervisor, please sort out this nonsense, and fast.”

“It’s not nonsense, mate. What the workers say is *bona fide*, conditions are substandard.”

“Are you telling me you’re on their side?”

“Yes, I guess that’s what I’m saying.”

There was a moment’s pause, before Jack spoke in a surly tone.

“So where is this likely to lead? I have a deadline to think about.”

“I’d say there’ll be rolling strikes, Jack. Yes, you can count on rolling strikes.”

In a mutual wave of disgust, the two of them hung up on one another. As Jack glowered into his inert phone, he cursed the fact he’d ever seen supervisor material in his oldest friend and colleague in the arts.

OOO

Once Jack had simmered down, he tried to think more clearly about what would happen if Malcolm's forecast of strike action eventuated. He couldn't afford to miss the deadline, what with the fee already spent. The Tower of Turf was due for completion in seven weeks. He gritted his teeth and decided he would head over to the factory the following day, and do whatever it took to settle the dispute. However, the next day came and Jack didn't find himself in the mood to go to the factory. Neither did he go the day after that, nor for the rest of the week. He meant to visit, he really did, but it was so pleasant in the penthouse, he kept forgetting what it was that meant he should leave. It didn't take long before the workers went on strike. Production on the Tower of Turf came to a grinding halt. Malcolm was, Jack discovered, at the helm of the agitators. Jack could see no way out of it. With the delivery of a terse letter, Jack sacked Malcolm on the spot. Within three days, with swift negotiations on Jack's part, the factory was up and running again, with Bill and Tim, the video making twins, instated as the new co-supervisors. The twins enticed the workers back on the job with a pay increases, plus extra loadings, and the promise of the installation of an industrial strength fan, aimed at banishing the fumes. The fan was wheeled into the premises to the accompaniment of loud applause. Jack turned up for the historic moment when the fan was turned on. It didn't surprise Jack or anyone else that Malcolm was out of contact with everyone there. Jack was glad that he wasn't remaining behind the scenes badmouthing him. Whilst a small party took place at the Post Office to mark the occasion of the fan's first turn, Jack took his two new supervisors aside to make it clear to them that under no circumstances were they to bother him with staff problems, especially those that might be expressed through the use of the jargon from the faded dream of 70s socialist utopianism.

Chapter 25

On mounting the rickety steps to the Pymont studio, Jillian plumped her hair. Last week she'd demanded her hairdresser colour it black and give it a daring red streak. Daring red streaks were in, and solid blonde bobs were out. In the same way black and white outfits were currently right off Jillian's list of things to wear. Jillian was embracing what she termed post-romanticism these days as her new personal style. Today, she was wearing a scarlet and green combination of garments that clashed in a way that looked accidental, but wasn't.

"Hello, I'm Jillian Trembath," she said holding out her hand to the tall, good-looking young man who opened the door wearing a paint splattered shirt and loose fitting jeans.

"Sebastian Glass," he said, "otherwise known as the artist in his lair."

She laughed, and eyed him off, perhaps inappropriately, but then it was hard to do anything truly inappropriate, when you were the art critic at *The Sydney Times*. Everyone in the *media* knows there are silly conventional codes that must be sacrificed at times for the sake of one's professional product. This young man before her did look very much like the key to a fabulous professional product.

The first painting Sebastian showed her, because that was the arrangement they'd made on the phone, that he would give her a studio tour, was of the Madonna. It was a depiction of the famous virgin, not the infamous pop star. While the image had a golden glow and she had a hallowed, puritanical expression, this Madonna's classicism ended there. For she was dressed as a 50s housewife and rendered in garish, cartoon style colour. Jillian was pleased with the curlers of fluoro pink beneath her halo, not to mention her emerald cat's eye glasses.

"You're not exactly into *minimalism*, are you?" she said.

"It's thin, in my opinion. Anorexic art," he said.

She nodded enthusiastically. On venturing to the next painting, Jillian did her best to appear—by walking nonchalantly by the artist's side—like the sophisticated, older woman of expertise that she considered herself. She wanted to be someone Sebastian could look up to and to eventually trust. Judging from the broken chairs and sense of squalor about the place, he fell into that tragic cliché 'the struggling artist', something which she decided, then and there, would be her job to help him escape.

At times like this, one likes to think of oneself as less of an art critic, with all those negative connotations of someone who sets out to dampen the creative spirit, and more of a person providing a social service for the artist as a member

of an underclass. They came to another painting of the Madonna. This one was portrayed standing under a huge Coke sign, in a miniskirt and skimpy top, with a golden glow about her, and a pair of faint wings.

“The Madonna as whore and angel in one. Love your allusions to the history of art as well as contemporary cultural references. I detect a truly radical theme emerging,” Jillian said.

Sebastian flushed. Jillian detected far more than a truly radical theme emerging. She detected that Sebastian Glass, who had developed a light—not unsexy—film of perspiration on his upper lip, was nervous. Most importantly, she sensed that this nervousness was related to his hope that she might review him in her column, and if she did, do it favorably. Sebastian Glass had not as yet been discovered, he didn’t even have a gallery. With so many artists, far more established than he, clawing at her for publicity, it might seem odd to her critics—that is if they knew what she was up to—that Jillian, now more influential than ever, had made her way into the studio of such an unknown.

“I definitely see potential here. I think I’ll write you up,” she announced, and sensed his heart start racing beneath his silence.

Jillian already knew, before entering the studio, she would write him up. She had been tipped off that he was what she was looking for on many scores. She’d heard he had recently arrived from out of town, that he was from Newcastle originally, the steel town of all steel towns, which gave him that hard edge the soft Sydney folk seemed to lack. She’d been informed, also, his work was not only different from the other stuff around, but that it veered as far away from minimalism as imaginable. She needed to align herself with work that expressed what she was on about these days. What she was not on about was minimalism any more. She’d been redecorating her apartment lately, adding clutter and adornment, filling it full of things. She had also singled out Sebastian Glass because of what he was not. Sebastian Glass, she’d heard even before she could see for herself, was 22. As she surveyed his smooth skin, his long, lanky limbs—his lithe frame housed in those loose fitting jeans—she mused how refreshing it would be to be done with the dreary masculine culture of the Bob Herricks and Daniel Blacks of the world, who may be very clever and exceedingly good at what they did, but did not offer the promise which she felt palpably in that studio, of *new blood*.

Sebastian Glass, she’d also been told, was hungry. There was a certain sort of hunger in the artworld, a fear of languishing at the bottom of the food chain, that had the tendency to make many a person who produced art quite ruthless. It could be dreary on the wrong artist, *that* she knew so very well, but in this case Jillian rather hoped Sebastian did, as rumor had it, possess quantities of hunger. They came to another painting. The Madonna in this one was black skinned, covered in

gold chains, a ghetto blaster placed nearby. The famous virgin was, in yet another work, waiting in the hospital room filled with patients who apparently had AIDS, or so a sign said. On the paintings went, along similar lines, image after image, Madonna after Madonna. Jillian's red painted lips were fixed in a wry smile.

OOO

The following day, Jillian was seated at her desk, an irritating rerun of Sonny and Cher playing on the nearby block of TV sets. Bob Herrick was out of the office, as per usual. The canned laughter was loud. She found it offensive, it sounded so fake. While fake was so recently Jillian's thing, she was in no mood for fake of this kind today. Fake reminded her of the work of Jack Blight, that Astroturf junk she had so foolishly lauded earlier in the year. Ever since she'd heard the rumour that Blight was working for Randolph Mars, she'd been looking for someone like Sebastian Glass to set things right. Although she didn't quite know yet what Blight, and probably Black, were actually doing for Mars, she knew whatever it was it was a move against her. Did they expect she would not find out about their treachery? Of course she'd find out. She was a Sydney art reviewer, *the* Sydney art reviewer, people told her things of import, artworld things. A sinister smile formed on her red painted lips as she turned on her VDU, and watched the letters light up on her screen.

As everyone knew Randolph Mars was a media mogul. Jillian worked for a media mogul, but she worked for Jonathon Forsyth, head of the Forsyth Foundation Press, not Randolph Mars, of the Mars Corporation. Jack Blight, and ergo Daniel Black thus worked for the competition, Jillian's competition. Another round of canned laughter prompted her to glance over at the TVs. Sonny looked short and pathetic. Cher looked tall and cheap. There was so much American cultural imperialism on display these days, and so much of it was crass, and here she was setting out to promote local Australian culture, and set a decent tone, and all those bastards in the local artworld did was betray her!

Blight and Black obviously didn't think twice about aligning themselves with Mars. Don't they get it? Jillian had singlehandedly made Jack Blight a success. Without her he'd be an artist without a name. She had launched him as the Astroturf Prince, helped to make him the biggest figure in the Sydney scene for almost an entire year. How did he repay the favour? With disloyalty, that's how, she thought. As for looking back on Black's behaviour, first there was his betrayal over Bouffant's visit, the way he hadn't rescued her out of the embarrassing situation, then there was the appearance of this overnight movement 'post-art', which was obviously his creation, and now this! He was somehow implicated in Jack Blight joining forces with Mars, the fellow couldn't have done

it on his own. It was hard for Jillian to believe she had actually allowed that sad excuse for a man into her superior bed, and more than once!
She began to hammer at the keys.

Post-Art is dead. This is no more evident than when we see the irreverent, iconoclastic work of Sebastian Glass, an emerging artist with a difference.

Before proceeding, let's pause to offer an epitaph. What did we gain from post-art? Consider the prolific output of Astroturf artist Jack Blight...

Jillian paused to glower at the nearby TVs as another round of canned laughter burst forth.

Today we are so oversaturated with his work we have become immune to it, that is blasé and bored. While it used to say so much, its import has dried up. While we once welcomed him as radical, it cannot be ignored that while now rumored to be working for the Mars Corporation, Blight has left the cutting edge, to plod along the mainstream path ...”

She looked up from her screen realising that before she could continue this review, and take it properly into the realm of *the new*, she would need to conduct more research. She picked up the phone and dialed Sebastian's number, and as she did so she also recalled the way he'd worn those intriguing loose fitting jeans, which was very well indeed.

Chapter 26

For a long time Jack didn't see or hear from Malcolm. This was for the simple reason that Malcolm—after his swift sacking—had seemingly vanished from artworld view, and Jack had made no effort to contact him. In other words, Malcolm had disappeared from Rubin's stable, from the round of art functions he and Jack had usually attended together. Jack told himself it was a relief not to have the man and his worker's rights rhetoric, foisting his judgments and accusations on him. The way Jack saw it, his former friend had not only let him down when it came to meeting the most important deadline of his life, he had made him look like an exploiter of his friends in the eyes of everyone else in the artworld. Jack wasn't a capitalist pig, as he'd been called viciously during that episode by Malcolm. He thought back to the behavior of his workers at the time, people who were again working for him now, slogging away at the creation of the Tower of Turf, without making so much as a peep. That lot wouldn't have gone on strike were Malcolm not egging them on. According to Jack there wasn't a political agitator in the bunch, bar that masticator of Four Wheel Drives. Besides, there were so many people now in Jack's life, so many intimate friends to fill the spaces and time, that Malcolm's absence wasn't even noticed by Jack. Each day it seemed the penthouse grew more crowded. From Jack's perspective there were plenty of people with whom to discuss the vagaries of life, people to fetch things one needed or desired, people hanging about for God knows what reason.

Thankfully Jack no longer lived in that Darlington flat, as there would not have been room for all the people he now had in his life. Indeed, that flat had been too small and drab for his current business needs. Although if he thought about it, these days Jack did little practical running of the business from home, or actually at all, yet as a contemporary artist, he felt, one still had a professional aura to maintain, an aura which required space and luxurious surrounds. The twins handled everything else. Thankfully, while the Tower was being made, Vivian still had enough Astroturf works in stock for the regular buyers, and to help him stage the odd show to keep his profile up. This left Jack time to pursue that other demand of the successful artist: living it up. He began to eat at fashionable restaurants with his new friends. As nouvelle cuisine was still the rage, he developed a public tolerance for mini-*crepes*, mini-*terrines* and mini-*cassoulets*. When he arrived home after such a meal, he ordered Brigitte, his live-in chef, to knock up some solid food to get him through, her specialty being French Toast. On the beverages front, while previously he'd imbibed nearly anything along alcoholic lines, now he chose only the best wines, or at least those wines people said were the best. His days of local beer were over, it was

expensive imports from here on. When it came to his clothes, Jack's suits were now tailor-made. Vivian was his fashion advisor as were the pages of *Vapid for Men*. He shopped for accessories: finding cuff links in the shape of paintbrushes plus a range of outlandish ties, his favorite being one with Dali's melting clocks as a design.

He employed home help, comprising not only Brigitte, but a young actress, Nadia Bloom, who looked tremendous in the French maid's outfit he had ordered for her. As she wasn't trained for the sturdier chores required of a housekeeper, she was relegated to dusting Jack's work on display. She was, he felt, along with his artworks, a visual feast. Another woman—Joan something or other—was hired to run, in her sensible flat shoes, the household from behind the scenes. With all this going on about him, it was a wonder Jack found the time to party, but party he did, and party hard. Vivian advised him on this art.

"The social side of your identity, dear man," she said, once when attired in a worryingly short white dress, "is a thing you must prioritise. No longer are you to attend just any old thing held for an artist and his friends. Expand your social wings. Mingle with the rich and famous, and whatever you do, make sure to get photographed."

Thus, all manner of famous people mingled at all manner of the parties that Jack attended, in all manner of venues. He arrived at lavish European styled apartments, three storey mansions and vast, renovated warehouses that seemed to never end. He spent time at parties on lawns with topiary, or in converted churches or barns. There were parties with novelty elements, like the time silver painted semi-naked girls did the hula-hoop on footstools in a living room the size of a ballroom.

At the parties Jack went to he met famous lawyers, politicians and women made famous for marrying famous men. He met famous crooks, sports people, entrepreneurs and actors, the latter who looked far less famous in the flesh. Being an artist, Jack was in another league to some of the other famous people whom everybody knew. In other words, despite his success, not everyone outside the artworld knew exactly who he was. Due to the nature of the rumour mills, many of the famous people at these parties came to the understanding that Jack had made his money as a franchise homeware store mogul. They seemed to have obtained the impression that he made his money from actually selling Astroturf.

OOO

One night, Jack and a cluster of friends arrived at a private party thrown by a fellow named Walter Burbank who had made his millions designing innovative fridge magnets. It was an outdoor event, the invitation specified. Once inside the

vast Burbank grounds, under one of the grand gazebos, the gang of artists and Jack took up residence near a bar. It was a very fine bar, with very fine drinks. The party itself had a string quartet and a roving circus troupe dressed as giant ants, which trudged on stilts among the guests. Performance art wasn't really Jack's thing, especially now that he was no longer hanging about with Malcolm who always talked it up, but still, the weather was pleasant, and the atmosphere spirited, and it was a rare occasion when, among his gathering, both his girlfriends were in attendance, and not fighting openly.

Jack began the serious business of drinking martinis. He had come to appreciate a good martini. He felt drinking one not only tasted good, it had the added bonus of making him look urbane in a Dean Martin retro sort of way.

"I heard Madam Lash is coming tonight, bringing her latest bondage boy no doubt," Daniel Black said in his knowing way. He had really changed a lot lately, Jack noted. Gathered a lot more confidence, and even a bit of bulk, since hustling Vivian for a larger share of the payment from the Mars contract.

"Oh, S and M is so yesterday," said that artist, whatever her name was, Jack could not recall, all he did recall that she had been working in sand for a very long time.

"No it isn't. Discipline and punishment is very now, thanks to the writing of Michel Foucault," insisted Daniel.

Just as Jack was about to add his two cents worth, he found himself with such a searing pain in his chest, that instead of interjecting he was forced to clutch his upper ribs with his free hand. He grimaced. His mind reeled.

The others, still busy talking about the popularity of bondage, were interrupted by the tremendous thud Jack made when he hit the ground. When they looked down there he was, lying oddly right by their feet, his eyes clenched shut, his martini glass smashed to pieces nearby. The olive from Jack's drink rolled across the ground, to finally land beneath an ant's motionless stilt. From high above, the ant's eyes peered down curiously on the fellow lying prone. The string quartet, which was quite nearby, halted mid-note. There was the sound of a general murmuring rising from the guests. A crowd gathered around Jack. His close friends were clustered in the front, with his girlfriends both kneeling beside him, one on either side. Those who couldn't get a front row view craned their heads to find out what all the commotion was about.

"Is that the homeware fellow? I can't seem to get those lamps I bought from his store to assemble. He looks in bad shape, and yet, I believe he's done very well with that franchise."

"Yes, he's probably the wealthiest man here."

Jack was barely aware of anything that was going on around him, for it took all his focus to stop drifting out of consciousness, while in the grip of unfamiliar, not

to mention unpleasant, waves of pain surging through him. Someone made the appropriate call, the ambulance soon arrived, and with their expert haste, a medical team carted Jack off on a stretcher. A group started running behind the stretcher, shoving one another aside along the way, to get a better place. In the back of the ambulance, Jack was placed with his face staring up at the ceiling. As the vehicle sped along the streets, siren blaring, and the bumps in the road to contend with, he couldn't quite register what was happening. Surely this couldn't be a serious matter, he was a young man, just 29, a man in his prime, not to mention a man at the peak of his success. Jack's profile was, at this point in time, still on the rise, he felt. Surely nothing bad could happen to an innovator, a man with a rising profile?

He asked a nearby medic to explain.

"What's happened to me? Does it look bad?"

The medic had one of those jolly voices they all seemed to employ for such circumstances.

"Well we can't be certain at first, but my guess is a minor heart attack, which while we call it minor, can, I'm afraid, be very serious. It looks like we got to you in the nick of time. We'll be at the hospital any moment now, where you'll be sorted out, and sent home right as rain."

Jack tried to smile gratefully to the medic for getting to him in the nick of time and promising to sort him out, but he couldn't smile. He kept recalling how his friend of old, Malcolm, used to say that clichés sucked the beauty out of life, that they offered hazy notions, where there should have been precision. He suddenly missed Malcolm. He wasn't grateful for being taken to hospital to be "sorted out" and made "right as rain". He was angry. Really angry. How could such a thing be happening to him? Artists who are still on the up and up don't go around having mini-heart attacks. As the ambulance sped along more city streets, Jack became aware that if he could have the choice to have one person with him right now, one person besides all these medicos and their pat responses, it wouldn't be one of his girlfriends, with their competitive streak, it wouldn't be his gallery director, with her odd fashion sense, it wouldn't be his Personal Theorist, with his clever answer for every situation, it wouldn't be his competent co-supervisors of the Post Office.

Some time ago, Malcolm had come to the attention of the Toyota Corporation's senior management, especially the team in the Communications and Public Relations Unit. They had approached him. Sponsorship deals ensued, which meant Malcolm was now touring his Eat-A-Four-Wheel-Drive in Tokyo. While people at Rubin's had heard about this, and initially done their best to keep this news from Jack, knowing it would upset him, eventually it had leaked out. On finding out that Malcolm was touring overseas, and had in the process, it

seemed, become some sort of international hit, Jack had tried not to let it rattle him. In fact Jack had put his mind to not thinking of Malcolm at all, and for some time he had succeeded. In fact, since he had sacked him, this was the first time he had actually thought, for any length of time, about their friendship of old, at least thought of it without allowing his mind to fill with curses. Now, as he was being ferried off to hospital with a bunch of strangers, who prattled in clichés, he had to admit, Malcolm might have had his failings as a supervisor of a grand artistic project, but he has some fine qualities as a friend. With a bump and rattle the ambulance entered the hospital gates.

OOO

Cards and flowers arrived by the dozen. The nurses ran out of vases, and patience. This was exacerbated by the fact that those who visited Jack in hospital seemed to have no respect for its policy, arriving at all hours of the day and night, making a racket, bringing in forbidden items like alcohol and recreational drugs. Jack tried to explain to the nurses that his visitors were *artists*, these were not regular people who could be fettered by regular rules. This made the nurses roll their eyes, and become even crankier. Among the well-wishers who flocked to see him were his girlfriends, who took time out in turns from the Post Office to attend his bedside and wring their hands at appropriate points. Then one day, as usual, Daniel Black was the first visitor of the day, and he had brought the paper for Jack to read. He handed *The Sydney Times*'s bloated Saturday edition to Jack wordlessly, sat on the visitor's chair and frowned. The paper was opened at the arts pages. Jack read for a while in silence.

"Listen to this crap," he said. "The Icy Pole says I've '*left the cutting edge, only to plod along the mainstream path!*' Jack had roared the last line, so that his drip rattled beside his bed.

"I'm not plodding along any path, let alone a mainstream one. Can't a creative person earn some decent money for a change without the likes of Jillian Trembath trying to stamp him out? That's what she's up to, right?"

Daniel had read the piece first thing that morning, read it carefully and, astute reader that he was, and knowing Jillian Trembath the way he did, he had managed to read between the lines.

"She's obviously discovered you're working for her competitors, and is seriously pissed off."

It was Jack's turn to frown and scratch his head. His drip bottle rattled. Not knowing a thing about media ownership, Jack had not considered that when signing up with Mars he'd joined anyone's competition, let alone Jillian Trembath's. Meanwhile, Daniel was considering another motive Jillian might

have had for being such an unarguable bitch about Jack's work. Daniel knew quite well that she associated him with Jack. It was an obvious association to make. The last time Daniel had seen her, Jillian had propositioned him in her usual conniving way, an obvious ulterior motive driving her, and for once he'd actually found it in him to turn her down.

"Want to join me at the flat for a nightcap after this sad little event is over?" she'd said, behind her hand during speech time, at an opening at art. The work there had been to neither of their liking, the alcohol had run out, and the speeches were dull. "I think I'll pass, Jillian," Daniel had said, "It's not worth it. I keep finding myself quoted in your latest review without even the smallest acknowledgment of my input."

At that Jillian had sneered.

"I don't have to abide by those obsessive rules governing academics you know. There's no need to provide footnotes for my reviews. You are simply a background source, Daniel, and I am not obliged to quote you!"

Daniel knew she had plagiarised him repeatedly, which was not legitimate even in the slippery realm of mainstream media. However, he didn't wish to argue, as she would only maintain her position. As she stood there looking disdainfully at him, her very disdain made her look fiercely attractive. Not trusting himself in the face of this, he took his leave and scurried out, and that was the last he'd seen of her.

Daniel came back to the present, and to the question of what motivated Jillian's latest review, and what had she achieved. By making a swipe at Jack's work, while lauding that of this nobody Sebastian Glass, could indeed be a way of getting at Daniel himself. For Jillian had pronounced post-art, which she knew Daniel was promoting, as irrelevant. It was clear she was out for blood, and not merely Jack's. Daniel felt he had indeed lost blood in this attack. Jack would not be any better off knowing about this, knowing that Daniel had turned down Jillian, knowing what precisely her review could achieve.

"Don't worry, Jack. Once the Tower of Turf is finished we will repair any damage Trembath has done to your image through other channels. She isn't the only critic in town."

As he spoke Jack looked quite tragic, lying on his hospital cot, not so very fetching to look at in his flimsy hospital gown.

"I mean it Jack. We'll do a really big PR campaign for the Tower's launch, and don't forget, we have the Mars media empire, you know, with Hamish Dove at our disposal."

Jack began to look a little cheered.

After Daniel left that morning, no one else replaced him in the visitor's chair, which was odd, really, Jack felt, because usually there were not enough chairs for

the numbers of friends who came to sit by his bed. Out of boredom, Jack picked up the review that Daniel had left behind, and after another swift reading, flung it across the room, and attracted a bitter chastising from an ancient nurse. Jack began to rehearse all the biting remarks he would make about the misguided reviewer to his friends and colleagues. He waited for them to come, and he waited. Apart from a frantic phone message from Bill—or was it Tim?—regarding some difficulty at The Post Office that he wasn't in the right frame of mind to contemplate, nobody from the outside world contacted him. By the end of the day there had been no visitors since his Personal Theorist, except a couple of nurses who said inane cheery things while taking his blood pressure and rearranging his drip.

Chapter 27

Jack made a series of frantic calls, and obtained as many answer machine messages. Where was everyone when a man was languishing on his deathbed? He was referring, of course, to those people who had become, over time, friends and employees rolled into one. Evidently everyone was either out or not available. This was pathetic. A good deal of these people relied on him for their livelihood. Here he was, Jack Blight, the artist, forced to sit in this antiseptic-scented dump, abandoned and alone. Just when he was about to succumb to self-pity, his mum called. She reminded him of her whereabouts, on the way back from Antarctica, no less, aboard the Russian icebreaker, just called in to a port near Buenos Aires, she said. Jack vaguely remembered the details of his mother's latest adventure.

"It's wonderful to contact the outside world, dear," she said.

On hearing his mother's voice, Jack realised how much he missed her. It wasn't that he hadn't thought of her. Since his newfound success, he had renovated the Earlwood family home, bought her a Fiat as well as shouting her this adventure tour. It was just that he hadn't actually seen much of her: what with all the spending he had done to improve her life, she was rarely home of late. He had wanted to spoil her, make her feel worthwhile. She was, after all, the first person to believe in his work. Just think, she had raised him to become the highly esteemed and talented artist that he was today. The trouble was, he had noticed that she had started to behave like a spoilt child.

"Jack, I rang my friend Elsie before you, and she read out that review to me, the recent one about you in *The Sydney Times*. Jillian Trembath really did a number on you, dear."

"So true. So true," he lamented, "I've been so misrepresented, so misunderstood, so dreadfully maligned by that little twit of a critic. What she doesn't mention is that I'm actually at my artistic peak, my pinnacle, my summit. She has no way of knowing that *The Tower of Turf* is going to be my best work yet. Here she is bringing my work down in her trite little estimation. She really has gone off. Soured completely, I believe. I mean one day she loves me, the next she's panning work she hasn't even seen! They're so ungrounded these newspaper types."

The line crackled, and then she spoke.

"I'm disappointed in you, Jack," his mum's voice sounded unduly harsh, he felt, "I thought you knew what you were doing."

The line was so crackly he couldn't be sure he'd heard properly.

"Pardon me, Mum?"

“I thought you were aware of all the art trends, how best to hang on to your success. Where will we be if you lose your spot in the limelight, Jack? Back in the poorhouse, that’s where.”

“Mum. I’m not about to lose anything, let alone my spot in the limelight.”

“You might, Jack. You’ve carelessly gone and annoyed Jillian Trembath. Even I have worked out she can make or break an artist with one review.”

Jack felt his guts go gurgley, and his panic of old returned in an unpleasant fashion after their conversation ended. He was not feeling very well. No, not well at all. He called a nurse and indicated the pain was worse, much worse, which resulted in him obtaining an injection of morphine.

Because it was so nice to feel so good and worry-free, when the morphine wore off he ordered some more, and that routine continued until he was cruising groggily through many days and nights without noticing the time slip by. In this state, he conjured pleasant daydreams, many of which involved his girlfriends. He saw them in their finest clothes, and he saw them take off their finest clothes, and he saw them, in turn, join him in his hospital bed. His favourite dream was when they mutually took off their clothes to mutually join him in his bed to deliver sexual favours in a cooperative sort of way. When the morphine began to ease, and he realised these double acts were his imaginings, he cursed himself for passing up such an opportunity in real life. Having that regret led Jack to feel other regrets, such as questioning why he’d made so many lousy friends, the sort not prepared to visit a fellow on his sickbed. Such thoughts found him pressing the buzzer again, and then again, to obtain more pain relief. Being in a private hospital, where so long as he paid up he could make all the demands he liked, or so it seemed, this pleasant state of affairs seemed as if it might go on indefinitely.

One morning he woke to find his downstairs neighbour of old—the beautiful Isabel from flat no 3, sitting in the visitor’s chair. How terribly it had hurt and confused him, that time she’d walked out on him without a word, before he had had the chance to explain his work.

“My God. Isabel! What a surprise. I’m so glad you’re here,” he exclaimed, and grew teary on seeing her pretty, black eyes shining with compassion.

“Jack. I heard you were sick. I had to come.”

“I’ve wanted to tell you something for so long now,” he said, realizing that it was time to set at least a few ills right, “I’ve been dying to explain my work to you. I didn’t mean to offend you with my *Goddesses*, if that is what occurred. I really didn’t. They were done with an *ironic* touch you see, in the name of postmodernism.”

“Oh, really,” she said in a sweet and forgiving tone, “I didn’t realise. But of course, I have forgiven you a long time ago.”

“If only you’d stayed long enough for me to explain back then ...” Jack said and sighed. It was satisfying finally setting things straight with Isabel, so very satisfying. Yet just as another wave of relief washed over him, Isabel began to melt into her surroundings, until soon she was just a shadowy form on the chair, and then she was simply gone. As Jack stared at the empty space Isabel had so recently inhabited, he was forced to admit, despite his wishes, that she was most likely a product of too many injections of morphine. He looked around him at the barren hospital room. He asked himself how long had he been in that sterile place, wasting his life away, not to mention his talent.

The next day, with bags in hand and all the mandatory forms filled out, Jack headed through the hospital’s grand entrance into the outside world. The glaring rays of the sun hit his weakened eyes sending him temporarily blind. As he shielded his eyes with a hand, and walked doggedly towards the taxi rank, having no way of knowing that the reality he was about to face would be far more unforgiving than that harsh morning sun.

Chapter 28

The newsroom could get tiresome, Jillian felt, when one had finished one review, and was not inspired to write the next. Indeed it was just that time of the week when she was listlessly rummaging through *Art Almanac*. The stack of televisions was filled with the same image of Michael Jackson, moon-walking. The phone rang.

“Jillian Trembath, *Sydney Times*.”

“I have a story, a scandal involving a case of gross negligence you might want to look into,” said a wheezy sort of voice, very overdone in the drama department Jillian thought irritably. Jillian was allergic to scandals. They invariably involved politicians with comb-overs and no-neck policemen, not to mention victims. She’d come across far too many of those when working on the news desk. Thankfully, now her world involved the more refined aspects of society, things that took place in art galleries, studios and could be discussed in cocktail lounges. “I’ll pass you onto a journalist,” she said curtly.

“As this is an *artworld* scandal I thought you might like to know about it,” the voice wheezed.

“Oh, in that case. Yes, please go on,” said Jillian reaching for her notepad.

Yet the voice did not go on, but rather started beating about the proverbial bush.

“I’d rather not discuss it over the phone,” said the voice, “I’ll give you an address instead, so you can see for yourself.”

By now Jillian was wondering if this was merely some attempt to play the Watergate game, a pose so stale, she would need to fob this nuisance off.

“Oh for God’s sake, what is this about? I have a column to write, this is the *Sydney Times*. Please give me more details, or else I have to go.”

“As I said I will give you the address, if you go to it you will find a spurious artworld undertaking, something perhaps for a column, or even a feature...”

Despite herself, Jillian was soon jotting down an address in the city’s Inner West. She decided if she was going to go, she would attend to this matter after hours, which meant not taking an office car or staff photographer. If there was something in it, she calculated she may well need *stealth*.

In the taxi she started ruminating on what could await her, if anything awaited her at all. Her mind drifted onto a number of conversations she had had over the weeks, and landed on one she had recently with Vivian Rubin. Jillian often talked to Vivian, yet in their last chat, Vivian had indicated that some of the artists from her stable had joined forces in some unspecified way. Yet though Jillian had pressed her for details, what this project entailed Vivian would not say. It was so unlike Vivian not to elaborate on something in which her artists were

engaged, that Jillian became suspicious. However she had forgotten all about it until now. However now she again pondered the fact that Vivian had been acting strange lately, and confirmed her understanding that no matter what artists mouthed about the wonderful community in which they were a part, they didn't usually work on collaborative projects in any consistent collaborative way.

After driving at a lumbering pace along a main street, the taxi took a right and came to a halt outside a derelict post office situated beside an unkempt vacant lot. She paid the driver, and on stepping out smoothed down her short skirt. Jillian's skirt, on this occasion, was not of black as it might once have been, for Jillian had a packed away her black attire of late. The word on the ground was that purple was the new black. Today it was a very stylish hue of violet in which she dressed, from top to toe, including the hue of her recently purchased, very high, high heels. So in the particularly appropriate style for an arts columnist of her standing, she alighted from the cab to discover that she was arriving at a site from which was emanating a particularly unpleasant smell. She pinched her nose at once, and also noted the ruckus coming from the place, something terribly noisy and clanging. Surely she had been promised some startling artworld story, not a pedestrian thing involving people in *trades* who made it their business to wield power-tools?

The front of the old post office, with its lettering still intact, but not with all its bricks held firmly into place, was locked up quite thoroughly, with padlock at its impenetrable front gate. There was a pathway leading to the back, and as she navigated the rugged thing, hoping her shoes would not be ruined, she came to a window, which while quite the thing to promise an ample view of the interior of the building, was a fraction too high for her to see through. Beneath it, she observed, was a little scrubby bush. With it soon flattened underfoot, and her fingers clutching onto the ledge, she could just get a glimpse of inside. It was all rather a sketchy scene, on account of the window being filthy, and the angle of her view, which simply gave her the view of a whole lot of people's backs. These people were all leaning over some task in which they were involved. Her guess was they were hammering. Then one of them stood up for a break, and looked her way, and careful that she would not be seen, she ducked out of view. She had already recognised the man. It was Drew Gunn. She dared look again, and noted that Gunn had resumed his task with the rest, and that he, like the others seemed to be wearing some sort of uniform. Once she had recognised Gunn it was easy, just by body size and haircuts, to place the others also as artists from Rubin's. The racket was emanating from their work. It was all very peculiar, for indeed, who, she wondered, had ever heard of contemporary artists toiling away as if in a factory in some dreary communist state?

She needed to find out what this was about, and in order to do so she required more information, information she could surely glean if she could get a better vantage point. Glancing about her, she caught sight of a nearby tree with an attractive looking trunk and a few well placed branches. However, it wasn't entirely easy, in her heels and short skirt, to manage such a climb, and if her critics had been watching at this particular moment, they might have found it amusing to see Jillian Trembath, the style-setting feminist and cultural commentator, negotiating a difficult bit of foliage that had caught on her delicate violet blouse for longer than was dignified. However, Jillian naturally would have a thing or two to say in her defense, a thing or two to say about a strong and capable woman's grit and steel and inner resolve, and the length's that such a woman would go to get to the *truth* of things. In Jillian's world the truth was not necessarily the most fixed of concepts, it could be wheeled in and wheeled out at appropriate moments. Right now it seemed very appropriate to pursue it unflinchingly.

Soon from her new position in the upper sections of the tree, Jillian once again peered inside. Those were definitely artists from Rubin's gallery, and they were definitely working together on something odd, and now she could see more clearly, it was evident that they were all buckled over sections of huge green sheets of Astroturf! Just then a face looked up and spied her. On swiftly clambering down, she felt the blood pumping through her veins. Just as she was nearing the ground on her journey down the trunk, she missed a foothold, and as she felt the impact of the bushes she let out a yelp.

By the time she was on her feet, pulling the twigs and leaves from her hair and skirt, a group had gathered around her to stare, and stare they did, from red and ruined eyes, from faces with welts and swellings. They were indeed the artists from Rubin's, and not only did they look strange in uniform, but each one looked slightly disfigured and odd.

"Hello everyone," she said in the most professional tone she could muster. "Jillian Trembath here, from *The Sydney Times*. Many of you know me already as the art reviewer, but I've come with another hat on today. A source told me some of you might wish to talk about something, well something, untoward, that has allegedly been going on."

She loved saying the word allegedly, it made her feel so very much the media heavyweight. Then an artist, whom Jillian recalled made installations using menstrual blood, stepped forward. She was, for some reason, on crutches, but didn't seem to have broken a leg.

"I'd be happy to assist," Trudy Smee said, in a wheezy voice, which Jillian recognised as that of her mystery caller, "Though what's been going on around here is not just untoward, it's downright criminal."

There were nods of assent all around. Jillian was delighted. She was obviously onto something. She was painfully aware that to her colleagues she was just a namby-pamby arts writer, someone way down the office food chain. So here was her chance to become more hard-edged, to gain some clout, and it had not escaped her that she might be able to bring some careers down in the process, notably those of Jack Blight and Daniel Black, who were evidentially, somehow or other, implicated.

OOO

As he scrambled out of the cab, Jack felt the familiar sensation of sea spray tickling his nostrils. While staring at the elegant cream façade of his apartment block he was overcome with relief. It had been a close shave, that mini-heart attack, but here he was, restored, and back at home. How a man could miss his penthouse, not to mention all the normality of lifestyle that it evoked. He took the lift, then came to his front door, and as he stood before it bags in hand, he had a flash of insight, what one might call *an epiphany*, no less. He felt as if heightened, deeply inspired, a tad *radiant*. It was clear to him that once he walked through that door, and back to so-called normal life, things would not be the same, nor did he wish them to return as such, the way they were. One cannot have a near-death experience and not be altered after all, he told himself. He had felt the limits of his mortality, faced the fact he was, on earth, alone, and what had he learned? Yes indeed, he asked himself, what had he learned?

He was ready for change. For most of the year, since his big break into Astroturf, he had been far too detached from his artistic practice, not to mention his staff. He thought back to the old days of painting. How he missed being in the muck of it, getting his hands dirty, doing all that practical work. How he had, at some deep level, loved the toil involved in painting. The sheer demand of it, the slog, that daily grind. Not to mention that smell of oils and turps. As he stood there, immobile, before his crème front door, he decided it was time to return, if not to painting, at least to the slog involved in personally producing work. Surely, he told himself, he'd let things get out of balance by allowing others to do the labour for him, while he turned his back on it. In order to set things right first he needed to be big enough to forgive his friends and colleagues for their silence over the last few weeks. Yes, he needed to forgive everyone who hadn't come to see him when in hospital, which was an awful lot of people. He took a breath, he fought internally with himself.

He could do it! Yes, he could. They had been disloyal and lax not visiting him, when he was flailing, but he was a generous man. The first thing he would do on going inside was pack and go down to the Post Office and make his

presence felt. Yes, make amends. He would set about reorganising his art enterprise, participating directly in his worker's lives. He hadn't been involved enough in the Tower of Turf, a project he must find it within himself to commit to, once and for all, before it was too late. He placed the key in the lock, and on entering, he observed that the penthouse was empty. It was as if gutted. Not a painting, nor a stick of furniture, none of the things he owned, and he did own a lot of things, nice things, big and small, were anywhere to be seen. There was nothing in view, except for one item, it occurred to him finally, the telephone. Yet when he reached to pick it up from the floor, it was disconnected.

OOO

At the nearest phone box, which was thankfully working, Jack dialled Rubin's gallery and, noted that when Vivian picked up in her usual way, her voice didn't have its usual charming ring when he told her who it was, in fact it was entirely devoid of charm.

"Out of hospital, fully mended, I presume?"

"The penthouse is empty!" he announced.

"Of course it is, Jack. What did you expect?"

Jack had expected a lot of things, but an empty penthouse wasn't one of them. He had expected his friends and colleagues had secretly found out he had checked out of hospital and organised a surprise party for his return. He had expected people had cooked him his favorite meal. He had expected hugs and kisses from his girlfriends. Vivian's strange cool tone, and these new circumstances, were making him tense.

"A man who is forced into a stint in hospital doesn't expect to return to find all his possessions gone, that's for bloody sure."

"No I meant, Jack, what did you expect given the public fiasco in which you are currently embroiled?" Vivian said, aggressively, adding "Look, I really haven't time to talk."

"What do you mean! My penthouse has been ransacked, don't you get it! I suggest we go to the police!"

"Goodness, Jack. Don't be absurd."

Despite his protestations, Vivian hung up.

His head in a spin, Jack grabbed his bags and caught a taxi. His earlier plan, of going to the Post Office, still seemed like a logical plan. Surely, he reasoned, people there, his workers, would take the time to fill him in on what was going on. It was all so strange, somewhat surreal.

When he reached the Post Office he found the building like a barricaded fortress from some ancient black-and-white film, with planks boarding windows and doors. One half expected Indians to appear with bows and arrows.

As he stared, Jack heard footsteps approaching from behind.

“Well, well, look who’s here.”

He recognised the strident voice of Trudy Smee at once, though when he swung around, the post-Lacanian feminist didn’t look at all like as he expected. There were welts on her face, her eyes were semi-closed, and she was holding herself up on a pair of crutches.

“You fully fledged fuckwit...” she snarled.

“Pardon me?” Jack stammered.

“Capitalist filth,” she spat.

As Jack was composing a statement that would allow him to exit quickly, without appearing cowardly, a globule of phlegm came flying through the air and landed on his right cheek. Trudy Smee turned on her crutches and hobbled away.

OOO

At his local pub, a venue to which he had fled for sanctuary in the past more than once, Jack, armed with beer, had monopolised the public phone for the last hour. He had dialled Joy and Ruby, but neither had answered. He had called Bill and then Tim, but it was the same with them. He had called, in fact, a long list of Astroturf suppliers, gallery directors, related contacts, and fellow artists with whom he had worked over the last year, some of them quite closely. Finally he resorted to calling Daniel Black. He had not wished to do this as, more than anyone else, he was annoyed at the man, his Personal Theorist, for not answering his last 15 calls, made in desperation from his hospital bed.

“Daniel speaking.”

“It’s Jack here, Jack Blight. I’m out of hospital at a public phone. Things seem kind of peculiar on my return. Like my penthouse is empty. Vivian’s gone cold, icier than the Icy Pole. The Post Office is closed, and when I visited I was spat at by a wounded post-Lacanian feminist. What the hell is going on?”

From his end of the conversation, Daniel clung tightly to the phone until his knuckles whitened.

“Well Jack, I have been following your situation closely, and it is a little complicated.”

“My situation! What situation?”

“Is there somewhere we can talk, Jack?” Daniel said.

“I’m at my old drinking hole.”

Daniel remembered the limitations of that venue from many a meeting with Jack in the past, and made it plain there was no way he wanted to have this conversation, or any conversation accompanied by the strains of Jimmy Barnes.

“What about the penthouse then?” Jack offered.

“You can get in?”

“Of course I can get in. I own the place.”

There was a pregnant pause.

“Okay. Meet you there in half an hour.”

“I’ll bring the beer,” Jack said.

Chapter 29

Daniel and Jack sat up against a wall on the floor. It certainly is bereft of Jack's presence, this empty space, thought Daniel. Though they sat side by side, Daniel was aware he was trying not to get too close to Jack. There was something, he felt, almost contagious about the sense of failure hanging over him. Besides, it was one in the afternoon and Jack smelled of beer. Several empties were scattered by his feet, a full bottle in his grip.

"Glad to see you, Dan my man. I hope you're planning to divulge what the hell is going on."

In truth, Daniel would rather not do anything of the sort. He was a decent man, he told himself, the sort who stands by his word, and he'd given that to Jack on the phone. Indeed, he had told Jack he would fill him in, so fill him in he must.

"You see Jack, while you were in hospital, production on the Tower was progressing smoothly, or at least so it seemed," Daniel began. "No-one realised, but as none of the windows open in the place, and the vents were blocked the fan was simply circulating noxious fumes."

Jack took a nervous slug.

"The workers came down with those complaints they'd had before, but worse this time. Some got rashes and sores, others, bronchial conditions. Drew Gunn was rushed to Emergency at one point when he couldn't breathe. He revived, but meanwhile the deadline was drawing near. You'd left instructions for nothing to get in the way of production. The twins tried to contact you, but you weren't contactable it seemed."

Daniel looked down at his fingernails as he continued, as if reciting a story that had not much to do with him, or people he knew.

"Then the situation was leaked to the media. It ran big in the Forsyth press, that is *The Sydney Times* went to town with it. You were named as the boss who'd let his workers risk their lives in the name of indulgent art."

"Steady on. My work isn't indulgent!"

"I'm only letting you know what Jillian Trembath reported," Daniel said.

"Trembath wrote about this?"

Daniel nodded.

"Randolph Mars was heavily implicated in the story that came out, being your employer. As you know he'd built provisions into your contract in case anything remotely like this occurred."

"He what!"

Daniel felt, not for the first time, that Jack's naiveté about the ways of the world was staggering. Even though he had told Daniel that he had, clearly he hadn't read his contract.

"The small print states that any negative press about Mars in relation to the Tower of Turf would render that contract null and void."

"Null and void!" Jack cried out.

"That is not all. He issued a writ. Vivian's lawyer agreed to settle out of court. Things moved fast from there. Mars won the dispute and was granted possession of your assets."

"What! Including this place?" Jack gestured around him.

"Yes. The penthouse is his."

"Jesus. I'm trespassing on my own premises."

"Indeed," Daniel said.

Jack had reached the dregs of his beer. As he looked morosely at the empty bottles he began to muse dreamily out loud.

"You know, if I were still a painter I'd create a work titled, *Empty on Empty*, in which I'd present a bunch of empties, just like these, in a vacant space, thus producing a work to provoke the viewer to consider the lack of purpose inherent in a striving, creative man's life."

"Although you're not a painter, Jack."

"In hindsight, I might have been better off had I stayed one, mate."

Suddenly Jack jumped to his feet and rushed out of the room. He returned a moment later holding a bottle filled with amber liquid.

"Whisky! Top grade. From my hidden stash," he cried.

He took a swig and shuddered. Suddenly he looked inspired.

"Surely this is a temporary hole into which I've fallen. You see Dan, mate, I have a *name* and that name is Jack Blight. If I'm strategic, just as you've taught me to be, in the postmodern sense, surely it won't take long to get myself back on track ..."

Jack grew increasingly excited as he continued. Daniel read the situation, and Jack's part in it, as tragic. The sordid boozing and the glimmer of false hope that shone in his eyes were signs of him getting delusional.

"I'll rustle up a Tazzie gallery and another in W.A. On the Sydney front, I'll hold back-to-back shows at Rubin's. Sure Vivian was cool before, I did catch her off guard. I can count on her to support me as I stage my comeback."

Daniel once again found himself admiring his hands. These days they were productive hands; they had recently finished writing the catalogue essay for Sebastian Glass's opening at Rubin's the following night. As he examined his hands further, Daniel considered some salient points he hadn't told Jack. He knew that when Mars had taken over Jack's possessions, these included the

hundreds of Astroturf works Vivian had in stock. He knew Vivian hadn't put up a fight when Mars's henchmen rolled in to whip away Jack's artistic assets. By the time they'd arrived, rumour had it she was quite glad. She'd been dragged into the public eye when the Post Office scandal broke, thanks to Jack. Vivian resented him for that. In fact there was nothing Vivian resented more than a person who bestowed on her such bad PR. Furthermore, Vivian sensed that with Jillian Trembath pronouncing post-art dead, the buyers would trample over its memory in order to get to the next new thing, the *post-ironic* work of Sebastian Glass, as Jillian Trembath had dubbed his movement. *Post-irony* was good, very good, Vivian well knew. It was the phrase that marked the future for Rubin's Contemporary Art Space.

Daniel finally looked up to find Jack sucking on that whisky bottle. God, thought Daniel, he really is rushing headlong into alcoholism. He supposed a desperate man like Jack needed some form of support. He certainly had no home, no gallery director, no critic, no girlfriends and certainly no-one he could refer to as his Personal Theorist behind him now. This reminded Daniel that Jack might not yet know about the girls.

"By the way I forgot to tell you Joy and Ruby are in love."

"What sort of bastards are so low as to have nicked off with my women when I was fighting for my life?"

"That's not what I meant, Jack. They've fallen in love with each other."

Jack took a moment's pause.

"They're batting for the other team?"

Daniel nodded solemnly.

Jack's long held ideal, of all three of them tumbling into bed together, withered and died. When Daniel next looked at him Jack's eyes had gone watery. Daniel leapt to his feet.

"Better be off then."

He had done his job. Before going, he realised that some parting words of condolence were required. Surely between men who'd worked so long together, such a thing was customary? He should say something kind and compassionate to Jack to indicate he felt empathy for all he was going through. He should at least offer him a simple word like "Sorry". Yes, he should apologise for not being more supportive, for not turning up in the last few weeks when he was in hospital, for being the one to bring all this bad news and then head off again into his own comfortable life. The problem was, he was not sorry. The way Jack's career had gone to the dogs hadn't worked out too badly for Daniel. In fact ever since Jack's fall from grace, things had started improving in Daniel's life. Vivian had hired him to work with Sebastian Glass, who was a professional all around. Glass knew exactly how to collaborate with another professional when dealing with the

theoretical terrain required. He knew all the theories coming in from overseas, how not just to read them, but how to apply them to his practice. Vivian had even raised Daniel's fee to a semi-decent rate. Yes, things had started looking up for Daniel ever since they had started degenerating for Jack.

"So, well, good to see you, Jack. I'd better be off," Daniel said formally.

He ventured down the hall and was soon staring into the door handle. He *did* feel a pang of guilt. Jack and he had worked so very closely together. The man did not have a friend in the world. Daniel could still turn around and offer Jack a word of kindness. A gesture like that, at a time like this, would mean a great deal to someone like Jack. Daniel was still mulling over this conundrum, when his hand pulled the door open and he walked out.

Epilogue

Jack Blight soon discovered that all the artists from Rubin's Contemporary Art Space who had been working at the Post Office were planning to sue him for their work-related injuries. Declaring himself bankrupt, he took off down the South Coast. They never sued, but he didn't return to Sydney either. Instead he joined an artistic community in a small coastal town in which postmodernism had never arrived. He wound up returning to his original passion for figurative painting, becoming primarily a painter of oceans, mountains and trees. However, he sometimes found the time to paint a nude. He fell in love with one of his models, a social worker who now supports their modest lifestyle in a miner's cottage in the bush, with a studio out the back.

Jillian Trembath moved from art critic to editor of the arts pages of *The Sydney Times* after Bob Herrick was headhunted by Randolph Mars. She was involved for over a year with the young artist Sebastian Glass, whom she helped to shoot into the international spotlight. He was the first man to make a firm impression on Jillian, and she presumed their love would never end, until she discovered he was engaging in extracurricular activity at a host of Sydney's gay beats. After three long nights of crying into her designer pillow, she found herself in the bed of the eldest Forsyth son, James Boyd Forsyth, heir to the Forsyth fortune. He would later buy her a string of art and lifestyle magazines for which she is now the managing editor.

In response to the stress and strain of running a leading Contemporary Art Space, **Vivian Rubin** decided to pack up shop for three months, and head off into outback Australia with her lover, the art cellist, Dana Bleak. On returning to Sydney, inspired by Australia's original inhabitants and sensing the fashion was swinging in their favour, Vivian dumped her stable of postmodernists and turned Rubin's Contemporary Art Space into Yullindi Studios for Aboriginal art. The postmodern artists who had relied on her showing their work were, in the main, outraged, especially when many as a consequence went broke.

Using his art writing and media liaison skills, sensing the emergence of true talent, **Daniel Black** was one of those behind the scenes who helped Sebastian Glass obtain international success within six months of his first solo show. When the artist changed direction in the 90s, heading into grunge, Daniel altered his

theoretical position to accommodate. Over the years, Daniel went from being the writer of small art catalogues, to the managing editor of an art press called Post Edit Publications. When the publishing house took on Michel Bouffant's contract, Daniel convinced the Frenchman to reprint his book written in 1986, which featured an Astroturf work, by Jack Blight, on the cover. However, Daniel argued that as the artist had been discredited nationwide, Bouffant would risk losing sales with the current cover of vivid green. The reprint had a plain red cover, with no pretensions to being a work of art.

While touring in Japan, at the height of his success under his sponsorship deal with Toyota, **Malcolm Tiler's** throat trouble flared up, threatening the future of his performance career, not to mention his life. He was forced to have an emergency operation in a Tokyo hospital, after which his doctor said if he wanted to live it was time he gave up eating Four Wheel Drives, or any other road vehicles. Malcolm struggled to let go of his passion, and attachment to the revenue his work was by that stage bringing in. Several years later, he returned to Sydney with his Japanese wife, and with a penchant for all things Zen. By then he'd moved into making work from pebbles, round and white, that he placed very carefully and artfully in refined patterns on the ground. He would never be as successful with his earthworks as he had been in the past, but he knew it offered the change to living a healthier, longer life.

Michel Bouffant went on to produce 23 more books before he died while performing a book reading, aged 74, in a Las Vegas casino. At the end of his career he wrote a host of works which critics consider his finest, in which he discussed the fate of theory in the era of post-theory. In his will he left the only artwork he possessed, an Astroturf piece by mid-80s artist Jack Blight, to the Pompidou Centre, an institution he himself debunked in an early essay, which was translated in English as 'Pompous Do: Pompous Don't.'

ENDS