THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

The Rise of the Curator:
Archiving the Self in Contemporary American Fiction

Robert Lederer

PhD English Literature

The University of Edinburgh

2014

Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Abstract / Lay Summary

Concurrent with a bloom of interest in the archive within academic discourse, an intense cultural fascination with museums, archives, and memorials to the past has flourished within the United States. The ascendency of digital technologies has contributed to and magnified this "turn" by popularising and habituating the archive as a personal memory tool, a key mechanism through which the self is negotiated and fashioned. This dissertation identifies a sustained exploration of the personal archive and its place in contemporary life by American novelists in the twenty-first century. Drawing on theories of the archive and the collection, this dissertation analyses the parameters of the curated self through close-readings of recent novels by five US authors. The first two chapters read Paul Auster's *Sunset Park* through trauma theory and Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved* through psychoanalysis, noting that in each the system of archiving generates moments of catharsis. The two chapters argue that, for the subject shattered by trauma, archiving activates and fulfils psychoanalytic processes that facilitate the self's reintegration and prompts a discursive revelation about the painful past. The texts, thus, discover in the archive strategies for achieving, however provisionally, a kind of stability amongst unexpected change. The next two chapters reveal the complicity of archival formations with threats posed in the digital age and articulate alternative forms of self-curation that counteract these pernicious forces. To ward off information overload, E.L. Doctorow's *Homer and Langley* advocates the ethical flexibility of "blind" narration that, wending through time, accommodates a broad range of perspectives by refusing to fantasise about its own ultimate and total claim to accuracy. Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, meanwhile, diagnoses the cultural anxiety over increasingly invasive surveillance measures. While the novel situates the digital archive, or database, at the heart of this new dataveillance, it recommends investing the self in material collections, where personal meaning is rendered in the inscrutable patois of objects that disintegrate over time. For Egan, the material archive thereby skirts the assumed readability and fixity of data on which this surveillance thrives. The conclusion analyses Dana Spiotta's *Stone Arabia*, observing within it and the other novels a consistent concern with archival destruction, erosion, and stagnation. Together, the texts suggest that the personal archive is persistently stalked by disintegration and failure. Yet, within this contemporary moment in which curation has become a widespread means of self-fashioning, they also show how these hazards can be creatively circumvented or actively courted, can threaten the subject or be harnessed by it.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Without realising it, I began rehearsing for this dissertation almost a decade ago, when Facebook first permitted university students where I studied in Canada to sign up for its then-fledgling social networking website. Like so many early users, I shared my likes, thoughts, and photographs without deeply scrutinising what defining myself online achieved intellectually and emotionally. The popularity of social networking websites, and the now-ubiquitous practice of rendering the self according to their museum interfaces, elicits several questions about contemporary subjectivity. How does self-consciously gathering and displaying personal information inhere in the notion of the self, what it is composed of and how it changes over time? What personal work takes place on online profiles: narcissistic exhibitionism, public performance, psychological self-analysis, personal diarising, or temporal anchoring? Facebook is just one of a multiplicity of platforms on which modern-day people assemble records of themselves. The fascination with self-documentation through diaries, photographs, and videos seems to have intensified in recent years with the propagation of digital technologies and the Internet. An array of digital applications allows users to monitor their everyday lives, from the vagaries of their moods to a daily count of their footsteps, in an effort to harvest data and, from it, extract self-knowledge that would otherwise go unmeasured. Together, these programmes form a movement known as Quantified Self, whose practitioners unite around 'a belief that gathering and analysing data about their everyday activities can help them improve their lives'.[1] While the name 'Quantified Self' is sparsely known, its premises infuse the cultural consciousness and its activities pervade the behaviour of people in the West.

Both Facebook and Quantified Self incorporate acts of assembling, arranging, and examining an archive of data into the process of actualising the self and registering knowledge about it. The emergence of digital self-archiving has a relevant prehistory in the rise of personal collections in the 1980s, when Susan Pearce and Paul Martin date the emergence a 'new' populist and inclusive form of collecting. It is during this decade,

---

[1] 'Counting Every Moment', *Economist*, 3 March 2012 <http://www.economist.com/node/21548493> [accessed 23 June 2014].

they suggest, that the dominant object of personal collections moves from the rare or exotic item towards typical, everyday wares, making collecting accessible to a broader reach of people.[2] The widespread appeal of collecting, they conclude, shows that 'it is undeniably an integral part of how we relate to the contemporary world.'[3] Leah Dilworth similarly notes a 'collecting mania' in twenty-first century America, with a history that extends back two hundred years, but she curiously omits the kinds of archives typically housed on digital devices.[4] This dissertation attests to an overlapping fixation on material and digital archives in recent American culture and literature. Alongside quilting, Kenneth Goldsmith unites material and digital archiving under the rubric of folk art.[5] For Goldsmith, curating objects, organising saved documents on a computer, and arranging mp3s into playlists engage individuals in the self-expressive activity of fashioning a personal system or tableau out of common materials. Joanne Garde-Hansen similarly indicates the digital archive's predominance as a personal memory apparatus,[6] while Dubravka Ugrešić describes the present moment as one of 'archivomania':

> In this private Big Brother show, this public Big Brother show, we record everything: the hypothetical moment of conception, the embryo, the baby *in utero*, birth, first steps, first words, first birthdays. And we do not stop there. If we have got the money we hire personal historians [...].[7]

We might say, then, that people have become curators of their own lives, and this cultural shift has served as the focus of much recent artistic and literary work as well.

Cultural analyses of the past few decades recurrently focus on the ubiquity of memory institutions and their penetration into the performance of personal life. Andreas Huyssen argues that, whereas modernism critiqued the museum as a site of mainstream

---

[2] Susan Pearce and Paul Martin, 'Introduction', in *The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*, Vol. 4 Contemporary Voices, ed. by Pearce and Martin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. xii-xxii (p. xii).

[3] Ibid., p. xxi.

[4] Leah Dilworth, 'Introduction', in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. by Dilworth (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 3-15 (p. 5).

[5] Here, Goldsmith is expanding on writing by Rick Prelinger and Walter Benjamin. Kenneth Goldsmith, 'Archiving is the New Folk Art', *Poetry Foundation*, 19 April 2011 <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2011/04/archiving-is-the-new-folk-art/> [accessed 29 July 2014].

[6] Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 74.

[7] Dubravka Ugrešić, 'The Elusive Substance of the Archive', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 341-53 (p. 352).

cultural ossification, the abundance of museums founded since the 1980s demonstrates its evolution into a mass medium: 'Indeed, a museal sensibility seems to be occupying ever larger chunks of everyday culture and experience.'[8] This development, Huyssen suggests, has generated shifts in public museums as well as in person memory practices, employing the term 'self-musealization' to describe the surge of self-documentation by 'video recorder, memoir writing and confessional literature'.[9] Pierre Nora argued, in late-1980s France, 'Modern memory is, above all, archival', functioning through the creation and accretion of material fossils instead of public narratives that morph over the course of time.[10] Nora posed a query that could just as easily have been asked in contemporary America: 'But who, today, does not feel compelled to record his feelings, to write his memoirs—not only the most minor historical actor but also his witnesses, his spouse, and his doctor.'[11] Erika Doss similarly observes a rise in the construction of memorials in present-day America, what she calls a '*memorial mania*: an obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public contexts.'[12] Alongside the frenzied interest in public commemoration, Doss highlights a surge in non-government sanctioned memorial sites, in personal and impermanent 'performances of grief', like the temporary displays at Columbine.[13]

This dissertation argues that, reflecting this general cultural turn, recent American fiction casts the personal archive as a predominant site where subjectivity is constructed, analysed, and controlled, where insights into the self crystallise to be addressed, narrated, or even destroyed. Although the sharing of data on digital apparatuses forms an underlying impetus and a historical marker for this project, I

---

[8] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Making Time is a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 14.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', trans. by Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7-24 (p. 13).

[11] Ibid., p. 14. Dave Eggers mocks his own uneasiness about having written a memoir in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*: 'the author, and those behind the making of this book, wish to acknowledge that yes, there are perhaps too many memoir-sorts of books being written at this juncture, [...] but would like to remind everyone that we could all do worse, as readers and as writers.' Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (London: Picador, 2000), p. xix.

[12] Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 2.

[13] Ibid., p. 71.

investigate personal curation in a broader field that includes both virtual and material collections. I make these arguments through close readings of novels by five American authors: Paul Auster's *Sunset Park* (2010), Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved* (2003), E.L. Doctorow's *Homer and Langley* (2009), Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), and Dana Spiotta's *Stone Arabia* (2011).[14] My arguments draw significantly from the canon of archive and collection theory, most significantly from work by Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, Susan Stewart, Krzysztof Pomian, and Jacques Derrida. This dissertation engages with these theorists to analyse the workings of the personal archive in each fictional text. My chapters also argue that archive novels reflect back on these theories, developing them in new ways and adapting them to new environments. That is to say, knowingly or not, these novels animate archive and collection theory but they also challenge it by investigating how it plays out diachronically in a temporal setting and how it interacts with other intellectual traditions, like trauma theory, psychoanalysis, realism, and theories of the digital.

This dissertation treats the archive as what Michel Foucault calls a 'technology of the self'. These are structures or discourses, he writes, that 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.'[15] I suggest that the archive similarly drives a form of self-knowledge and self-production, and this dissertation inquires into the parameters of this knowledge and the processes that generate it. Archivisation, the first two chapters suggest, can facilitate a psychoanalytic encounter with the self: objects manifest the collector's internal landscape, and archival actions—selection, arrangement, display—activate and

---

[14] There are, of course, many other novels that could have taken centre stage in this thesis. Several of these are briefly integrated into the individual chapters as supporting texts. Others include: Michael Cunningham, *By Nightfall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010); Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005); Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2007) and *Point Omega* (New York: Scribner, 2010); Karen Russell, *Swamplandia!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011); Leanne Shapton, *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion and Jewelry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Jonathan Franzen, *Strong Motion* (New York: Picador, 1992).

[15] Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, ed. by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988), p. 18.

externalise psychic mechanisms that generate and consolidate the self. The archive, as the next two chapters address, can also endanger the subject that it seeks to buttress, flooding it with a surplus of signification or facilitating its co-option by surveillance institutions. These are troubles that seem particularly potent in a digital space where archivisation has become the default procedure for self-fashioning. Contemporary novels diagnose archival hazards while proposing different methods of curation that tranquilise these dangers. As such, this dissertation discovers in contemporary American literature a sustained inquiry into the effects of archival self-fashioning, an attempt to understand its consequences, to analyse its promise and its menace, and, ultimately, to guide its installation in social and personal life.

Terminology: Curate, Archive, Personal Archive

The title of this dissertation employs two terms, 'curator' and 'archive', for their respective currencies in cultural and academic discourses. In her review of Spiotta's *Stone Arabia*, Kathryn Schulz notes, 'In the last few years, "curate" has become the reigning metaphor for how we organize virtually every aspect of our lives.'[16] Schulz argues that 'curate' has become a dominant term for the way American culture considers the self in the digital age: as something that can be quantified and, once recorded, understood. Simon Reynolds observes that the language of rock music began borrowing the term 'curation' from art historians in the 1990s. He cites the music producer Brian Eno, who wrote, in 1991, 'Curatorship is arguably the big new job of our times: it is the task of re-evaluating, filtering, digesting, and connecting together. In an age saturated with new artifacts and information, it is perhaps the curator, the connection maker, who is the new storyteller, the meta-author.'[17] For Reynolds, this comment reflects and anticipates the development in the 1990s of 'record-collector rock', music groups that 'assembled their identity within a kind of economy of influences.'[18] Contemporary

---

[16] Kathryn Schulz, 'Trickster Makes the World', *New York Magazine*, 3 July 2011 <www.nymag.com/arts/books/reviews/stone-arabia-schulz-review-2011-7/> [accessed 3 July 2014].
[17] Brian Eno qtd. in Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 130.
[18] Simon Reynolds, p. 141.

musicians, Reynolds argues, construct their public identities by self-consciously mobilising allusions and nods to earlier artists into an identifiable profile.

The significance of the curator to literary practice is integral to Jonathan Lethem's essay, 'The Ecstasy of Influence', which advocates for the value of plagiarism and the unfettered flow of ideas. At the essay's conclusion, Lethem reveals that its own contents have been stolen from several texts that he then enumerates.[19] Like Reynolds's rock musicians, who shape themselves around a constellation of influences, Lethem sees his essay as the manifestation of his own history of cultural engagement: 'I'm basically a curator. [...] It's literally an anthology of writings I cared about, writings that flowed into me, then flowed literally onto the page.'[20] While it is not itself a digital text, Zara Dinnen argues that 'Ecstasy' takes shape around certain possibilities enabled by new technologies, affiliating the essay with a recent cultural emphasis on the remix or mash-up. While Dinnen relates it to a longer history of texts composed of excerpts, she notes that 'Ecstasy' reveals the ease with which works of quotation and sampling can be created, or curated, using digital technologies that hide the dissonances between their source material. On the computer, she notes, 'all information is, at base, abstract and equal (digitized data)', and so the curated text need not reveal itself to be a plagiarism or an arrangement of cut-ups.[21] Lethem, in his defence of the essay, relates its ethos to an economy of self-fashioning: 'Let a million canons Bloom. Only, canons not by authoritarian fiat but out of urgent personal voyaging. Construct your own and wear it, an exoskeleton of many colors.'[22] Evoking Schultz's curated self, Lethem imagines readers delineating and displaying a personalised catalogue of literary favourites evocative or definitive of their own self-image. While not limited to the digital moment, this kind of thinking becomes particularly widespread at this time, with musicians, writers, and many Web-users participating in a culture of self-curation.

---

[19] Jonathan Lethem, 'Ecstasy of Influence', in *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, Etc*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), pp. 93-120.
[20] Jonathan Lethem, interviewed by Peter Andrey Smith, *Believer*, May 2012 <http://www.believermag.com/issues/201205/?read=interview_lethem> [accessed 28 June 2014].
[21] Zara Dinnen, 'In the Mix: The Potential Convergence of Literature and New Media in Jonathan Lethem's "The Ecstasy of Influence"', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 42.2 (2012), 212-230 (p. 214).
[22] Jonathan Lethem, 'The Afterlife of "Ecstasy"', in *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, Etc*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), pp. 121-24 (p. 124).

If 'curate' has entered social and artistic parlance, the 'archive' has gained particular purchase in academic circles. Marlene Manoff notes an upsurge of writings on the archive in a vast array of academic disciplines beyond their typical location within curatorial and historical discourses.[23] Ann Laura Stoler terms this shift in academic work an 'archival turn', whereby the archive itself has become the object of analysis rather than the source for historical narrative or data.[24] Thinking critically about the personal archive as a tool for self-fashioning, this dissertation contributes to this shift in academic focus. Although it makes use of the terms 'collection', 'archive', and 'museum' almost interchangeably, by spotlighting the 'archive' in its title, this dissertation acknowledges its engagement with this bounty of scholarly interest.

I also employ the term 'archive' because of the breadth of its usage and meaning, its capacity to house other collecting practices and institutions under its rubric. Jacques Derrida writes, 'Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word "archive."'[25] Despite the archive's opacity, Derrida defines it in terms of its residence in a physical location and its submission to a law that brings into harmony its corpus of items. Derrida thus delineates the archive according to 'the *commencement* and the *commandment*', the establishment and the consolidation of social authority.[26] Carolyn Steedman, however, critiques the scope of Derrida's definition, arguing that it functions as 'a metaphor capacious enough to encompass the whole of modern information technology, its storage, retrieval and communication.'[27] For Steedman, Derrida loses touch with the physical realities of working with historical documents. Yet this supposed inadequacy allows a more generous application of the 'archive' and theories about it to locations and practices outside the historian's purview. As such, J.J. Long notes that, despite its shortcomings, the indecisiveness of Derrida's definition opens up the concept to include libraries, museums, and other repositories, and admits 'the need for a more

---

[23] Marlene Manoff, 'Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines', *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 4.1 (2004), 9-25 (p. 9).

[24] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 44.

[25] Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', trans. by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), 9-63 (p. 57).

[26] Ibid., p. 9.

[27] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 4.

inclusive notion of the archive.'[28] This dissertation takes advantage of the archive's haziness, specifically in order to see how a broad array of archival writings sheds light on personal collections in the contemporary moment.

       G. Thomas Tanselle extols the benefits of outlining the archive, or in his case, the collection, in broad strokes. Defining collecting flexibly as 'the accumulation of tangible things', he suggests that 'only by linking all forms of collecting can we illuminate the fundamental nature of the myriad directions it can take.'[29] Whereas Tanselle posits a universal explanation for the collecting impulse, this dissertation operates with an inclusive understanding of the archive to broaden its range of critical resources. This dissertation testifies to the related concerns of theoretical writing on the archive, the collection, and the museum and insists on the relevance of each body of thought to the dissection and consideration of personal memory assemblages. Tanselle's definition does, however, prove slightly too exclusive by limiting the collection to material objects. This dissertation requires a definition that encompasses both physical and virtual items. At this juncture, then, we might define the archive as a series of artefacts, terms, or data linked by a common theme, system, or purpose.

       The final critical term that requires elucidation is 'personal archive'. On the one hand, this expression can be defined simply as an archive gathered, administered, and controlled by an individual rather than by an institution. Personal archives could, seemingly, be distinguished by whether the archivist is the subject of his or her own display, which would differentiate personal records, like Facebook profiles, from traditional collections of antiques or art. Jean Baudrillard, however, muddies this boundary when he indicates that, no matter the objects one focuses on, 'what you really collect is always yourself.'[30] Baudrillard is hardly alone in suggesting that the subjectivity of the collector always expresses itself through the selection and manipulation of his or her objects. Sing-chen Lydia Chiang similarly argues, 'By

---

[28] J.J. Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 12.

[29] G. Thomas Tanselle, 'A Rationale for Collecting', *Raritan*, 19.1 (1999), 23-50 (p. 23).

[30] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 2005 [1968]), p. 97.

selecting, ordering, and re-presenting the objects of desire, the collecting subject re-creates the self.'[31] All archives overseen by an individual, then, are imbued with personal content and stage the work of self-formation. This dissertation inquires into how this process takes place, what kind of subject forms within the boundaries of the collection, and what benefits or dangers are produced by different styles of archivisation.

Before contemplating the subjective economy of personal archives, I first want to sketch out the relationship between these individual spaces and their institutional counterparts and, in doing so, indicate the cultural and political significance of conferring personal archives with historical weight. Stoler has noted, in light of the multidisciplinarity of the 'archival turn', that the archive in academic discussion is not always consistent across scholarly fields:

> One could argue that "the archive" for historians and "the Archive" for cultural theorists have been wholly different analytic objects: for the former, a body of documents and the institutions that house them, for the later, a metaphoric invocation for any corpus of selective collections and the longings that the acquisitive quests for the primary, originary, and untouched entail.[32]

Although she acknowledges that studies often blur the two domains together, Stoler's tentative distinction separates the historian's archive and the cultural theorist's Archive in two ways: while the former is material and presided over by institutions, the latter is metaphorical and conceptually inclusive. The personal archive, I suggest, strains Stoler's dichotomy by resting on the interstices between the institutional and the individual and, within archival fiction, between the tangible and the metaphorical.

Although moderated by the organising consciousness of a private individual rather than an administrative body, personal archives frequently overlap with or become subsumed by larger institutional structures. Jeremy Braddock argues that modernism entered into mainstream culture through 'the privately assembled, but publicly exhibited, art collection and the interventionist literary anthology.'[33] Braddock terms these collections 'provisional institution[s]', groupings contoured by the distinctive

---

[31] Here, Chiang is largely reflecting on the writing of Susan Pearce. Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 1.

[32] Stoler, p. 45.

[33] Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 3.

proclivities of their owners, serving as challenges against official historical culture and competing to become the arbiter of modernist culture's canonisation.[34] In doing so, they functioned not just as privately-authored compendiums but, eventually, as institutionally-recognised assemblages of documents, literatures, and artworks. Digital technologies and the Internet have changed, and in many ways intensified, the trajectory of personal records into the space of authorised history. As Christopher Lee notes, 'Professionals engaged in web archiving must often consider annual reports, organizational publications, blogs, wikis, and YouTube videos all in the same set of selection activities, rather than insisting on a stark line between the official and unofficial.'[35] In Lee's account, contemporary archivists blur the distinction between institutional and personal archives by engaging with both forms of documentation.

While personal collections and effects sometimes gain the certification of official archives, so too do they offer a robust resource for historical and cultural analysis. By confining the historian's archive to institutional structures, Stoler risks belittling or ignoring other archival sites. José van Dijck coins the term 'mediated memories' to refer to cherished materials, a shoebox of photographs or a folder of digital .JPGs, through which people frame their identities and their relationships to the past. Van Dijck sets these object landscapes at the heart of what she terms 'personal cultural memory', as sites where individual agency rubs up against acculturated habits and norms, together determining what should be remembered and what form that memory should take.[36] Personal archives, then, permit an act of self-assemblage and display, marking the confrontation between personal desire and cultural convention. John Berger, like van Dijck, positions the personal archive—here, bulletin boards plastered with cuttings, pictures, and letters—as an alternative form of museum: 'On each board all the images belong to the same language and all are more or less equal within it, because they have been chosen in a highly personal way to match and express the experience of the room's

---

[34] Ibid., p. 12.

[35] Christopher A. Lee, 'Introduction', in *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era*, ed. by Lee (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011), pp. 1-26 (p. 11).

[36] José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 6-7.

inhabitant. Logically, these boards should replace museums.'[37] Berger suggests that the reproducibility of canonical images has freed art history to be deployed by any person and, specifically, by those people without inherited cultural authority. This shift has enabled marginalised people, through their collections, to re-inscribe the canon of art with new meanings by organising images in new arrangements and appending them with alternative descriptions.

Both van Dijck and Berger position personal archives as subjective platforms that can adapt the aesthetic form and the material content of the museum while challenging their hegemonic narratives. The novels analysed in this dissertation at times underline both the personal archive's investment in collective memory and its potential to compose and challenge historical narratives. If personal archives interact with institutionalised structures, so too are they speculative spaces where the cultural theorist's suppositions come alive. Stoler, as we have seen, attempts to distinguish the historian's from the theorist's archive based on their relationships to materiality: while the historian deals in specific tangible documents, the theorist offers a conceptual and abstracted examination of the archive in general. The novels analysed in this dissertation insist on the relationship between theories of the archive and their tangible, material instantiations. The personal archives I consider are real compendiums of items or of data, not the murky metaphorical spaces that, Stoler suggests, are the purview of cultural theorists. Within these materialised sites, the novels put philosophical concepts into action, demonstrating how theorists' conceptual, and at-times nebulous, claims about the archive resonate with and apply to real personal collections. The novels, thus, bridge the two domains of archival writing—the historian's and the theorist's—by animating theory within the space of fiction.

This dissertation possesses a family relationship with Richard Wendorf's 'The Literature of Collecting'. Wendorf argues that novels and theories of collecting 'illuminate each other', and he ends his essay with an assertion of the collection's status as a tool through which the self takes shape: 'I see personal collecting in particular as

---

[37] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 30.

part of the complicated project of self-projection, self-fashioning, and self-fulfilment.'[38] This dissertation investigates Wendorf's conclusion at length, interrogating the kinds of subjective labour that occur within the archive and questioning how various forms of archive invoke different possibilities and dangers. Whereas Wendorf strives to illuminate a general theory of collecting, this dissertation is specifically interested in scrutinising how this mode of self-formation functions within the digitised, late-capitalist, contemporary American environment. Limiting my inquiry to this particular location similarly distinguishes my project from Jonathan Boulter's *Melancholy and the Archive*. Boulter notes that recent fiction frequently views the traumatised subject in conjunction with the archive, navigating through archives or, indeed, coming to embody them. These novels, he suggests, voice an ethical dilemma—'history must be preserved; history cannot be preserved'—that dooms every archival venture to melancholy.[39] By positioning the contemporary subject within 'a globalized economy of the archive', Boulter's study provides a salient point of comparison and a useful resource for this project.[40] Indeed, we both begin in the same place, with novels by Paul Auster and thoughts on the system of mourning. However, whereas Boulter is principally interested in exhuming the archive's melancholy associations within an international body of fiction, my own project argues that the archive functions multifariously as a site of self-enunciation that can mobilise different forms of subjectivity and operate alternatively as a harbinger or redeemer of loss.

Archive Fiction and Art

These recent novels must be considered within a long history of archival fiction. Recent criticism tends to find in archival fiction a commentary on the question of historical veracity: does the novel affirm the archive's validity, or does it undermine its purchase on historical truth? Marco Codebò argues that fiction's concern with the

---

[38] Richard Wendorf, 'The Literature of Collecting', in *The Literature of Collecting and Other Essays* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2008), pp. 5-70 (p. 6, 64).
[39] Jonathan Boulter, *Melancholy and the Archive: Trauma, History and Memory in the Contemporary Novel* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 12.
[40] Ibid., p. 14.

archive extends back to the earliest novels but that only in the postmodern context do authors become aware that they are writing within a genre of archival fiction.[41] He splits the archival novel's lineage into two predominant eras: realism, when the novel upheld the archive's authority, and postmodernism, when the novel challenged it. In the nineteenth century, Codebò suggests, realist novels and centralised state archives 'participate in the same project: making the industrial city dweller visible through the storing of individualized knowledge.'[42] However, the tide turns in the twentieth century, and particularly during postmodernism, when 'novelists relate their work to archival practices not to support the verisimilitude of their texts, but to detect the errors, frauds, and/or (ab)uses of power that have led to the creation and storage of records.'[43] Thus, Codebò suggests that, whereas earlier novels fortify the archive's cultural authority, postmodernism complicates these claims.

Codebò situates at the heart of his genealogy a concern with the archive's access to cultural truth, and this same issue frames Linda Hutcheon's discussion of postmodernism, which she similarly imbues with cynicism towards the archive. Hutcheon, writing in the late 1980s, defines postmodernism not as a historical moment but as the fictional genre of historiographic metafiction, to which she attributes two paradoxical strategies: 'It reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge.'[44] This pattern—where the past is shown to be both formative and inaccessible—similarly underlies postmodern archival fictions. Hutcheon asserts: 'In postmodern fiction, there is a contradictory turning to the archive and yet a contesting of its authority.'[45] When Hutcheon talks about novels becoming archival, she is specifically focused on the tendency for postmodern writers to insert documentary forms, such as photographs and clippings, into their texts. She argues that postmodern novels, whose

---

[41] Marco Codebò, *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), p. 18.
[42] Ibid., p. 49.
[43] Ibid., pp. 54.
[44] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 89.
[45] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 81.

narrative surrounds and explains their archival insertions, reveal that records require textual interpretation to be meaningful. For Hutcheon, these novels show the archive to be a cloudy and contentious place where history's meaning is inferred and imagined, withholding the past rather than revealing it with clarity and precision.[46] Max Saunders argues that this incredulity towards the archive and its reliance on narrative structures predates postmodernism. As evidence of this historicisation, he delineates the genre of 'autobiografiction', 'works that use the *form* of autobiography, but that fictionalize some of the content, so that the narrator's story is not the same as the author's.'[47] Saunders argues that such works, popular from the late-nineteenth century, aspire to resemble archives, sometimes forming the corpus of a supposedly dead (but, in reality, an invented) author. In so doing, they imbue real archives with an underlying economy of fiction: 'To write fictions like archives is to suggest that archives already sound like fiction.'[48]

Codebò, Hutcheon, and Saunders argue that postmodern fiction, and sometimes its precursors, contest the authority of the archive and reveal it to require narrative to become intelligible. Suzanne Keen, however, notes an alternative group of recent texts that insist on the possibility of accessing the past and correcting misinformation about it through material traces. Keen outlines a genre prevalent in the past three decades, which she coins 'romances of the archive', in which researcher-adventurers travel to dusty archives to seek out and discover the truths of the past, to solve historical mysteries and return historical objects to their rightful owners.[49] In a recent article, Keen observes the permeation of this genre into twenty-first-century writing by American women.[50] Keen sets 'romances of the archive' against the ontological-scepticism typical of postmodernism, in their suggestion that historical truths can be contacted and mistakes

---

[46] More recently, Vivian Halloran argues that a similarly insistent indeterminacy animates Caribbean postmodern historical novels and museum exhibitions, both of which, she suggests, insistently refuse to provide narrative or ethical coherence. Vivian Nun Halloran, *Exhibiting Slavery: The Caribbean Postmodern Novel as Museum* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 15.

[47] Max Saunders, 'Archive Fiction', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 169-88 (p. 175).

[48] Ibid., p. 180.

[49] Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 3.

[50] Suzanne Keen, 'Magical Values in Recent Romances of the Archive', in *Libraries, Literatures, and Archives*, ed. by Sas Mays (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 115-129.

righted within the setting of the archive.[51] In sketching out one of its subgenres, Keen testifies to archive fiction's prevalence within the contemporary scene. So too does her analysis envision the central question of archival novels of recent decades as a matter of historical authority and of accessing the truth of the past.

In her initial monograph, Keen argues that, in addition to evoking postcolonial anxieties, 'romances of the archive' respond to the digital turn.[52] With their insistence on returning to material records and on bodily pleasure, these novels, including her contemporary American examples, avow the enchantment of real documents after historical research has withered to sitting in front of a computer screen. Despite the different relationships that they illuminate between recent fiction and archival verisimilitude, Codebò offers a congruent explanation for the ubiquity of archival novels, linking their popularity with both postcolonial and digital moments.[53] Max Saunders, however, disputes that the increase of interest in the archive can be traced to the culture of digitisation:

> While it remains a compelling argument that internet research alters the nature of the archive and our relation to it, the existence of such pre-digital archive fictions undermines the attempt to establish a causal link between the digital revolution and such narratives. There is, however, evidence that such work was shaped by anxieties about transformations in communication technology, the technologies involved being *pre*-digital ones such as the typewriter and the telephone, both of which were in production from the 1870s.[54]

This dissertation does not contend that archive fiction is a new phenomenon that springs from a digital moment where real objects have recently become pieces of fetishistic fascination. It does suggest that, largely in light of digital technology, many twenty-first-century archival novels foreground different questions and tropes than the majority of their predecessors.[55] That is, even though they possess historical antecedents, contemporary archival novels are driven by the present-day context and pose questions resonant with its cultural scaffolding. These questions tend to focus on the ways the

---

[51] Keen, *Romances*, p. 3.
[52] Ibid., pp. 9-10.
[53] Codebò, p. 58.
[54] Saunders, p. 179.
[55] There are, of course, several novels concerned with personal collecting that predate the contemporary moment. I would rather suggest that recently there has been a broad emphasis on collecting as a biographical and psychological process that overlaps with several theoretical disciplines and real-world anxieties.

archive generates or imperils the self rather than scrutinising its relationship to the real content of history. This dissertation contends that, considering the ubiquity of self-archivisation in contemporary culture, reading contemporary archival novels for their commentary on self-fashioning forms a necessary and revealing mode of inquiry.

While I find in these recent novels a progression from the concerns of postmodern archival novels, this is not to make the case for an entirely new historical paradigm of fiction. There are, however, several accounts that suggest that contemporary fiction comprises a new aesthetic moment. Stephen J. Burn, chief among these theorists, sees in 'post-postmodernism' not a turning away from the previous movement but a style that reflects back, cites, and riffs on its precursor.[56] Similarly, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, theorists of metamodernism, argue that today's art balances modernist naivety and postmodernist doubt in searching for truth and meaning that it knows it can never find.[57] Peter Boxall attributes a transformation in 'the mechanics of narrative itself' to digital technology and, specifically, to the speed of electronic processing.[58] I make the case that an insistently personal inflection informs contemporary archival novels and affiliate this shift, in part, to the ever-presence of digital technology. I nevertheless employ theories of the postmodern—as well as the digital—when they are relevant, treating what might be a new aesthetic moment as possessing a porous relationship with its past.

While Codebò, Hutcheon, Keen, and Saunders disagree about the particular relationship between recent fiction and historical truth, it is nevertheless this question of veracity or authority that each highlights as the reigning issue within recent archival texts. Whereas those previous novels grapple with the archive's contact to the past, the contemporary novels addressed in this dissertation instead focus on the particular valences of the archive as a mode of personal discovery and self-fashioning. These novels frequently take for granted that the past presented by the archive is composed and

---

[56] Stephen J. Burn, *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 19.

[57] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 2 (2010), 1-14 (pp. 5-6).

[58] Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 6.

contrived rather than natural and accurate. Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides* is an instructive text for tracing this shift.[59] Although it appears to offer a typical postmodernist critique, the novel also embeds the personal archive within the memory and psychology of its owners. *The Virgin Suicides* is framed by references to a battered collection of artefacts that a group of boyhood friends maintain in an attempt to decode the lives and suicides of their childhood neighbours, the Lisbon sisters. The documents, however, refuse to offer up a key to the girls' deaths even as the collection appears on the cusp of decomposition. In *The Virgin Suicides*, the collection is not just the place where history goes to hide. Rather, the novel hints at a link between the boys' childhood fetishisation of the Lisbons, their sexual fixation on the sisters, and their archival attempt to determine the reasons for their deaths. Throughout the novel, the imperilled Lisbons appear as the content for a childhood adventure, the objects of the boys' fascination and desire. The gravity of the sisters' confinement finally registers when the boys discover their corpses during their ultimate rescue attempt. The boys' potential culpability in the Lisbons' deaths, their inability to view the girls as more than mysterious objects, seems to be the true secret they veil from themselves within their collection: they seek in the archive the truth of the painful past to distract from their own responsibility for its perils.

While affirming postmodern incredulity towards archival truth, *The Virgin Suicides* also implicates the collection in the complicated psychology of its owners. This movement beyond critiquing the archive's purchase on revealing history has been, as I noted above, the subject of studies by Wendorf and Boulter, but it has also been investigated within contemporary artistic practice. In a 2004 article, Hal Foster argues that an archival art with a distinctive flavour predominates in the contemporary art scene.[60] These works, he notes, are distinct from their postmodern predecessors in their desire to create meaningful interconnections, rather than employing fragmentation as a means to explode the hegemonic symbolic whole: 'On the contrary, [the work] assumes anomic fragmentation as a condition not only to represent but to work through, and proposes new orders of affective association, however partial and provisional, to this

---

[59] Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993).
[60] Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 (2004), 3-22 (p. 3).

end, even as it also registers the difficulty, at times the absurdity, of doing so.'[61] Sven Spieker argues that a quality of playfulness characterises recent archival art, similarly stressing the impulse to undermine authorised curatorial arrangements: the artists he writes of, 'tentatively abandon the archive's immunity from tampering, as they allow visitors to their archives to interact more or less freely with the holdings in ways that fundamentally affect their configuration.'[62] While Foster sees the artist's emphasis on creating, sometimes paranoiacally, new archival relations as part of a distinctly materialistic movement, Spieker relates his artists' attempts to overthrow archival systemisation to the digital archive, or database. More than revealing the archive to be composed around a fiction, these artworks complicate dominant stories by creating new associations and systems. They ponder what can be gained by composing and recomposing the archive even with the foreknowledge that it is not historical fact that is being contested.

Between Posthumanism and Humanism

This section locates in the archive a particularly apposite mechanism for moderating between the dispersed posthumanist and the unified humanist self. Neil Badmington defines humanism in terms of the belief in 'a basic human essence.'[63] Taking the Cartesian maxim 'I think therefore I am' as its classic axiom, he argues that humanist subjects trust their own capacity for rational thought and the possibility of self-knowledge. Badmington identifies two thinkers who initially troubled the human subject's capacity to know, understand, and control itself: Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Marx undermined the humanist belief in a common human nature by suggesting that social conditions produce and contour subjectivity.[64] Freud intensified this attack on humanism by describing internal forces and drives that elude the subject's conscious

---

[61] Ibid., p. 21.

[62] Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008), p. 175.

[63] Neil Badmington, 'Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism', in *Posthumanism*, ed. by Badmington (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), pp. 1-10 (p. 4).

[64] Ibid., p. 5.

awareness yet trigger its behaviour.[65] For Badmington, the arrival of posthumanism announces an understanding that the self is shaped by the surrounding environment, composed of a variety of often-unknowable components, and animated by sometimes-contradictory motivations. This complication of humanism has made the self a zone of contestation for contemporary theory. Nick Mansfield notes, 'It is this ambivalence and ambiguity—the intensification of the self as the key site of human experience and its increasing sense of internal fragmentation and chaos—that the twentieth century's theorists of subjectivity have tried to deal with.'[66]

New technologies of the past few decades have re-orientated old assumptions about the self and provided an anchor for conversations about posthumanism. Donald E. Hall argues: 'Subjectivity, once considered potentially knowable and conceptually one-dimensional, has been rendered various, fractured, and indefinite in recent theorizations, largely because of a new recognition of the complexity of our social roles and the multiplicity of our interactions.'[67] He stresses that new technological augmentations and amendments to the body strain easy accounts about the bounds of the self, taking Donna Haraway's writing as a prime example. Haraway offers the figure of the cyborg as a salient metaphor for present-day humans, seeing in its undifferentiated mixture of organic and machinic components a corollary for human bodies entwined with and enhanced by technological parts. In the cyborg, Haraway suggests, human and machine are rendered indistinct, an amalgamation she celebrates because, unlike humanism, 'it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end'.[68] For Haraway, the cyborg's sundry body admits to the tumultuous and contradictory composition of the self, rather than fantasising about a universal and unified theory of the subject that could only be limiting and damaging. N. Katherine Hayles similarly emphasises internal partition in her reading of the posthuman, which she contrasts with the theory of possessive individualism. Whereas the possessive individualist conceives

---

[65] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[66] Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 2.
[67] Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 118.
[68] Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in *The Haraway Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 7-45 (p. 38).

of freedom through the ownership of his or her own capacities, the posthumanist mixes with others, often though not always through computing technology, in a way that renders individual desire and action incomprehensible. Hayles writes: 'The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction.'[69]

Both Hayles and Haraway cast the posthuman as a non-unified series of parts whose multiplicity skirts a humanist order that overrides internal difference and contradiction. The collection, like the cyborg, seems an apt representation of this distributed self. Boulter argues that, fractured by trauma, 'the archival subject [...] stands as a stark negation of the humanist claims for subjectivity as such.'[70] While the self-archive does, on the one hand, acknowledge the subject's many conflicting pulls and influences, it can also, like the humanist model, override internal discord. Jacques Derrida, as I have already noted, argues that the archive works by 'consignation', the process that 'aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.'[71] For Derrida, then, the archive drains its components of heterogeneity, unlike the cyborg whose body is defined, above all, by its diverse assemblage. Baudrillard, similarly, suggests that the act of collecting buttresses a neurotic need for omnipotence and control, reinforcing the collector's authority rather than emphasising his or her conflictual makeup. For Baudrillard, each object 'contribut[es] to the creation of a total environment, to that totalization of images of the self that is the basis of the miracle of collecting.'[72] Baudrillard, as we have seen, is not alone in suggesting that the collector's self is always the latent content of a collection. Yet the look of that collected self, its relative unity or strength, remains contested territory.

---

[69] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 3.
[70] Boulter, p. 15.
[71] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 10.
[72] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 97.

Other theories admit that the singularity of the collection's objects can push through its homogenised veneer. Susan Stewart, like Baudrillard, argues that collected objects, shorn of their use value, transform external space into an extension of the self. She also suggests that bringing objects together in a collection creates a unifying narrative that overwrites the unique histories of the individual pieces. Nevertheless, Stewart declares that disagreement can sometimes bubble to the collection's surface: 'the fetishist's impulse toward accumulation and privacy, hoarding and the secret, serves both to give integrity to the self and at the same time to overload the self with signification.'[73] Continual collecting, Stewart implies, at once asserts the self's power while distributing it across an enlarging field of objects, gradually straining the consistency of the archive's narrative. Stewart's argument hints that, rather than a space in absolute accord with itself, within the collection there can occur both unity and discord, or, what Walter Benjamin terms, 'a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order' in the life of the collector.[74]

Benjamin took an immense interest in the bourgeois cult of collecting—and was himself a collector—at a time when he felt the pastime was fading into obsolescence. Like Baudrillard and Stewart, Benjamin argues that collected objects combine into a total world, but unlike these other theorists, he sees this movement towards self-enclosure less as a style of discipline than a creative reckoning. Rather than eliding the objects' unique qualities, Benjamin suggests that their individual histories and metonymies come together in a 'magic circle', or 'a whole magic encyclopedia, a world order'.[75] The collection, then, provides a stage on which to ponder the surrounding social arrangement and historical moment, a comprehension that develops by organising objects 'according to a surprising and, for the profane understanding, incomprehensible

---

[73] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 162-63.

[74] Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007 [1955]), pp. 59-67 (p. 60). Benjamin similarly writes just sentences earlier: 'For what else is this collection but a discord to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order.' Ibid.

[75] Walter Benjamin, 'The Collector', in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 203-11 (p. 205, 207).

connection.'[76] Benjamin, thus, argues that rather than claiming a position of organisational omnipotence, the steward can uncover the concealed social order by sensitively probing and engaging with his or her objects. The collection's 'magic' quality, its ethos of creative discovery, emerges from what Benjamin calls its 'productive disorder', the tension between multiplicity and consistency.[77]

Mapping these opposing pulls onto the archived subject, we might say there exists in the collection a tug-of-war between humanist and posthumanist versions of the self, an impulse that strives for completeness and harmony of subjectivity and another that acknowledges internal confusion. Mike Featherstone, in his description of reading an archive, acknowledges this movement between fission and fusion:

> Archive reason is a kind of reason concerned with detail, it directs us constantly away from the big generalization, down into the particularity and singularity of the event. Yet this singularity is itself produced through a discriminating gaze and entails an 'aesthetics of perception' to enable the significant to be lifted out from the mass of detail.[78]

Interacting with an archive means both treating its objects individually, and thereby foregrounding multiplicity, while at the same time striving to reveal a constant thread that unifies the whole into an analysable form. The personal collection, then, coordinates the moderation between humanist coherence and posthumanist dispersal, facilitating the subject's contemplation and organisation of their own distributed being.

On the one hand, then, the personal archive provides a template that, acknowledging subjective disharmony, permits a self to be envisioned and moulded across a multiplicity of items. Yet, it also manifests an opportunity for thinking these disparate parts into an arrangement that appears to cohere, however momentarily. In this sense, the archive facilitates, on the level of the individual subject, the examination and interrogation of humanism, rather than its total dismissal, which Badmington argues should be the current work of posthumanism.[79] In the novels analysed in this dissertation, when an integrated self emerges from the archive, it is never out of belief in a naive

---

[76] Ibid., p. 207.
[77] Ibid., p. 211.
[78] Mike Featherstone, 'Archive Cultures', *British Journal of Sociology*, 51.1 (2000), 161-84 (p. 169).
[79] Badmington suggests that we ought not embrace a posthumanism defined as the negative of humanist beliefs but instead engage in a sustained interrogation and conversation with the principles of humanism. Neil Badmington, 'Theorising Posthumanism', *Cultural Critique*, 53 (2003), 10-27 (p. 15).

humanism but with a firm awareness of the wealth of drives at work within the subject: the self's integration within the archive is never total, infallible, and eternal. Sometimes, then, the archive enables a temporarily smoothing over of fragmentation that brings the various pieces of the self into a system of agreement. At other times, the diversity or the ambiguity of the collection overpowers the possibility of uniformity. In the novels analysed in this dissertation, the collection's refusal of stability is either condemned for destroying the subject or it is celebrated for releasing the subject to radical posthumanist opportunities.

The novels that I analyse do not treat the personal collection as a space of personal mastery or a means of asserting control or power over oneself. Unlike Baudrillard, they see the collection as a locale for continual self-analysis and self-formation, a contemplative and creative engagement rather than a means of self-domination.[80] Treating collecting as an assertion of power and discipline, a solitary and willed pursuit, has led commentators to associate it with typically masculine behaviour. Philipp Blom writes:

> It takes this mind-set, its voluntary seclusion and single-minded pursuit of one goal and one goal only, to keep on going oblivious of the consequences. Men seem to be more comfortable with, or more in need of, the hunt, and with the business of conquest and possession, with the loneliness of this task and with submission to its demands, with social and intellectual hierarchies.[81]

Naomi Schor, furthermore, identifies a sexist language coded into Benjamin's and, in particular, into Baudrillard's writing on the collector. In Baudrillard's account, where the pleasure of collecting is equated with overseeing a harem, there is no room for a female collector: Schor writes, 'The paradigmatic collector [...] is a man whose extreme castration anxiety leads him to a pathological need to sequester the love-object or loved objects'.[82] If the obsessive or imposing collector has been traditionally thought of as male, this dissertation could be seen as discovering an alternative, non-phallocentric mode of collecting in contemporary literature. These are self-archives that foreground

---

[80] That is not to say, however, that the archival self cannot be co-opted by more pernicious external sources, a dominant worry in an age of digital surveillance that I address in Chapter Four.

[81] Philipp Blom, *To Have and To Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 170.

[82] Naomi Schor, '"Cartes Postales": Representing Paris 1900', *Critical Inquiry*, 18.2 (1992), 188-244 (pp. 201-2).

the object-world as a resource for thinking through the self, its internal mechanisms or its outward fashioning, rather than using it as a screen for the narcissistic projection of meaning.

Domietta Torlasco has, similarly, strived to delineate a feminist theory of the archive, based around the story of Antigone. Torlasco explicitly challenges Derrida's reading of the archive, which, taking Oedipus as its central character, argues that the archive is always subject to a law that determines its organisation. Derrida suggests, by instituting a system that maintains consistency over time, this law dooms the archive to destruction according to the dynamics of the Freudian death drive.[83] Torlasco strives to delineate, through Antigone's disobedience of the law, an alternative vision of the archive 'where the death drive (the path it takes in a patriarchal order) is diverted, detoured, given more than one route, so that the house that constitutes its domicile can be other than a funeral chamber[.]'[84] She identifies within digital memory a new archival modality that rests not on the immutable law but on the expectation of disruption. In the digital space, archival materials are more feasibly tampered with, quoted, and put in new orientations—recall Lethem's 'Ecstasy of Influence'. As such, Torlasco suggests, digitised memory opens up an art that constantly renovates the previous order, refashioning old materials into stories that have thus far gone without voice.[85] The resistance of digital archives to a stable order or law has been noted by Arjen Mulder and Joke Brouwer, who write: 'Digital archives are unstable, plastic, living entities, as stories and rituals were in oral cultures.'[86] Frequently, the novels I analyse, whether or not they focus explicitly on digital technology, advise the necessity for the archive to accept change over time, to slacken its rigidity, and even to embrace its own eventual obsolescence or collapse. This can mean treating the archive as a necessarily temporary point of stability in an ever-changing late-capitalist moment, or a dynamic space that

---

[83] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 14. I investigate Derrida's 'Archive Fever' in depth in Chapter Three and in the Conclusion.

[84] Domietta Torlasco, 'Against House Arrest: Digital Memory and the Impossible Archive', *Camera Obscura*, 26.1 (2011), 38-63 (p. 51).

[85] Ibid., p. 58.

[86] Arjen Mulder and Joke Brouwer, 'Information is Alive', in *Information is Alive*, ed. by Brouwer, Mulder, and Susan Charlton (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003), pp. 4-7 (p. 5).

prospers with the addition of new objects. It can also mean seeking out modes of curation more transient and flexible than archival law, or welcoming the self-destruct impulse that brings an archive to its end.

Chapters, Themes, Tropes

Mansfield notes that recent theories of subjectivity agree that 'the subject is *constructed*, made within the world, not born into it already formed.'[87] He divides these accounts of the subject into two schools, the psychoanalytic and the Foucauldian. The psychoanalytic school argues that the subject takes shape against the family environment in which it is born, splitting into conscious and unconscious parts. Psychoanalytic theories rest on the assumption that the subject possesses 'a fixed structure, operating in knowable and predictable patterns.'[88] The Foucauldian model, conversely, sees the subject as the product of societal power and ideology. Foucault argues that social infrastructures and discourses generate and contour subjectivity, determining the delineating components basic to the subject's constitution. As such, coming to be a subject requires conforming to recognised modes of self-knowledge or self-performance, the confession being a prime example: Foucault argues that the notion that the truth of the self lies within, awaiting excavation and revelation, has been historically acculturated, functioning as the vessel for the subject's co-option by medical and legal establishments.[89] The self-archive, I suggest, interacts with both the psychological and the Foucauldian notions of the subject, and it is through their differentiation that I will track the development of this dissertation's chapters.

The first two chapters investigate the psychological underpinnings of archival practice. Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*, which I discuss in Chapter One, finds in archiving a strategy for rehabilitation following a traumatic event. In the repetitious acts of recording it locates a mechanism for encountering—seeing for the first time—the event of trauma that could not be witnessed at the moment of its initial occurrence. Acts of

---

[87] Mansfield, p. 11. Emphasis in original.
[88] Ibid., p. 9.
[89] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 59-61.

archiving thereby enable the subject to contemplate and come to terms with the traumatic event. The novel recommends, amidst the turbulent backdrop of the recent financial collapse, embodying the archive, as exemplified by the actor's catalogue of roles or the novelist's corpus of texts. Within a historical era of rapid, unexpected change, internalising a pool of possible people or narratives, and thereby habituating adaptation, becomes a prudent pursuit. Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, the subject of the second chapter, sees in the archive of objects the potential for a psychoanalytic encounter with one's own self. The objects in Leo's drawer stand in for his internal landscape, functioning as a mirror in which he can lay eyes on and interact with the usually occluded interior self. In the chapter, I define the concept of 'archival play,' developing the psychoanalytic theories of D.W. Winnicott and Christopher Bollas. By reshuffling his collection and inspecting different arrangements for meaning, Leo turns the archival domain into a space for dream analysis, where the self comes into view and, most importantly for Hustvedt, can be translated into narrative—the decisive sign of the subject's vitality.

Auster's and Hustvedt's novels share an interest in the archive as a means of instigating, externalising, and enacting psychoanalytic procedures. In both texts the objects are tethered to the archivist's internal psychology: in Auster's they are metaphorically linked to the event of trauma that the archive is implicitly confronting; in Hustvedt's they provide the content for a dream analysis, the various affiliations uncovered becoming the very substance of the novel. Just as significant as the objects themselves are the processes of archiving: recording, gathering together, arranging, and displaying. The novels' focus on archiving as a practice is mirrored in recent theoretical writing: Michael O'Driscoll and Edward Bishop stress that archives are 'spatio-temporal processes', series of events that take place over time, and Sue Breakell and Huyssen suggest that the verbal forms 'to curate' and 'to archive', respectively, are contemporary terminologies.[90] Auster's and Hustvedt's novels lend a psychoanalytic essence to this

---

[90] Michael O'Driscoll and Edward Bishop, 'Archiving "Archiving"', *English Studies in Canada*, 30.1 (2004), 1-16 (p. 3); Sue Breakell, 'Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive', *Tate Papers*, 9 (2008) <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7288> [accessed 13 July 2014]; Huyssen, *Twilight*, p. 21.

recent interest in the procedures of archiving, suggesting that maneuvering the collection mimics the internal dynamics that generate catharsis. In foregrounding archival practices, these novels also suggest that there is something performative that occurs in archival self-formation.[91] Judith Butler has argued that the gendered self is performative, that it is fabricated through a routine of coded actions rather than the expression of an internal essence.[92] Recording and arranging an archive similarly functions as a cycle of related performances within which a subject takes shape. However, self-performance through the archive features an elevated quality of self-consciousness, the subject simultaneously gazing upon and acting upon its materialised doppelganger reproduced in the collection that lies before it.

In Hustvedt's and Auster's novels, these archival processes ultimately illuminate a speech act, the revelation of the traumatic moment, for Auster, or the composition of an autobiographical account, for Hustvedt. Frequently, the archive has been imbued with the quality of narrative. Antoinette Burton writes that 'archives are always already stories: they produce speech and especially speech effects, of which history is but one.'[93] I similarly contend that the archive is shot through with language and can generate narrative accounts, but I insist that limiting the textual qualities of the collection strictly to narrative obscures its more complicated linguistic network. Foucault has argued, 'The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events.'[94] For Foucault, the archive is a figurative site that determines the parameters of discourse within a given society and, as such, it manifests the ideological underpinnings and political configurations of that setting. Foucault's

---

[91] For a debate on the advantages and disadvantages of thinking performance as separate from the archive, see Diana Taylor, 'Acts of Transfer', in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 1-52; Rebecca Schneider, 'In the Meantime: Performance Remains', in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 87-110.

[92] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007 [1990]), p. 185.

[93] Antoinette Burton, 'Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories', in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. by Burton (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 1-24 (p. 20). Mieke Bal more systematically delineates a theory of the collection as a narrative form. See Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion, 1994), pp. 97-115.

[94] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972), p. 129.

conceptual account of the archive engorges its linguistic properties to contain a whole universe of statements. Displaced onto the personal archive, Foucault's statements helpfully suggest that these collections produce a landscape of potential utterances about the self and its history. It is in this linguistically ripe setting, in the complex discourse concealed within and entangled between its items, that the archive induces cathartic disclosures. The personal archive, then, becomes a force that governs language but also enables the revelation and enunciation of otherwise opaque statements.

In the third and fourth chapters, this dissertation moves on to analysing different archival forms and comparing their efficacy within the digitised environment. In this sense, they acquire a Foucauldian quality, demonstrating that the form self-fashioning takes, in turn, determines and contours the subject that emerges from it. E.L. Doctorow's *Homer and Langley*, I argue in the third chapter, arranges itself around a particular paradox: how to represent the past from as many angles as possible without overwhelming the symbolic apparatus with too much information. Whereas the archive, with its strict design and impulse to categorise, cannot handle the diversity of history, Doctorow's text suggests that a more suitable, and indeed ethical, curational mode is the blind narrative, a strategy employed by the novel itself. This style of writing refuses to view itself as definitive and totalising and weaves through time without exact route. As such, it leaves its account open to addendum and complication by refusing to submit the past to a final ordering, and thereby acts as a balm for the threat of information overload instead of buckling under its weight.

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, the subject of Chapter Four, thematises the digital archive more explicitly than the preceding novels. Through its formal qualities and its narrative content, the novel offers a stridently Foucauldian critique of the database as a technique of subjection. Manuel DeLanda summarises Foucault's thinking on police and medical records as surveillance technologies, which, he argues, intensify with the primacy of digital records: 'It is not a matter of interiorized representations but of an external body of archives within which we are caught and that

compulsorily fabricate an objective identity for us.'[95] Just as *Goon Squad* shears its characters of agency through what I define as its database form, within the narrative itself the digital archive stages the subject's capture by institutional structures. As the novel hints, this move relies on an acculturated belief in data as the dominant stuff of the self so that, once someone's information has been captured within their databases, institutions possess that person in a seemingly elemental sense. Against database surveillance, its persistent mapping of human geography, the novel advocates for the necessity of silence and of gaps for creative thinking. *Goon Squad* undermines the notion that the simplistic grammar of digital data can legitimately capture human subjectivity and advises a return to material collection. Objects, the novel implies, provide an inscrutable and perishable memory bank, a location where the owner's biography and personality can hide within hieroglyphics that decompose over time. As such, the novel suggests that material collections undercut the clarity of data and the theft of personal information through which database surveillance operates.

Doctorow's and Egan's novels both warn of possible dangers presented by digital technologies and archival structures. These threats of information overload and database surveillance, they suggest, can also be neutered through the creative application of alternative curational methods that either accommodate the wellspring of data or obscure the ever-penetrating lens of panoptic structures. These novels, then, instead of recommending the wholesale abandonment of self-archiving, propose specific modes of participation in response to the particularities of contemporary digitised life.

A series of common tropes can be traced throughout all of the chapters, and I will conclude this introduction with a discussion of two of them: vision and domesticity. A curious similitude binds Auster's, Hustvedt's, and Doctorow's novels: they all orientate the archive in relation to blindness. In Auster's text, archiving provides a means of making seeable the traumatic event that initially could not be witnessed or understood, while Hustvedt's and Doctorow's novels are narrated by blind men, their

---

[95] Manuel DeLanda, 'The Archive Before and After Foucault', in *Information is Alive*, ed. by Joke Brouwer, Arjen Mulder, and Susan Charlton (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003), pp. 8-13 (p. 12).

diminished eyes accenting their curational styles. Theories of the archive frequently meditate on its visual qualities. Esther Leslie notes that Walter Benjamin considered collecting as a kind of telescope, a means of 'revisioning' the past, 'seeing more closely and seeing anew.'[96] Meanwhile, Krzysztof Pomian argues that the collection renders the invisible—the distant or the conceptual—present and visible.[97] The texts in this dissertation show the archive to light up hidden details or information while, at the same time, critiquing the limits of visual knowledge. The archive, in Auster's and Hustvedt's novels, functions as a corrective for the eye's failure to see the moment of trauma or the internal self. The blind narrational style employed by Doctorow purposefully refuses visual knowledge, finding in the absence of its verification a strategy for archiving that repudiates the fantasy of total knowledge. Egan's *Goon Squad*, although it does not consider blindness as such, does structure its analysis towards undermining the burgeoning surveillance apparatus of the database. It advocates the opacity of material collection as a form of resistance, arguing that, unlike fields of data, which we have imbued with a false clarity, objects cannot be easily inspected and read by outside sources. If the archive can illuminate, Egan also recovers in it a strategy to hide.

Derrida argues that the archive always dwells under 'house arrest,' and the novels analysed in this dissertation similarly organise their personal archives around the health or decline of the domestic space.[98] Daniel Miller and Peter Schwenger both point out that the interior design of a home crystallises the personality of its owner, giving shape to the subject who organises it.[99] Jean-François Lyotard, however, situates the home and the archive at cross-purposes. The *domus*, his figure of the ideal family home, forms an idyll where memory, left uninscribed, disseminates through narratives, gestures, and routines.[100] The city, or megalopolis, uproots this family haven, while the

---

[96] Esther Leslie, 'Telescoping the Microscopic Object: Benjamin the Collector', in *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Alex Coles (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), pp. 58-91 (p. 59).

[97] Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, trans. by Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 24-5.

[98] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 10.

[99] Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p. 2; Peter Schwenger, 'Outside the Interior', *English Studies in Canada*, 31.1 (2007), 1-9 (p. 2).

[100] Jean-François Lyotard, '*Domus* and the Megalopolis', in *The Inhuman*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 191-204 (p. 193).

public archive it brings with it denudes memory, managing the past by transcribing it.[101] For Lyotard, then, the arrival of the archive signals the end of organic memory and the vibrancy of the *domus*. These theories, taken together, establish a dialectic between the archive as home-producing and home-destroying, one which recurs across in this dissertation. Setting his novel after the housing crash, Auster establishes the archive as a temporary memory site when the home can no longer be relied upon for stability. Egan, in a digital moment when intimacy spirals more and more outside of the physically proximate, reinstates the domestic archive, although, like Auster, she does so as a purposefully temporary location. Whereas in Hustvedt's novel, the collection provides a means of ordering the house and the self, Doctorow reveals the hazard it can bring to both, killing the brothers while dismantling their mansion. These novels suggest that, at a time when the stability of the home is under threat—by globalisation, by the housing crisis, by digitisation—the archive might form an alternative anchor for the subject and its memories. At the same time, they contemplate the purpose of a site that fixes the subject in space, troubling its ability to adapt over time.

The presentation of the archive in these novels as both a pernicious and a productive source for home-making overlaps with their treatment of the archive as a technology of self. Novels of the contemporary American milieu vouch that turning towards the archive can produce an array of subjective effects, shoring up or endangering the self, integrating or overloading it, revealing, hiding, or even destroying it. In their analyses, these novels acknowledge the critical role that the personal archive plays in fashioning the contemporary self, on and off digital platforms. They offer up a catalogue of warnings and recommendations for self-curation, and it is the project of this study, in the pages that follow, to decode their counsel.

---

[101] Ibid., pp. 193-94.

Archiving Trauma and Financial Collapse
in Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*

In a 2008 article, Paul Reyes documents his time working with his father's 'trashing out' crew in Florida, hired to empty vast numbers of houses foreclosed during the recent 'credit crunch'. Reyes approaches these homes as texts to be deciphered, attempting to decode from their often-decrepit interiors the stories of the evicted:

> I begin to pick, sweating nearly every item we throw away, creeping among gadgets and notes and utility bills and photographs in order to decipher who lived there and how they lost it, a life partially revealed by stuff marinating in a fetid stillness. It is a guilt-ridden literary forensics, because to confront the junk is to confront the individuality being purged from a place.[102]

In each case, the owner's biography fills up their objects even as they lose possession of them, abandon them, even disavow them: one man refuses help retaining any of his possessions, calling that stuff—pictures and letters—'trash.'[103] Paul Auster's *Sunset Park* begins in the same Florida wasteland, its protagonist Miles employed in the same 'trashing out' profession, forming a photographic archive of the objects he encounters. Auster's novel is similarly concerned with the status of the object as a carrier for the self at a time when things, the physical structures that house them, and the financial structures that enable their accumulation, have all become vulnerable. It casts the significance of collecting as a process of memorialisation rather than simply the accretion of objects themselves, and explores archival forms that self-consciously eschew the material world and challenge consumer capitalism. Writing just before the publication of *Sunset Park*, Jonathan Boulter argues that 'Auster's late novels figure the archive as the central *site*, or *affect*, where loss is catalogued and (possibly) metabolized.'[104] *Sunset Park* returns to this central theme, highlighting the significance of the archive to shelter objects, to make sense of the past, and to address unsettling events in a traumatic moment when the familiar milieu of the home has been ravaged.

Within the realities of the financial crisis, Auster discovers a historical setting in which his long-term interest in the tropes of the Freudian *uncanny* play themselves out. Freud defines the unsettling feeling of uncanniness as the coincidence of the homely

---

[102] Paul Reyes, 'Bleak Houses: Digging Through the Ruins of the Mortgage Crisis', *Harper's Magazine*, October 2008, pp. 31-45 (p. 31).
[103] Ibid., p. 44.
[104] Boulter, p. 23. Emphasis in original.

(*heimlich*) and the unhomely (*unheimlich*), flickers of familiarity in the unfamiliar, the haunted house providing its most literal embodiment. Freud decides: 'this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed.'[105] The uncanny return of the repressed, in Freud's essay, constellates around a series of figures that recur in *Sunset Park*: eyes, coincidence, houses, the unhomely, and the return home. Auster explicitly calls upon Freud's uncanny in 'The Invention of Solitude' to explain the feeling of unhomeliness that results from serendipitous occurrences. These moments of unexplainable coincidence, he suggests, momentarily expel us from habituated perception, hinting at a latent worldly order while concealing its workings.[106] Scott Dimovitz argues that this early engagement with the uncanny contours Auster's treatment of chance in the novel *Leviathan*, in which the uncanny also facilitates viewing subjectivity as neither wholly unified nor fully decentred.[107] Roberta Rubenstein, likewise, calls Freud's essay 'an influential intertext' to Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, in whose tripartite structure she sees a process of doubling and repetition emblematic of the uncanny.[108]

    Sunset Park contains a surfeit of uncanny symbols, with its emphasis on broken-down homes and returning home from exile, on lustrous eyes and eyes that fail to see, and on eruptions of contingency and disaster. The novel also contemplates an uncanny replacement instrumental to the functioning of capitalism: the replacement of the subject by its objects. Freud's essay calls upon the writing of Ernst Jentsch, who argues that the uncanny arises in ambiguous moments when inanimate objects appear animate and

---

[105] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 148.

[106] Freud links the feeling of uncanniness surrounding coincidence to its seeming justification of a belief in providence that has been culturally surpassed but not fully overcome psychologically. See Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 154. Auster writes: 'Freud has described such experiences as "uncanny," or *unheimlich*—the opposite of *heimlich*, which means "familiar," "native," "belonging to the home." The implication, therefore, is that we are thrust out from the protective shell of our habitual perceptions, as though we were suddenly outside ourselves, adrift in a world we do not understand.' Paul Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude', in *Collected Prose: Autobiographical Writings, True Stories, Critical Essays, Prefaces and Collaborations with Artists* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), pp. 1-150 (p. 126).

[107] Scott Dimovitz, 'Portraits in Absentia: Repetition Compulsion and the Postmodern Uncanny in Paul Auster's *Leviathan*', *Studies in the Novel*, 40.4 (Winter 2008), 447-64 (pp. 456, 447-48).

[108] Roberta Rubenstein, 'Doubling, Intertextuality, and the Postmodern Uncanny: Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 9.3 (1998), 245-62 (p. 246).

animate beings appear object-like.[109] Bill Brown, quoting Marx and reflecting on Jentsch, notes, 'the commodity form itself depends on "the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things"'.[110] The novel literalises this subject-object replacement when Miles convinces the sisters of his underage lover, Pilar, to allow her to move in with him by gifting them luxury objects from his 'trashing out' job: 'In other words, Pilar now lives with him because he bribed the family. He bought her.'[111] *Sunset Park* ponders the uncanny slippage between subject and object attendant to capitalism, its melancholic moorings made apparent when owners are no longer there to speak for themselves, their possessions forced to stand in for the evicted and the dead. This subject-object confusion surfaces most readily in the possessions that litter the foreclosed houses, which Miles decides to photograph and archive. Scattered amongst the uncanny, abandoned structures, objects no longer arrange the memory of their owners into a meaningful system. Miles, I argue, turns his camera on them to re-imbue the crumbling structures and crumbling lives with order while commemorating the traumas of the financial crisis that might otherwise go unseen.

The archive, as Boulter suggests in Auster's other recent novels, is predominantly invoked in order to contend with trauma.[112] If Miles's photographic archive sheds light on the financial collapse, so too does it provide a means of

---

[109] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 135.

[110] Brown argues that Jentsch's theory of the uncanny, the slippage of subject into object is the content of repression in American society due to its historical participation in, and its uncertain legal justification of, the slave trade, which treated humans as commodities. Bill Brown, 'Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny', *Critical Inquiry* 32.2 (2006), 175-207 (p. 180). The replacement of the subject by its objects is, perhaps, most evident in the functioning of conspicuous consumption, which Jean Baudrillard expands upon in *The Consumer Society*. In the new consumer environment, overrun by objects, Baudrillard suggests that consumers arrange commodities around themselves to conjure happiness by chance: '"Affluence" is, in effect, merely the accumulation of the *signs* of happiness.' Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 31.

[111] Paul Auster, *Sunset Park* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 13. Further page references will appear within the text.

[112] In detailing the redemptive powers of the archive, I employ Dominick LaCapra's concept of 'working-through'. Boulter employs the Freudian scheme of 'mourning' and 'melancholia' to make a comparable argument about the possibility for overcoming trauma through the archive in Auster's fiction. Whereas Boulter employs these terms in order to show how, in many ways, successful mourning in Auster's fiction can never wholly be achieved, that assumption is already woven into LaCapra's theory. For LaCapra, the past event still exerts a force after it has been 'worked through', repeating itself in the actions and the thoughts of the survivor. The ways that LaCapra measures working-through and describes its process, which I detail in the essay, provide a richer template to compare with Miles's and Ellen's archival liaisons.

addressing his own personal trauma, his stepbrother's death, for which he feels an ambiguous sense of responsibility. Within *Sunset Park*, all traumas, personal and communal, create an uncanny milieu, spoiling the previous security and familiarity of the home, and the housing crisis is paradigmatic of this trope. Whereas the crisis evicts people from their homes, Miles's personal trauma sours his relationship with his father, Morris, and stepmother, Willa, and he devotes himself to a life of exile. In the novel, personal traumas, like Miles's, contain the added uncanny element of compromised eyes: Freud links the fear of losing one's eyes to the repressed anxiety over castration.[113] Miles's photographic archive, when reviewed alongside the archive of his Brooklyn squat-mate Ellen, approaches the traumatic event through the visual mode. Trauma, I argue, threatens the eyes both because the accident cannot be viewed in the moment that it occurs and because, in causing the victim to withdraw into themselves, it complicates the possibility of face-to-face encounters. The archive, for both Ellen and Miles, redeems the eyes, galvanising a new understanding of the past and the reinvigoration of communal life.

The archive, I argue, forms a temporary home, a haven in which to encounter and come to terms with the traumatic past, to re-familiarise uncanny surroundings and to heal corrupted eyes. Walter Benjamin, in his essay on book collecting, compares the collector's library to 'one of his dwellings, with books as the building stones'.[114] While here the collector takes refuge in his objects, the temporal logic of *Sunset Park* undoes the archive's stability. Rita Felski notes a pervasive 'vocabulary of anti-home' within theoretical writing on modernity, questioning the ethics of maintaining a stable and enclosed milieu, particularly in a post-World War II historical era.[115] The financial crisis, by throwing the house into crisis, registers this critique and necessitates finding flexible sites to use as anchors of the self, the archive providing one possibility. Threatened by change and marked by death, the collection's sanctuary can exist only temporarily. In a financial-collapse era of unpredictable change, where the future seems especially

---

[113] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 140

[114] Benjamin, 'Unpacking', p. 67.

[115] Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), p. 86.

opaque, *Sunset Park* considers the prudence of conceptualising subjectivity as an archival form. The artists Renzo and Mary-Lee, each embodying the archive of their past works, move anxiously from project to project, wary of the future but unmoored from the past and its various disasters. Their talent for changing roles, evinced by their archive of work, reaches fulfilment in the young Pilar, who is figured both as the uncanny return of others' squandered hopes and an embodied archive with camera-like eyes. Pilar poses two potential modes of struggling through an era of persistent crisis: to form relationships only for them to traumatically crumble, or to remain inaccessible to others and ricochet from performance to performance. The novel, then, figures archival malleability as the only way to contend with the traumatic temporality of the contemporary moment while simultaneously admitting and revealing its melancholy core.

Broken Homes and the Terrain of Trauma

Within the contemporary environment of *Sunset Park*, the home and the family find themselves in constant peril. The endangerment of the home coalesces most overtly around the representation of the financial crisis, with Miles hired to empty out foreclosed residences, many of which have been vandalised by their former owners. These dilapidated and vacant structures, which index the home's degradation materially, mirror the novel's many broken families. Moments of trauma within the novel, both personal and collective, throw the domestic unit into crisis and demand either re-establishing an orderly home-space or learning to do without the comforts of familiarity. The novel's focus on the broad crisis of the home after the housing crisis, emphasises the question: if the home stands as a basic site of belonging, what happens when we are forced to abandon it? With the family and the house in ruins, *Sunset Park* turns to the archive as site of temporary stability, where the self can be contemplated and, more specifically, the past can be mourned.

There has been some debate about Auster's representation of the domestic space. Mark Brown cites family as a primary, albeit unstable, locus for the forging of self.[116] In *The New York Trilogy*, for instance, Brown identifies two '[s]ites of familial calm and stability, [...] the apartment of 'Paul Auster' and his wife 'Siri', [which] operate as oases of hope for alienated characters.'[117] Writing more generally about his early oeuvre, however, Charles Baxter identifies pessimism about the capacity for identity-formation to occur around the family unit, arguing that, for Auster, 'family is more a source of *loss* of identity.'[118] Both the forging of the domestic sphere and its loss are themes common to Auster's work. Richard Patteson, reflecting on Baxter's article, notes that 'homelessness goes hand in hand with the unraveling of identity in several of his most important works, including *The New York Trilogy*, *Moon Palace*, and *Timbuktu*.'[119] This precarious positioning of the self in relation to the home, the loss of the external space becoming the loss of interior identity, is frequently seen as indicative of Auster's deconstruction of the idea of the home. Richard Swope argues that *The Trilogy* 'critiques an entire cultural logic whose production of space hinges on its very notion of "home."'[120] Swope aligns his own argument with Steven Alford's suggestion that the belief in home as a specific place is an 'original misunderstanding' possessed by some of the characters in *The Trilogy*.[121] Theirs is a failure to identify home as 'an anchoring point, but one whose spatial location depends on the other of "awayness" (and its spatial location, like our selfhood, may change through time without losing its character as "home").'[122] For Alford, the notion of home as a moveable site facilitates the healthy adaptation and evolution of identity that permits its continuation across time.

---

[116] Mark Brown, *Paul Auster* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 2-3.
[117] Ibid., p. 62.
[118] Charles Baxter, 'The Bureau of Missing Persons: Notes on Paul Auster's Fiction', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 14.1 (Spring 1994), 40-43 (p. 41). Emphasis in original.
[119] Richard Patteson, 'The Teller's Tale: Text and Paratext in Paul Auster's *Oracle Night*', *Critique*, 49.2 (2008), 115-28 (p. 123).
[120] Richard Swope, 'Supposing a Place: The Detecting Subject in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*', Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture, 2.3 (Summer 2002) <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/023/swope.htm> [accessed 22 March 2011].
[121] Steven Alford, 'Spaced-Out: Signification and Space in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*', *Contemporary Literature*, 36.4 (1995), 613-32 (p. 629).
[122] Ibid., p. 624.

In *Sunset Park*, the domestic sphere—the house and the family—is atomised and uncontained. The novel's various families are almost all fractured by divorce, death, or spatial dislocation, breaks that for the most part predate the financial collapse. Miles's parents are divorced, his mother living in California and his father in New York, while he nomadically wanders the United States. The deaths of her first-husband and, later, her son have demolished Willa's family, and Pilar's is similarly divided. After her parents' deaths, Pilar leaves the family house to live with Miles while her sister's husband lives in danger as a soldier serving in Iraq. Angela, another of her sisters, threatens to turn Miles into the police for his illegal relationship with the underage Pilar when he refuses to steal more objects for her from his 'trashing out' job. Of Morris's friends, Renzo has two failed marriages behind him, while Marty and Nina suffer the suicide of their daughter. Miles dooms Willa and Morris's union because it is 'an artificial family, a constructed family' (21). Willa's now-dead son Bobby retained his birthfather's surname, making him, to Miles, 'both a brother and not a brother, both a son and not a son, both a friend and a foe', in other words a definitively uncanny set of relations (22). When stranded on a rural highway, Miles pushes Bobby into the road where he is struck by a car and killed. This accident, which ultimately sends Miles into self-imposed exile, registers as an assault on their unsteadily built family. It sits as one of the novel's two primary traumatic events, the other—Ellen's pregnancy by a sixteen-year-old and her subsequent abortion and suicide attempt—likewise confuses her relationship with her parents and terminates the advent of a potential family that would have arrived too soon. Moreover, the financial crisis becomes explicitly responsible for the separations of two families. Mary-Lee's third husband must reside on the West coast, where he teaches film, because the economic climate has undone the independent movie market in which he used to participate (193). Meanwhile, Alice cannot rely on her parents for financial help, because they are 'living on their Social Security checks and clipping coupons out of the newspaper in a perpetual hunt for bargains, sales, gimmicks [...]' (89).

In *Sunset Park*, the financial crisis shares with the personal wounds suffered by Miles and Ellen comparable traumatic symptoms and strategies for renewal: it catalyses the breakdown of the home and instils the condition of silence in its victims, both of

which are addressed, I shall argue, through a process of archiving. Paul Crosthwaite suggests that, according to Jacques Lacan's definition, financial crises qualify as traumas, horrifying and inconceivable because they are at once built into the human-made capitalist infrastructure yet operate outside of human control. Financial crises, he argues, erupt from 'a "third nature" that we have constructed but that we cannot touch, see, master, or, frequently, comprehend.'[123] Crosthwaite notes, however, that financial crises are unique, and particularly difficult to represent symbolically, because they lack overt physical destruction, 'being disasters in which no *thing* is destroyed.'[124] Dominick LaCapra differentiates between structural trauma, which is built into the process of subject-formation, and historical trauma, which results from a particular occurrence of violent loss. While the financial crisis would, alongside other epochal events, qualify as a historical trauma, LaCapra notes the tendency to think of major events as structural traumas proper to an entire people or community. Indeed, the eventless-ness of financial crises, theorised by Crosthwaite, does strain this rubric, but LaCapra argues that while it is tempting to think of large-scale historical traumas as structural to the self's organisation, they 'might instead be seen as posing the problematic question of identity and as calling for more critical ways of coming to terms with both their legacy and problems such as absence and loss.'[125]

Within *Sunset Park*, the financial crisis, as a historical trauma, broadly threatens familiar orientations of the self and demands the re-examination of social structures that surround it. Alice, one of Miles's squat-mates, provides an extended analysis of trauma through her commentary on the film *The Best Years of Our Lives*, which portrays the collapse of social conventions when soldiers returned from World War II. Her dissertation argues 'that the traditional rules of conduct between men and women were destroyed on the battlefields and the home front, and once the war was over, American life had to be reinvented' (96). In the aftermath of the War, soldiers 'have lost their appetite for domesticity, their feel for home' (98). In this newly strange setting, the

---

[123] Paul Crosthwaite, 'Is a Financial Crisis a Trauma?', *Cultural Critique*, 82 (2012), 34-67 (p. 47).
[124] Ibid., p. 50. Emphasis in original.
[125] Dominick LaCapra, 'Trauma, Absence, Loss', *Critical Inquiry*, 25.4 (1999), 696-727 (p. 724).

configuration of relationships needs to be re-imagined, the traditional structures of domesticity having become unfamiliar. While the return from combat has transformed the national home uncannily into alien terrain, particular wartime ordeals render the soldiers traumatically speechless. Alice recognises this condition in her own grandfather, who, she notes, 'speaks only in the foggiest generalities, it simply isn't possible for him to talk about those years' (103). The struggle to communicate after being wounded repeats in Miles and Ellen. Alice later notices that Miles 'is incapable of making small talk, and refuses to share his secrets with anyone', indicating 'that he walks around with an inner wound that will never heal' (236). Within *Sunset Park* maturity comes from a process of wounding. Miles, as a child, observes as much in his reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*: 'until you are wounded in some way, you cannot become a man' (185). Alice construes age similarly, identifying Miles as a 'man' and her boyfriend Jake as a 'boy', discerning Miles's traumatised status—that he 'has been to war and has grown old'—even though she has no knowledge of his past or the death of his stepbrother (237-38).

Alice notes that silence seems distinctly absent from her contemporaries, specifically Bing and Jake, even if they are suffering the aftershocks of the financial crisis and struggling to establish a stable domestic space amid the financial crunch (104). Yet, the financial crisis does produce a voiceless population. Andrew Lawson notes, '*Sunset Park* charts a newly revealed landscape of class, where a precariously located middle class begin to sense their own economic vulnerability and structural affinity with the working class. But the poor are still not accurately seen, contextualized, or regarded for very long.'[126] Like the 'crash fiction' classified by Daniel Mattingly, *Sunset Park* demonstrates a sustained focus on the middle class at the expense of an in-depth portrayal and consideration of working-class struggles.[127] Rather than view this critical absence as a representational failure, I suggest instead that, when viewed alongside the

---

[126] Andrew Lawson, 'Foreclosure Stories: Neoliberal Suffering in the Great Recession', *Journal of American Studies*, 47.1 (2013), 49-68 (p. 61).

[127] Daniel Mattingly, 'Crash Fiction: American Literary Novels of the Global Financial Crisis', in *The Great Recession in Fiction, Film and Television: Twenty-First-Century Bust Culture*, ed. by Kirk Boyle and Daniel Mrozowski (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013), pp. 95-112 (p. 109).

novel's own meditations on the silencing effects of trauma, the evicted cannot appear to narrate their despair precisely because they are the most violently affected by the market downturn. Although they go unrepresented within the novel, their stories are approached through their abandoned objects. Miles photographs the object remains of the dispossessed to access and to capture their stories when they are not themselves present to speak them. The absence of the working class from Auster's novel can be read as highlighting their unspeakable, traumatic position following the financial collapse, their stories approachable not through narrative language but the visual impact of their objects.

As in Alice's reading of the post-World War landscape, the financial collapse undoes the home's stability and produces the effect of traumatised silence. The collapse of the previous social order manifests itself not only in the atomisation of the family but similarly in the literal destruction of the home, and we shall see that Miles's archive performs the work of saving their stories of loss and lending some cohesion to the destroyed homes. The houses that Miles is hired to empty are sites of abjection, ravaged by their previous owners out of frustration, and even when they are left in pristine condition they nevertheless register an uncanny effect: 'even if he is not always gripped by revulsion when he enters a house, he never opens a door without a feeling of dread' (4). David Harvey insists that, within a chaotic postmodern culture of ceaseless innovation, 'The home becomes a private museum to guard against the ravages of time-space compression.'[128] Rita Felski in turn argues that, filled with mementos and memories, the home 'in its very familiarity becomes a symbolic extension and confirmation of the self.'[129] Pilar leaves the family house following her parents' deaths for precisely this reason, because it 'is filled with too many memories of her mother and father' (10). Indeed, it is the very feeling that domestic objects bear evidence of their owners' lives that brings Miles to document the foreclosed homes he trashes out.

---

[128] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Social Change* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 292.
[129] Felski, p. 88.

The houses that Miles encounters, however, have often been vandalised by their owners, who frequently deface the objects evocative of their former lives. Miles is struck, upon entering, 'by the disarray and the filth, the neglect' (4). He finds everything 'from the open taps of sinks and bathtubs overflowing with water to sledge-hammered, smashed-in walls or walls covered with obscene graffiti or walls pocked with bullet holes' (4). The homes Miles trashes-out lack any semblance of arrangement, their destitution and abjection denoting the demolition of familiarity instigated by the financial crash. Gillian Whiteley describes waste as 'the equivalent of Bataille's *spittle*. It offends our desire to categorise and classify the world which, of course, is one strategy for keeping the world under control.'[130] Overflowing with water, their walls levelled, the foreclosed homes do not organise what they are meant to house, resonating explicitly with Julia Kristeva's definition of the abject as that which 'does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'[131] '[T]he piles of shit deposited on the living room floor', emblematic of the Kristevean abject, stress both the ruination of these homes and their resistance to order (4). As the rubble of the financial crisis, they fittingly embody Tim Edensor's description of the ruin as a site of 'disorder and hybridity' that can both house melancholy and energise 'new forms, orderings and aesthetics'.[132] Thus we see in the ruined, *unheimlich* houses an echo of the atomisation of the family unit. Both domestic space and filial structure no longer function to contain the family and its possessions. The aftershocks of financial collapse, then, require new structures for belonging, including the Brooklyn squat that Bing, Miles, Ellen, and Alice inhabit.

Juxtaposed against these visions of uncontrolled dispersal is what Alison Kelly terms the novel's 'reiterative itemization', its many lists, archives, encyclopaedias, filmographies, and '[n]umerous further catalogues'.[133] These archival forms are all

---

[130] Gillian Whiteley, *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 26-27.
[131] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.
[132] Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 15.
[133] Alison Kelly, 'Abandoned objects: Paul Auster's new squatters', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 November 2010, p. 19.

technologies of containment and categorisation, beginning where the house and the family has failed, organising and shielding the subject in the wake of the domestic crisis. Most obvious of these catalogues is Miles's self-termed archive of photographs taken of objects left behind in the houses he is hired to empty:

> Each house is a story of failure—of bankruptcy and default, of debt and foreclosure—and he has taken it upon himself to document the last, lingering traces of those scattered lives in order to prove that the vanished families were once here, that the ghosts of people he will never see and never know are still present in the discarded things strewn about their empty houses. (3)

Whereas the evicted 'have all fled in haste, in shame, in confusion,' Miles's photographs denote the narratives of collapse hidden in the scenes left behind (3). I want to suggest that Miles's archive comes about as a response to the destruction of the home, instituting order where the house is now impotent to control its contents.

Susan Sontag argues that, emerging during the ascendency of the nuclear family, the family photo album displays a larger, extended domestic unit 'to memorialize, to restate symbolically, the imperilled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life.'[134] Photographs, for Sontag, provide the last breath of extended family cohesion, struggling to display broad familial intimacy against its historical loss. Miles's archive acts as a family album in absentia, resisting the physical destruction of the domestic space by photographing and memorialising its remains. The archive is by its very definition a technology of containment and categorisation. Paul Voss and Marta Werner note that an archive 'confers order on its contents and creates a system whereby an official record of the past may be preserved and transmitted intact.'[135] Framing and preserving objects within the borders of the photograph and the archive, Miles works towards restoring the boundaries of the ruined houses he encounters in Florida, to provide the sense of order that has been lost in the housing crisis. While he sees no underlying purpose to this venture, Miles's impetus to photograph, his sense that a story can found within the objects left behind, hints that he is, however inadequately, trying to preserve and display the traumatic story of the financial collapse that its victims cannot speak themselves.

---

[134] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York and London: Anchor Books, 1989 [1977]), p. 9.
[135] Paul Voss and Marta Werner, 'Toward a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 32.1 (Spring 1999), i-viii (p. i).

Miles's archive, in addition to addressing these collapsed homes of the financial crisis, also psychologically contends with the destruction of his own family life. Years after the death of his stepbrother, Miles exiles himself from family after overhearing his father and stepmother ruminate over his cold, unfeeling demeanour.[136] Miles leaves home due to the belief that he has corrupted his family unit, and he produces his archive in Florida when a sense of being at home is not possible, where 'his apartment is a shabby little nothing of a place' (10). Upon his move, Miles likewise thinks of his stay in Brooklyn 'as a six-month prison sentence' from Pilar who remains in Florida, and there he produces his second archive, photographing the Greenwood Cemetery 'to forget that he is a prisoner serving out his time in a dreary part of Brooklyn' (121, 135). Thus we see the personal archive arise out of a need left bare by the destruction of the home, its ruination elicited by communal and personal traumas alike. In the next section I address the personal archive as a means of confronting trauma, of rebuilding the home by, crucially, healing the eyes of the traumatised.

Archival Working-Through

Miles's archive provides one means of buttressing the crumbling homes of the financial crisis, offering a platform to remember and order their various objects. The photographs, however, must also be treated as a response to Miles's own traumatic past and the relinquishment of home that it catalysed. I argue that the archive, by mirroring the repetitive temporality of trauma, presents a mechanism for addressing the traumatic past. In her interpretation of *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Alice notes that after years of battle the returned soldiers 'have been cut off from their civilian past, crippled, *trapped in nightmare repetitions of their experiences*, and the women they left behind have become strangers to them' (98, my emphasis). The repetition of wartime events is indicative of the Freudian repetition compulsion, the unconscious drive to reenact a

---

[136] Svetlana Boym suggests that exiles and immigrants fashion their residence according to a museum aesthetic in a display of diasporic survival. In *Sunset Park*, where Miles occupies the position of the self-exiled, this function of the now-defunct and untrustworthy home is transplanted onto the more flexible structure of the archive. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. 335-36.

traumatic event that cannot be integrated into memory. Cathy Caruth explains: 'the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will.'[137] The status of melancholic repetition, however, remains somewhat obscure in Freud's writings. LaCapra notes that melancholic attachment to the lost object appears, for Freud, to be both a necessary part of and an obstruction to mourning.[138] For Freud, the repressed past can be accessed, and thus dealt with, by providing the repetition compulsion 'some sovereignty' in the space of psychoanalysis, allowing its expression 'to reveal to us everything in the way of pathogenic drives that have hidden themselves away in the patient's psyche.'[139] LaCapra develops Freud's concept of 'working-through' trauma by situating 'acting-out'—that is, compulsive repetition—as an inseparable part of the process of social rejuvenation that often never ceases to exert itself.

LaCapra defines his process of 'working-through' against the tendency to see only two results from traumatic repetition: achieving total mastery over the event, thereby surpassing and even forgetting it, or remaining ceaselessly stuck amongst the damaging repetition compulsion. Against this binary, LaCapra posits a system of 'working-through' in which 'acting-out' is often never fully exceeded: 'Possession by the past may never be fully overcome or transcended, and working-through may at best enable some distance or critical perspective that is acquired with extreme difficulty and not achieved once and for all.'[140] LaCapra argues that mourning, as one form of working-through, functions through habituated and controlled repetition:

> In line with Freud's concepts, one might further suggest that mourning be seen not simply as individual or quasi-transcendental grieving but as a homeopathic socialization or ritualization of the repetition compulsion that attempts to turn it against the death drive and to counteract compulsiveness—especially the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes of violence—by re-petitioning in ways that allow for a measure of critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal.[141]

---

[137] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 2.

[138] Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 213.

[139] Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 31-42 (p. 40).

[140] LaCapra, 'Trauma', p. 717.

[141] Ibid., p. 713.

Rather than offering total redemption and separation from the traumatic event, working-through facilitates the return to communal life and the evacuation of the traumatic event to a past historical moment. If, during melancholic attachment, the traumatic event still feels bound up with the present moment, working-through signals its consignment to the past even if it continues to exert pressure on the subject. This form of working-through is consistent with the transformations undergone by Miles and Ellen. Debra Shostak, employing LaCapra's schema, argues that many of Auster's novels reveal an engagement with narrating and overcoming trauma, the narratives structured 'according to the psychoanalytic pattern of acting-out and working-through associated with the process of mourning.'[142] Shostak lists *The Red Notebook*'s collection of 'true stories' as one instance in which an Auster character attempts to analyse and control trauma after its occurrence.[143] The collection, I suggest, becomes the predominant site of traumatic working-through in *Sunset Park*, Miles's and Ellen's archives facilitating a cathartic cycle of repetition.

Both Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida highlight the repetitious temporality of the archive. Baudrillard affiliates the collection with '"habitual" patterns', which, by breaking time into repeatable and discontinuous routines, 'dispel the anxiety-provoking aspect of the temporal continuum and of the absolute singularity of events.'[144] By imbuing sequences of objects with historical resonances, the collector can repeatedly replay the past and, thereby, achieve mastery over time's seemingly inexorable forward movement. Derrida argues that, housed according to a governing principle, the archive is premised on the condition of repetition and remembrance. Derrida couches his exploration in Freudian theory, linking the archive with the repetition compulsion, which, he contends, condemns the archive to eventual destruction.[145] Herman Rapaport argues that, in Derrida's account, the archive repeats the traumatic event 'in such a way

---

[142] Shostak focuses on Auster's work up until the novel *The Brooklyn Follies* (2006) in her overview. Debra Shostak, 'In the Country of Missing Persons: Paul Auster's Narratives of Trauma', *Studies in the Novel*, 41.1 (2009), 66-87 (p. 66).
[143] Ibid., p. 68.
[144] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 100.
[145] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 14.

that the trauma can be mastered.'[146] The archive permits the articulation of trauma but, because it is doomed to collapse, Rapaport concludes that it also ensures the eventual erasure of that traumatic reenactment. I explore Baudrillard's and Derrida's theories at length in Chapters Two and Three, respectively. Here, however, I want to emphasise their shared conceptualisation of the archive as an arena where the past is self-consciously repeated and reorganised to contend with its latent anxieties. As such, I propose that the archive can provide a theatre for working-through the traumatic past through its considered and staged reenactments.

Sunset Park positions the archive's rehabilitative potential in its relationship to vision. The novel presents a sustained focus on eyes—Ellen's lustful eyes, Angela's contemptuous eyes, Pilar's unblinking eyes, Herb Score's injured eye—evoking the uncanny fear of losing eyes that Freud links to the anxiety over castration. This threat to the eye is literalised in Score's and Miles's grandfather's devastating eye injuries. Like Mark 'the Bird' Fidrych, whose baseball career ends 'in the blink of an eye' (43), Herb Score's career is unpredictably cut short by a baseball that strikes his eye (32). While Score's vision does return, his baseball career never recovers. The damage done to the eye at the moment of trauma corresponds to the belated temporality of the traumatic event. Caruth argues that the event of trauma is never fully discernible at the moment of its sudden occurrence but can only be known through its subsequent reenactments.[147] As a theatre for traumatic repetition, the archive permits a form of working-through precisely because it allows the subject to engage with, and thus to come to terms with, that which was previously hidden. In *Sunset Park*, the moment of trauma, we shall see, throws the sufferer's relationship to vision into disarray, and the archive provides for both Miles and Ellen a means of retraining and stabilising their degraded eyes. In restaging their traumatic symptoms, the archive, as LaCapra writes of working-through, allows them to achieve a new distance from their past.

---

[146] Herman Rapaport, *Later Derrida: Reading the Recent Work* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 89.

[147] Caruth cites Jean Laplanche's outline of the temporality of trauma, writing that trauma is 'an event that [...] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.' Caruth, p. 4.

Miles's photographic archives—first, of the material residue of the financial crash and, later, of gravestones in the Brooklyn cemetery—both respond to his uncertain involvement in his half-brother's death and the ensuing unrest within his family. The novel invests Bobby's death and Miles's implication in it with an enveloping blindness. Stranded on a country road, the two boys get into an adolescent spat that ends with Miles's shoving his stepbrother into the road where he is hit by a passing car. At the moment when Miles pushes his stepbrother, he is blind to the approaching car: it 'was suddenly visible after rounding a sharp curve at fifty miles an hour, visible only when it was already too late to prevent his brother from being hit' (25). Miles's involvement in the crash and his inability to witness it with any certainty comprise the traumatic hold that the event has over him: 'The entire story of his life hinges on what happened that day in the Berkshires, and he still has no grasp of the truth, he still can't be certain if he is guilty of a crime or not' (18). Like the unfamiliar home front following the War and the ravaged Florida houses following the Crash, the traumatic event of Bobby's death registers as an assault on the family. The accident literally injures the family unit, but it also fractures the relationships between Miles, Willa, and Morris. Several years after the accident, Miles overhears his father and stepmother diagnosing his cold and shut-down demeanour: 'They were chopping him into pieces, dismembering him with the calm and efficient strokes of pathologists conducting a postmortem, talking about him as if they thought he was already dead' (29). This non-encounter, in which Miles remains out of sight, results in his decision to desert his parents and functions as the culmination of Miles's earlier trauma.

Miles's impetus to repeat the moment of trauma is observable in a variety of forms. Just before Bobby dies, he announces his intention to abandon the family: 'he was through with them and wouldn't be coming back' (24). It is precisely this decision, however, that Miles courts after hearing his parents discuss his detached introspection. Remaining out of contact with his parents for years, Miles performs the desires that his dead brother could never achieve. It is in the archive, however, where these repetitions surface most fervently. In his review of the novel, André Alexis observes that Miles's photos are 'variations on the moment of his own wounding', but he fails to explicate this

provocative observation at any length.[148] I argue that Miles's confrontation with trauma is enacted primarily in the mode of the visual, his wounds resulting from a failure to see and his archive in turn founded as a way to rehabilitate the gaze. Unable to witness the oncoming car or to know with any certainty his responsibility for Bobby's death, the accident throws Miles's vision into crisis. This crisis repeatedly produces encounters with asymmetrical gazes, the first of which is Miles's non-encounter with Morris and Willa. If Miles could not adequately observe the moment of Bobby's demise, he similarly cannot see Morris and Willa as they dissect his behaviour, and their failure to lock eyes facilitates what feels to Miles to be a personal attack. Miles decides, then, 'to disappear' because 'he didn't have the courage to face them again' (29). The novel is, in many ways, a story of learning again to 'face' people, to meet their gaze, and it is precisely the failure to do so that characterises Miles's depressed nomadism.

Throughout his photographic venture, Miles is, for various reasons, wary of being seen by others, repeating the asymmetry of vision that animates the non-encounter with his parents. He is cautious, for instance, of dropping Pilar off at school or showing her affection in public, fearing onlookers will alert the police of his illicit relationship. Of Angela, Pilar's sister, Miles admits, 'He doesn't like how she keeps looking at him, scrutinizing him with that odd combination of contempt and seductiveness in her eyes' (40). Miles is similarly suspicious of the brightness of the Florida sun, whose illumination he characterises as harsh and damaging: 'It is a Machiavellian sun in his opinion, a hypocritical sun, and the light it generates does not illuminate things but obscures them' (7). When he arrives in Brooklyn, Miles remains wary of Ellen's eyes, which betray her erotic interest: 'If only she wouldn't stare at him so much, he might be able to warm up to her a little, but her eyes have been on him ever since they sat down at the table' (128). Miles's desire to remain out of sight emerges most fully in the form of his ongoing engagement with Morris and Willa through the intermediary of Bing. Although he refuses to contact his family, Miles continues to receive updates on the

---

[148] André Alexis, 'Capturing the moment beautifully', *The Globe and Mail*, 12 November 2010 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/books/sunset-park-by-paul-auster/article1796347/> [accessed 5 February 2011].

goings-on in New York through his friend, keeping an eye on them but from an indiscernible distance. Bing, unbeknownst to Miles, also informs Morris and Willa of Miles's whereabouts. This set-up repeats the dynamics of the non-encounter that initially sent Miles into exile. In neither case do parents and child 'face' each other, and this becomes most explicit in Morris's journey to reconnect with his son, observing Miles from the safety of his car seat. This pattern recurs as Morris continues to track his movements through Bing's tips, 'always watching from a place where he couldn't be seen' (178).

Sunset Park makes explicit the optical dimension of Miles's archive. While Miles does not provide a coherent meaning behind his photographic venture, 'he senses that the things are calling out to him, speaking to him in the voices of the people who are no longer there, asking him to be looked at one last time before they are carted away' (5). While the objects beckon to be gazed upon, they also provide a conduit for Miles to revisit psychologically his parents from the distance of his exile. Krzysztof Pomian argues that, by displaying objects from distant places and times or by materialising intangible concepts, a collection's predominant function is to act as a conduit between the visible world and invisible world.[149] While in Pomian's account the collection can mediate contact with a distant setting through the transportation and curation of objects from that time and place, Miles's archive achieves a similar wormhole effect through items metaphorically linked to the home he left behind. Miles's archives significantly feature scenes of abandonment: 'There were the abandoned things down in Florida, and now he has stumbled upon the abandoned people of Brooklyn' (133). Just as he stays abreast of his parents' struggles through his informant, photographing abandoned objects functions as a stand-in and a preparation for actually contacting his parents. In this sense, Miles is photographing the ruins of his own family, the people abandoned when he ran away. Each picture addresses another thing deserted by owners who have, like Miles, 'fled in haste, in shame, in confusion' (3).

Attempting to make sites of familial abjection and abandonment visible, to restore order to destitute dwellings, Miles appears to be psychologically readdressing his

---

[149] Pomian, pp. 24-5.

own damaged family through these Florida substitutes. His project is, on the one hand, invested in rendering the usually occluded traumatic moment visible through its material remnants and in psychologically revisiting his distant parents through a material telescope. Yet, his photographic endeavour remains couched in an archival form that repeats the lopsided vision that trails his post-trauma psyche. Baudrillard conjoins sight and the archive when he suggests that what appeals to many collectors is the ability to fashion, and thereby to control absolutely, the collection's meaning. While human relations involve confrontation, objects, for Baudrillard, cannot resist the personal identifications projected onto them: 'you can look at an object without it looking back at you.'[150] Composing the blind archive, for Miles, becomes an attempt to regain control over the faculty of vision whose failure in the moment of crisis, the 'blind corner' around which the car appeared, produced his trauma. Thus, Miles's archive arises as a comfortable location where he can determine what he sees while evading the eyes of spectators.

In Miles's archive we witness an attempt to rehabilitate the gaze, thrown into crisis by a traumatic occurrence that could neither be seen nor known. This crisis unbalances his family and brings about a scalding moment of asymmetrical vision, an uneven optical configuration that recurs in the archive. While the archive functions as a repetition of this traumatic vision, it also enables other kinds of sight, the registration, for instance, of traumas of the financial crash and a removed point of view on the family he left behind. The repetitive process of archiving, I suggest, ultimately permits Miles to meet the gazes of others once more. The success of his archival project to memorialise abandoned objects and forgotten people, to recover lost vision, is made clear in the novel's conclusion. After assaulting a police officer, Miles, under the guidance of his father, determines not to run away again but 'to stand up and face the music,' to meet with Morris and 'hash it out in person, face to face' (306). This comment emphasises Miles's transformed vision and his renewed capacity to face others, to meet their eyes.

Ellen is the novel's other principal archivist, creating a collection of drawings through which she routes her sexual energy. An affair with an underage boy leads to an

---

[150] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 96.

abortion and suicide attempt, leaving Ellen depleted and uncertain of her future, keen for a return to her lost vibrancy but unsure of how to counter her psychological malaise: 'She wants her senses to be awake, to think thoughts that don't vanish the moment they occur to her, to feel alive in all the ways she once felt alive' (106). Like Miles, Ellen reawakens socially—that is, works through her trauma—through recourse to an archive, composing a series of drawings whose nature changes as she becomes increasingly in touch with her desires. Before eventually composing erotic sketches, Ellen's paintings, like Miles's pictures, focus on objects in isolation, attempting to 'evoke the mute wonder of pure thingness' (115). Ellen's turn away from objects and towards erotic scenes distinguishes her project from Miles's archive. Ellen insists on the creativity of her project because unlike photography, which 'leaves nothing to the imagination', drawing 'dwells exclusively in the realm of the imagination' (218). The status of the hand demonstrates another distinction between the two characters: whereas Ellen's hand embodies her creativity—'the essence of the work resides in her hand'—Miles's hands bring destruction and trauma, shoving Bobby to his death and, later, punching a police officer (215). Despite these differences, Ellen's archive mirrors Miles's in its restoration of her vision.

Ellen characterises her traumatised listlessness in terms of overwhelming lust and loneliness. Ellen's hunger for physical contact emerges in uncontrollable and undesirable sexual fantasies that crowd her vision when in public, her eyes involuntarily stripping people of their clothing: 'Sometimes she even goes so far as to imagine herself pausing to slip her tongue into the mouth of each passerby, each and every person who falls within her sight [...] in an orgy of indiscriminate, democratic love. She doesn't know how to stop these visions. They leave her feeling wretched and exhausted' (109). Whereas Miles could not stand being looked at, Ellen's traumatised position is one of obsessive and uncontrollable voyeurism. Not only does Miles avoid Ellen because her enduring stare so obviously betrays her erotic interest in him, but her insistent eyes also disrupt her sleep, seemingly opening of their own volition: 'She can't remember the last time she managed to sleep for six full hours, six uninterrupted hours without waking from a rough dream or discovering her eyes had opened at dawn' (105). Ellen

compensates for her longing through masturbation, and her system of mourning can be tracked from the solitude of her sexual activity to the rediscovery of a partnership.

The origin of Ellen's melancholy, her sexual encounter with her sixteen-year-old tutee, registers as an unobservable moment in which she abstains from participation:

> she was beginning to feel drowsy, drowsy enough to lean back her head and close her eyes for a few seconds, perhaps ten seconds, perhaps twenty seconds, and before she was able to open them again, young Mr. Samuels had moved over to her side of the sofa and was kissing her on the mouth. She should have pushed him away, or turned her head away, or stood up and walked away, but she couldn't think fast enough to do any of those things, and so she remained where she was, sitting on the sofa with her eyes closed, and allowed him to go on kissing her. (112)

Ellen, like Miles, cannot properly encounter the traumatic moment through her visual faculty. Whereas Miles precipitates the event through a violent outburst, Ellen passively sanctions intercourse when she could have, and feels retrospectively that she should have, put a stop to it. Indeed, it is precisely the action that killed Bobby—pushing—that Ellen says she failed to perform to put an end to the encounter. This discrepancy in the moment of trauma explains the distinctive repercussions to Ellen's vision. Her impotency to control the sexual scenes that overload her field of vision mirrors her passive authorization of her encounter with Ben. Whereas the sexual contact with Ben was illicit but desired, her erotic mirages turn towards the grotesque.

Ellen's trajectory of working-through and her archival pursuit both centre on recovering a compromised relationship to her body, which invokes a new relationship to sight.[151] Miles infers Ellen's depression from her muted exterior appearance:

> Ellen was not an unattractive woman. Her body was trim, her face was pleasant to look at, but she projected an aura of anxiety and defeat, and with her too pale skin and flat, lusterless hair, he wondered if she wasn't mired in some sort of depression, living out her days in an underground room at the Hotel Melancholia. (79)

Ellen's archival working-through registers in both a renewed intimacy with her own body and a rejuvenated sexual life: she 'overhauled the outward trappings of her person in order to express the new relation she has developed with her body, which is a product of the new relation she has developed with her heart, which in turn is a product of the new relation she has developed with her innermost self' (291). Ellen's mourning process

---

[151] Susan Pearce suggests that 'the collection represents both an extension of the physical body of the collector and a kind of tangible *alter ego* which forms a body outside the body.' The collection, thereby, becomes a means for the collector to domesticate the alien or exotic outside world, to integrate it into their somatic life. Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 168.

reflects Elizabeth Grosz's treatment of the body as 'the very "stuff" of subjectivity.'[152] Grosz employs the figure of the Möbius strip to describe the relationship between mind and body, for its aptitude at showing 'the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside.'[153] Ellen's archiving achieves its desirable endpoint by repeating the overwhelming sexual imagery of her promenades on the contained space of the sketchpad. If her trauma and its subsequent repetitions are characterised by an inability to control sight, I argue that Ellen's collection harnesses her vision.

Ellen's archive is comprised of sexual pictures that she quickly sketches, based on photos she gleans from pornography magazines and the inspection of her own body with a mirror, imaginatively refashioned according to her own impulses. These scenes develop from an initial aesthetic fragmentation of the body to its recomposition in intimate combinations. The initial, atomised stage of this process evokes the description of Miles's impetus to leave home, when Morris and Willa perform their symbolic dissection of his personality. Similarly, when Miles is forced to leave Pilar, he tells her, '*You mustn't go to pieces*' (121, emphasis in original). This process of fragmentation appears as a prerequisite for Ellen to rebuild herself and her sketches into coherent entities.

Ellen begins her artwork by alienating herself from her body, symbolically slicing it into parts. This in-depth contemplation involves breaking down the hand into 'its slender fingers and rounded nails, the half-moons above the cuticles, the narrow wrist with its small bump of bone sticking out on the left side,' and so on (117). In her later sessions, Ellen works up to copulative depictions by drawing the body's parts in isolation—'A page of hands. A page of eyes. A page of buttocks'—before 'mov[ing] on to whole bodies' (217). From there, she sketches highly sexualised scenes reminiscent of the fantasies that previous barraged her on the street. Whereas in real life Ellen haplessly endured their bombardment, through the engine of the archive she devises these tableaux

---

[152] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. ix.
[153] Ibid., p. xii.

imaginatively and adapts her artistic style to capturing the frenzied rush with which they arrive: 'There is no time for painting now. Drawing is faster and more tactile, better suited to the urgency of her project, and she has filled sketchbook after sketchbook this past month with her attempts to break free of her old methods' (217). Unlike her previously unassertive conduct, she commits to 'forc[ing] her strokes to become bolder and more expressive, more gestural, more wild if need be, as wild as the wildest thought within her' (116). Here, the archive revisits the erotic visions that previously overwhelmed Ellen but equips her with the resources to channel those scenes onto the sketchpad.

Crucially, like Baudrillard's collection, whose blindness I linked to Miles's photographs, Ellen's drawings are incapable of returning or confronting her gaze: 'These are intimate portraits, she tells herself, not erotic drawings, human bodies doing what human bodies do when no one is watching them' (218). As such, the archive appears to fulfil the voyeurism that plagues Ellen on the street and when interacting with Miles, but it does so in the mediated archival environment in which her obsessive gaze can be managed. After drawing from magazines and from her own body, Ellen finds a human subject for her work in Bing, who poses for her in the nude. Whereas her fervent eyes troubled Miles, Bing revels in being the object of Ellen's focus: 'he trusted her, he hadn't known how much he would enjoy being looked at in this way' (222). Ellen submits eroticism to scrutiny, tracing Bing's increasing self-stimulation until she allows him to ejaculate into her mouth. This arrangement, wherein Ellen trades sexual contact with Bing for the opportunity to draw him, seems ideologically troubling; however, Ellen notes that 'the contact is comforting to her, and she takes pleasure in it as well' (223). This modicum of bodily pleasure, coupled with its investment in her artistic work, appears as the ultimate stage before Ellen makes over her body and achieves a return to sexual fulfilment.

Shostak suggests that the characters of Auster's *Moon Palace* overthrow the repetition compulsion by rediscovering the body and its place in temporal progression,

epitomised in the act of walking.[154] Ellen achieves this return to embodiment through her pictorial investigations of the body and of sexuality. When she initially commits herself to the study of the body, Ellen observes her own hand, 'studying it until it no longer seems attached to her body' (117). This self-alienation leads her to discovering 'a new way of thinking. The human body is an instrument of knowledge' (217). This return to embodiment comes from the dislocation of vision from the eyes to the creative hand: 'whenever she manages to lift herself out of herself and put her mind in abeyance, she can will that hand to see' (215-6). This collision of the subjective and the objective—the object that can see—ultimately premises a return to bodily pleasure through a reunion with Ben Samuels, the young boy who had impregnated her. Their relationship is squarely based on corporeality: 'he isn't terribly bright', but she 'can't get enough of his body' (296). Ellen's renewal is, somewhat troublingly, energised by and shaped around the sexual desires of someone else. She credits the renovation of her attire with Ben's return, and she has her hair cut 'because Ben is aroused by the back of her neck' (293).

The reanimation of a melancholic woman by a savior-man is, of course, ideologically problematic. However, here I would emphasise that Ellen rebuilds herself not so much for the sake of her partner but for the sake of her own sexual pleasure, and—to repeat—this can only occur because 'of the new relation she has developed with her innermost self' (291). Indeed, the pleasure that she derives from Ben matches the comingling and confusion of corporeality and subjectivity that occurs in her archival contemplations: 'He turns me inside out', she narrates (296). Ellen's newfound relation to the body brings with it a changed sense of the visual. The embellishment of her body indicates her overarching revitalisation: she 'no longer projects an aura of victimhood and skittish uncertainty' (292). Whereas Ellen was previously whittled down to her involuntarily oppressive, voyeuristic eyes, she now takes pleasure in being the object of the gaze: 'heads turn when people walk past her, and she exults in the attention she receives, exults in the knowledge that she is the most desirable woman in the room' (292). Like Miles, who at the end of the novel learns to re-face his parents and the

---

[154] Debra Shostak, 'Under the Sign of *Moon Palace*: Paul Auster and the Body in the Text', *Critique*, 49.2 (2008), 149-70 (pp. 162-3).

police, Ellen, too, having reigned in her uncontrollable eyes, learns to re-engage in intimate encounters, to be both the owner and the subject of the gaze.

Ellen's traumatic cycle, like Miles's, involves the destruction of and then return to a kind of home. While her suicide attempt throws her relationship with her parents into disarray, Ellen's pregnancy and abortion stem from a family that arrived too soon: sex with a desirable partner who was underage and a pregnancy that came at too young an age. Her return home is to the same family, to the partnership with Ben, but years later when their age difference no longer seems significant: 'Those four years are a lot less important today than they were back then' (296). Shoshana Felman, over the course of 'Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching', demonstrates how testifying to traumatic events, while never comprehensive or complete, can reach towards a form of catharsis.[155] Alongside the visual renovations that I detailed above, the process of working-through undergone by both characters lead to moments of testimony that, while demonstrating what LaCapra terms 'critical distance' on the past, nevertheless fail to completely come to terms with it. For Miles, this means remaining unable to uncover his own responsibility for Bobby's death. Morris responds to Miles's revelation that he pushed Bobby into the road: 'is there anything that needs to be forgiven? Probably not. But still, he must be forgiven' (277). The clemency that Miles seeks must come with full recognition of the past's indecipherability. Ellen, similarly, confesses the identity of her aborted child's father to Alice but recognises that despite their reunion Ben should still never learn of the pregnancy: 'There's no point in telling him, is there?', she asks (296). These two moments of testimony evince forms of working-through by denoting a turn towards accepting the past's inscrutability. Miles and Ellen, I have suggested, realise this shift in different but related ways through recourse to the repetitive archive, which permits the re-evaluation of vision that was compromised at the moment of trauma.

---

[155] Shoshana Felman, 'Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching', in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-56 (p. 5).

The Crisis of Futurity

The temporal framework of *Sunset Park* is one of unpredictable change, in which damaging events might occur at any moment. Not only, as I have shown, do these traumatic changes compel the production of archives but they also threaten their integrity. Ann Cvetkovich argues that trauma 'demands an unusual archive, whose materials, in pointing to trauma's ephemerality, are themselves frequently ephemeral.'[156] The archive, in *Sunset Park*, can only exist as a temporary refuge, because it inevitably comes to be marked by death, and this is made clear through the novel's treatment of baseball and its archive, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*. The contemporary moment has been characterised by a difficulty of communication and a deficiency in common knowledge: Fredric Jameson identifies postmodernism with 'a linguistic fragmentation of social life', such that there remains no common language but only private dialects, while Jeremy Green suggests that authors write within a field where the reader's knowledge and the value of literature can no longer be assumed.[157] Writing within this semantically isolated milieu, Auster frequently links baseball to stability and community.[158] Baseball stands as 'a universe as large as life itself', providing a discourse that overcomes generational divisions for Miles, Morris, and Morris's father (45, 183); a topic of communication that transcends class for Miles and Eddie (41-46); and a 'wholly neutral subject, safe ground' over which Miles and Morris reacquaint themselves (276). The baseball archive, notably, supplies a language through which to address trauma circuitously when it cannot be broached explicitly. His father, Morris notes, periodically referred to Herb Score's eye injury throughout his life, although he never mentioned his own identical wound that kept him safe from wartime conscription: 'Never a word about himself, never the slightest hint of any personal connection' (164).

---

[156] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.7.

[157] Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 (1984), 53-92, (p. 65); Jeremy Green, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 10.

[158] Both Baxter and Mark Brown discuss baseball as a communal discourse within Auster's fiction. See Baxter, p. 41; Mark Brown, p. 158.

While *The Baseball Encyclopedia* compiles a malleable language, its terms become increasingly muddied by death. Those figures that featured prominently in Miles and Morris's baseball mythology gradually perish over the course of the novel, the *Encyclopedia* increasingly looking like a graveyard or, as Morris narrates, 'the roster of the fallen' (285). Most significant of these deaths is that of Jack "Lucky" Lohrke who, early in the novel, Miles calls, 'the mythic embodiment of a theory of life that contends that not all luck is bad luck' (35). Lucky Lohrke's good fortune, however, must eventually run out, like that of baseball's other stars, until the *Encyclopedia* resembles *Oracle Night*'s 1937-38 Warsaw phone directory, a '*book of ghosts*.'[159] Baseball, and the archive more generally, can provide a haven from trauma only briefly, until its eventual permeation by death, enunciating an anxiety over the future that overlaps with the novel's, and baseball's own, investment in the return home. Miles's and Ellen's processes of working-through, as I showed in the last section, precede a return home, either to Morris or to Ben Samuels. Marjorie Garber links baseball to the return and the uncanny: she suggests 'that the uncanniness of the return home, the simultaneity [...] of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, [...] is persistently literalized in contemporary American culture through the figure of baseball, [...] in which "greatness" is figured as the capacity to control the return home, through the agency of the "home run."'[160] Ultimate success in baseball is a player's departure and subsequent return to home base. While the return home on the one hand demonstrates working-through, in *Sunset Park*, the blood-soaked pages of the *Encyclopedia* also denote an anxiety over the inevitability of a fatal accident from which there is no return. So too does Miles encounter another icon of the return homeward, the Wizard of Oz, interred in the Brooklyn cemetery.[161] Even if 'there is no place like home', that home must eventually be made inaccessible by death. Thus, we see figured in *The Baseball Encyclopedia* the archive's inability, within the temporal climate of the novel, to resist being stained with death and bereavement. The opportunity of the archive to withstand melancholy, then, can only be temporary.

---

[159] Paul Auster, *Oracle Night* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. 112.
[160] Marjorie Garber, *Symptoms of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 23-24.
[161] Garber explicitly mentions the Wizard of Oz as another figure of the return. Ibid., p. 21.

Lucky Lohrke's demise articulates a suspicion over the future, that good luck can only persist for so long, an insight that overlaps with the operation of chance in the novel. Auster is known for making chance an organising feature of his fictional worlds. He has stated, in an interview, 'In the strictest sense of the word, I consider myself a realist. Chance is a part of reality: we are continually shaped by the forces of coincidence, the unexpected occurs with almost numbing regularity in all our lives.'[162] Brendan Martin quotes this reply when detailing the abundance of randomness in Auster's fiction, arguing that his characters frequently take shape around their responses to coincidence.[163] In *Sunset Park*, Miles frequently attributes key moments to meaningless chance: that his return to New York occurs at the same moment his mother is performing in the city is '[j]ust another roll of the dice, then, another lottery pick scooped out of the black metal urn, another fluke in a world of flukes and endless mayhem' (56); his first encounter with Pilar is 'purely accidental' (8); and the situation leading to Bobby's death occurs 'for no special reason' (20). These examples demonstrate the novel's overt concern with 'the imponderables of fate, the strangeness of life, the what-ifs and might-have-beens' (34). I argue, however, that the novel betrays a pattern in its representation of chance. Scott Dimovitz, writing on *Leviathan*, notes, 'By opening himself up to contingency, an Austerian character inevitably loops back into a system of correspondences that will take the character where he needed to go.'[164] That is, Auster's characters tend to secure a sought-after future by ceding choice to randomness. In *Sunset Park*, a complementary logic applies: characters, in shutting themselves off to the workings of chance, in articulating a desired future to be worked towards, actually close off the potential of achieving that aspiration.

The first instance of this pattern occurs in Miles's recollection of Bobby's death. Bobby's final speech announces his intention to forsake his family when he leaves for college. Bobby dies just after voicing these future plans, nullifying any chance of realising his desires. This pattern arises again and again in the text. As soon as Miles

---

[162] Paul Auster, interviewed by Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, in *Conversations with Paul Auster*, ed. by James M. Hutchisson (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2013), pp. 13-39 (p. 13).
[163] Brendan Martin, *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 35-6.
[164] Dimovitz, p. 454.

determines to marry Pilar and reject Bing's invitation to live in Sunset Park, Angela's blackmail compels him to abandon Florida and install himself with the squatters (39-40, 52). Alice spends the three years of her PhD immersed in research: 'she has rarely thought about what would happen to her after she reached the top' (289). Just when Alice determines to remain in New York after graduating, her dissertation is destroyed when police officers invade the squatters' residence (302). Shortly after Miles re-enrols in college and makes plans for Pilar to move with him to New York, he assaults the police officer and sacrifices that future: 'with one punch he has destroyed everything, they will never have their life together in New York' (307). Morris observes, following his reunion with Miles, that 'it is best to refrain from writing another person's future,' but in *Sunset Park*, narrating your own future appears equally perilous (279).

This crisis of futurity, the structural impossibility of imagining and realising a desired future, is congruent with the novel's figuring of children. Of all its women characters, Pilar is most resistant to motherhood: 'She would rather slit her wrists or jump off a bridge than get herself knocked up' (15). Her position emerges from firsthand observation, her sister's baby representing only time wasted babysitting and changing diapers when she could be alone or studying (10). Mary-Lee's descriptions of motherhood emphasise boredom with baby Miles and verge on the grotesque: 'the smothering tedium of it all, the incessant wailing, the wet, yellow shit in the diapers, the puked-up milk, the howls in the middle of the night, the lack of sleep, the mindless repetitions' (258). Lee Edelman argues that in American political discourse the Child, emblematic of the future, is 'the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention.'[165] Cultural life, he suggests, is structured around the presumed needs of children, nurturing them for a time-to-come that is always postponed: there are always new children and so the future space for which they are being groomed is perpetually deferred. *Sunset Park* echoes Edelman's critique of 'reproductive futurism', condemning childbirth for its naïve investment in the future.[166] If children interrupt, for Pilar and

---

[165] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.
[166] Ibid.

Mary-Lee, the necessity of living in the present, so too does the child itself represent an unknowable future entity. Morris thinks that Renzo was canny 'to steer clear of the kid business, to avoid the unavoidable mess and potential devastation of fatherhood' (146). Ellen, too, remains wary of introducing children into a tumultuous historical era. Of her nephews, she thinks, 'just two months old and everything still before them in a world coming apart at the seams' (224). While Alice is adamant in her desire to become a mother, hers is a minority opinion in a book critical of 'reproductive futurism' and the innocent endorsement of the Child.

In contrast to *Sunset Park*'s circumspection of childbirth, Christian Lorentzen notes that in most boom-and-bust fiction children 'emerge as the most cherished assets' perhaps because they 'seem, for a while at least, to be the one asset with unlimited growth potential.'[167] In this post-crash climate, Lorentzen offers Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as a more fitting representation of the economic present:

> It follows three young people from a dreamy adolescence in what seems to be a privileged boarding school into a truncated adulthood that expires as they donate their organs to the barely glimpsed society that has created them—these children are clones—to exploit them. [...] It doesn't take much of a leap to see in Ishiguro's scenario the lifetimes of debt paying and service employment that await dreamy children at a time when college tuition swells at twice the rate of inflation.[168]

Animated by an anxiety over children, *Sunset Park*, like Ishiguro's novel, projects a fear over what the future might bring. Lorentzen's article provides a means of linking *Sunset Park*'s crisis of futurity—in its representation of baseball, of chance, and of children— with the current financial moment and the failure of speculating on the future. Alissa G. Karl similarly argues that, virtual and volatile, 'finance capital generates narrative and aesthetic forms that also hinge upon the generic and systemically necessary crisis.'[169] In 'finance capital's narrative pattern', Karl discovers a logic of 'awaited crisis,' a string of interchangeable catastrophes filling the text and animating it with an ethos of generic disruption.[170] *Sunset Park*, I have argued, similarly exudes an anxiety over a crisis that is

---

[167] Christian Lorentzen, 'Fictitious Values: Boom and Bust in Twenty-First Century Lit', *Bookforum*, June/July/August 2012 <http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/019_02/9453> [accessed 13 April 2014].
[168] Ibid.
[169] Alissa G. Karl, '*Casino Royale*, Financial Aesthetics, and National Narrative Form', in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*, ed. by Paul Crosthwaite (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 161-77 (p. 161).
[170] Ibid.

sure to arrive eventually. This temporal logic, in which characters are compelled to live as though with no future, overlaps with the depleted confidence in speculating on the future in post-crisis culture.

 Sunset Park's nervous foreboding maps onto the temporality of contemporary capitalism and, more particularly, the post-financial crisis fears of long-term investment. Writing a decade before the bursting of the housing bubble, Arjun Appadurai conceptualises the contemporary norm of long-term lending as bolstering a linear sense of time:

> large-scale innovations in lending [...] have created an open-ended rather than cyclic climate for consumer borrowing: they have thereby linked borrowing to the long, linear sense of a lifetime of potential earnings and the equally open-ended sense of the growth value of assets such as houses, rather than to the short and inherently restrictive cycles of monthly or annual income.[171]

Long-term lending implies a faith in the stability in the future, that the borrower will remain employed and secure sufficient money to pay off their debt. When Margaret Atwood writes, 'without story, there is no debt,' she is suggesting that, since narrative takes shape over time, borrowing and lending always imply a time-to-come, a future wherein, we hope, balance has been restored.[172] The financial crisis, however, represents a catastrophe of confidence in these extended lending schemes: a wave of foreclosures resulting from a rise in interest rates instigated the financial downswing and contributed to further defaults as the housing market crumbled.[173] These foreclosures foreground a diminished certainty in and control over the economic future. Slavoj Žižek argues that 'capitalist investment is, at its very core, a risky wager that a scheme will turn out to be profitable, an act of borrowing from the future.'[174] The potential for unexpected shifts, he suggests, blurs the distinction between safe and risky investments, the unknowable future always shadowed by the possibility of collapse.

 By its conclusion, *Sunset Park* insists that characters must reside purely in the moment without projection forward into the frighteningly opaque future. In the novel's

---

[171] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 84.

[172] Margaret Atwood, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2008), p. 81.

[173] Lawson, pp. 49-50.

[174] Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 36.

final scene, Miles heads towards a meeting with his father and the police, and 'he tells himself, he will stop hoping for anything and live only for now, this moment, this passing moment, the now that is here and then not here, the now that is gone forever' (308). These concluding remarks form a small portion of a two-page sentence, during which Miles realises that he and his fellow squatters 'are all homeless now' whilst surveying broken down buildings and considering other 'buildings that no longer exist' (307-8). Georgiana Banita argues that, in this scene, the broken-down structures conjure up not only the abandoned homes of post-financial collapse Florida but the absent remnants of another national trauma: the Twin Towers. She situates post-9/11 and post-financial crisis uncertainty over the future—the sense 'that the future is unwarranted and unsafe'—within a larger terrain of trauma in the novel, encompassing both these national calamities and Miles's and Ellen's personal wounds.[175] Indeed, within the novel, a state of trauma is coeval with the experience of living without a future. Like his final decision to forget about the future, Miles lives his earlier exile in Florida with 'no clear idea of what building a plausible future might entail for him' (6). Miles, here, is 'content to live in the present and not look ahead', engineering an ability 'to confine himself to the here and now' by forgoing material desires (6). Ellen, too, has trepidations about the future and the possibility that she will never rehabilitate her psychic wounds: she characterises her melancholy as 'fear of dying without having lived' (106). When she first enrols in art class and experiences some distance from the traumatic event, she only then begins 'to feel that [...] there might be something that resembled a future for her, after all' (114).

I suggest that the novel advocates for, while also troubling, the ability to embody flexibility and scepticism towards the future through an artistic and archival sensibility. However, before turning to that analysis, I detail how both Miles and Bing pursue forms of resistance against the onslaught of the future. The capitalist infrastructure portrayed within the novel is one of quick innovation and obsolescence. Miles's characterisation of the cultural environment as 'a world of mega-junk' and 'a world of fads and weightless

---

[175] Georgiana Banita, *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. 11.

ephemera', and Bing's description of our 'throwaway culture', gesture towards accounts of the chaotic temporality of postmodernity (67, 72). Jameson affiliates late capitalism with Lacanian schizophrenia, shattering time into an array of 'pure and unrelated presents' that cannot be linked up into a seamless flow of events.[176] In the time of consumer culture, innovation happens at such a quick pace that the present becomes disconnected from the past almost immediately. As David Harvey writes,

> In the realm of commodity production, the primary effect has been to emphasize the values and virtues of instantaneity [...] and of disposability [...]. The dynamics of a 'throwaway' society, as writers like Alvin Toffler (1970) dubbed it, began to become evident during the 1960s. It meant more than just throwing away produced goods [...] but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being.[177]

In these accounts, the horizon of the present shrinks as change occurs ever-more quickly. Bing recognises a 'unanimous [...] belief in the notion of progress' within American life (72). Reinhart Koselleck identifies G.E. Lessing's perfect figure of progress, who 'cannot wait for the future. He wants this future to come more quickly'.[178] This orientation, however, becomes increasingly problematic within the text, where the future's arrival is viewed with apprehension. Whereas Lessing's figure is confidently optimistic about incoming changes and innovations, post-financial crash anxiety installs a frightening scene on the horizon of the future. With the future marred by ominous uncertainty, characters in *Sunset Park* do not so much embrace upcoming moments as learn to weather them.

After Morris suffers a stroke, he imagines his withered body as an embodiment of the fear over the future suffered by the employees at his failing publishing house. But even within the quickening pace of contemporary capitalist innovation, Bing and Miles set out two modes of temporal resistance: the Hospital for Broken Things, where Bing repairs outmoded technologies, and the archive, in which Miles photographs the remnants of foreclosed houses. Andreas Huyssen and David Lowenthal provide theories in which both projects could be analysed as fighting to lengthen the time of familiarity

---

[176] Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 72.
[177] Harvey, p. 286.
[178] Lessing qtd. in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 22.

against fast-paced change. Huyssen contextualises both the archive and the repurposing of old or vintage technologies within a broader memory culture that 'express[es] the growing need for spatial and temporal anchoring in a world of increasing flux in ever denser networks of compressed time and space.'[179] Huyssen sees these two practices as counteracting the consumer culture's shrinking of the present, carving out a time of stability and familiarity. Lowenthal similarly suggests that physical relics, including images as well as objects, establish a sense of commonality between the present and what preceded it: they persuade 'us that the past we recall and chronicle is a living part of the present.'[180]

The two projects, however, present contradictory relationships to materiality. Bing's resistance to the speed of change emerges from a philosophy of '*Tangibility*', which holds that across time and space the human community is united by the common experience of embodiment, whose same deficiencies are addressed again and again by new technologies (73). Bing's emphasis on shared materiality stands in stark juxtaposition with Miles's photographic project, which is explicitly anti-material: 'all he wants are his pictures—not things, but the pictures of things' (6). The digital camera is an aberration from Miles's anti-materialism, the one luxury object in which he still indulges. Miles rids himself of material desires, part of his project of eliminating projection into the future while in Floridian exile. This considered resilience to commodities comes through in his archive, its preservation not of the object itself but of the image of the object. Baudrillard posits two 'functions' that can belong to an object: 'to be put to use and to be possessed.'[181] Miles, by turning the material into the image, eliminates use value for pure display, whereas Bing aims at preserving use value by refurbishing and repairing objects as they become outdated. Michael Thompson provides a useful taxonomy with which to speak of Bing's project, suggesting that consumer objects are coded according to three categories: transient, the object whose value

---

[179] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsest and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 27.
[180] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 249.
[181] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 92.

decreases as it ages, such as an old car; durable, the object whose value increases with time, such as the antique; and rubbish, the discarded object waiting to be rediscovered and converted from 'transient' to 'durable'.[182] By offering a repair service for obsolete technologies, Bing struggles to transform them into durables against the pull of ephemerality.

If Bing's project seeks to undermine quick obsolescence in the contemporary marketplace by keeping old technologies in use, Miles's photography of abandoned objects similarly attacks capitalism through its elimination of use value. Collecting possesses a complicated relationship with capitalism and consumption. James Clifford notes that while, in the broadest sense, gathering the self together through the arrangement of objects is likely a universal endeavour, Western society views this subject-object relationship in the capitalist terms of ownership and possession.[183] Susan Stewart implicates collecting in feeding commodity fetishism, collected objects transporting their owners back to the scene of acquisition while obscuring the mode of production through which they are created. Collecting objects is, for Stewart, 'prelapsarian', a naive and pure form of consumer participation in which all acquisitions are '*objets de lux*, objects abstracted from use value and materiality within a magic cycle of self-referential exchange.'[184] For Walter Benjamin, conversely, divorcing the object from functionality rescues it from being tarnished by capitalism: 'To [the collector] falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he can bestow on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value.'[185] Benjamin, like Baudrillard, links collecting with a kind of possession that undoes use value, but he argues, too, that freeing objects 'from the drudgery of being useful' elevates them above the capitalist agenda into the domain of art.[186] Benjamin, thus, ascribes to the collector the task of 'renew[ing] the old world', lending permanence and

---

[182] Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 7-10.
[183] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 218.
[184] Stewart, p. 165.
[185] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1939)', in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Eiland and McLaughlin, pp. 14-26 (p. 19).
[186] Ibid.

lustre to outdated objects.[187]

Benjamin's collector, it is worth noting, is a specimen of the domestic interior, using the home as a display case for his wares. While in *Sunset Park* the domestic space becomes endangered by the financial crisis, the archive stands as a temporary asylum in which order can be restored. Miles's photographic venture specifically turns the archiving lens on the interior that can no longer accommodate those objects that previously performed the work of memory and of self-definition. Read alongside Miles's distaste for material accumulation, his photographs still bear the anti-consumer object impulse that animates Benjamin's noble collector. Miles's photographs function according to two principles: on the one hand, they preserve the memory of market collapse, of the destructive impulse embedded in capitalism and its traumatic effect on human life, even as they work to re-establish a kind of order within the ruins; at the same time, they refuse to shore up the desire for material objects by preserving only their image and allowing their skeletons to drift out of sight. Miles, that is, through the medium of photography can both archive the past while adhering to a principled antipathy to the ethos of consumer consumption.

It is possible to differentiate Bing's and Miles's projects based on Pierre Nora's distinction between *lieux* and *milieux de mémoire*. Miles, in Nora's terminology, creates *lieux de mémoire*, consciously composed material sites that stabilise memory, whereas Bing facilitates a *milieux de mémoire*, where keeping objects in circulation allows memory to evolve organically within everyday life.[188] The novel, however, encourages us to think of these two tactics together as means of resisting the ever-shrinking horizon of the present and the terrifying uncertainty of the future. Significantly, both men position themselves against new technology: Miles laments requiring a cell phone for work and a digital camera for archiving while abstaining from other new technologies, and Bing 'shuns cell phones, computers, and all things digital' (7, 72). The novel also reveals several crossovers between their two activities. Miles, for instance, takes a job at Bing's Hospital while still pursuing his photographic venture, and while the Hospital is

---

[187] Benjamin, 'Unpacking', p. 61.
[188] Nora, pp. 11-12.

ostensibly invested in the recuperation of failing technologies, Bing nevertheless secures 'ninety percent of the money he earns comes from framing pictures' (73). This inadvertent investment in image culture recalls the origin of Bing's philosophy of tangibility and his resistance to technological innovation: 'Paging through an illustrated book about the Dead Sea scrolls one afternoon, he stumbled across some photographs of the things that had been unearthed along with the parchment texts: plates and eating utensils, straw baskets, pots, jugs, all of them perfectly intact' (74). These 2000-year-old implements, which look 'utterly contemporary', suggest to Bing that, despite technological shifts, human consciousness has remained largely unchanged across time. This epiphany arrives to Bing in a form that marries his own urge to conserve material objects with Miles's drive to turn them into images: a photograph of objects preserved for centuries.

Both Miles's and Bing's projects appear embedded, whether consciously or unconsciously, in a critique of the fast-paced turnover of postmodern capitalism made frightening by crisis of futurity manifest in the financial collapse. As means of resistance, however, they seem doomed to fail. Bing, who explicitly understands the Hospital as mode of resisting the mainstream belief in progress, views his rebellions as politically futile: they are 'peevish gestures that accomplish little or nothing even in the short run, but they help to enhance his dignity as a human being, to ennoble him in his own eyes' (72). Miles's archival strategy, too, as I have argued, can only restrain the passing of time briefly, like the *Baseball Encyclopedia* that becomes smeared with death. Miles and Ellen's movements in the novel's final pages evince the failures of the archive and of the home to provide permanent shelter and protection. Fleeing the police, the novel's two archivists take shelter in a graveyard, an archive of the dead and the site of Miles's second set of photographs, before concealing themselves in Ben's apartment. The protective nest of the archive, like that of the home, must ultimately be deserted, the novel concluding with Miles en route to a meeting with the police. In this sense, then, though they cannot fight off the foreboding future, both renewing technologies and archiving them appear as activities directed towards the invigoration of the present moment. While in this section I have lent the archive a political dimension in its doomed

capacity to restrict the temporal rush of postmodern capitalism, in the final section I argue that the novel finally envisions flexibility in the face of the uncertain future as the most formidable means of survival. The novel conceives of the characters who pursue this strategy as embodied archives, manifesting the archive's vast resourcefulness and possibility.

Becoming Archive

In foregrounding the post-financial crisis anxiety over the future, Auster formalises a terrain of chance in *Sunset Park* that he explored in his earlier fiction. Alford writes, 'Auster's random world is that of a life (or text) lived forward; it's one damn thing after another, with no seeming meaning.'[189] By limiting its characters to the present moment, *Sunset Park* positions itself alongside an earlier postmodern narrative temporality. Elizabeth Ermarth argues that the language of postmodern narrative subverts the historical temporality of realist writing, an expanse of time over which all perspectives are united into a form of textual agreement.[190] Ermarth contends that postmodernism undermines this convention by instituting a 'rhythmic time' frequently modelled after the collective improvisation of jazz music, which shifts the contours of subjectivity:

> Because rhythmic time is an exploratory repetition, because it is over when it's over and exists for its duration only and then disappears into some other rhythm, any "I" or ego or *cogito* exists only for the same duration and then disappears with that sea change or undergoes transformation into some new state of being.[191]

Unlike Ermarth's jazz improvisers or Jameson's schizophrenics, *Sunset Park*'s overriding emphasis on contingency and the unknowable future generates a melancholic subjectivity personified by the artist and his or her archive of work.

The certainty of future catastrophe generates a particular form of melancholy that Sarah Henstra calls 'proleptic grief'. Henstra defines this concept in relation to the Cold

---

[189] Steven Alford, 'Chance in Contemporary Narrative: The Example of Paul Auster', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 11.1 (July 2000), 59-82 (p. 77).
[190] Elizabeth Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 27.
[191] Ibid., p. 53.

War conviction of imminent nuclear catastrophe, but it echoes *Sunset Park*'s certainty that the future can only entail disaster in an unknown form. She summarises:

> Mourning 'on hold,' oriented toward a loss we are sure is coming but cannot prevent, goes beyond other kinds of melancholia in confounding the explanatory and curative projects of psychoanalysis, which depend on the chronological ordering of trauma (that is, in the past tense) and on the elaboration of emotion in symbolic terms.[192]

Whereas Miles and Ellen could work through their traumatic histories via the production of archives, the uncertain future cannot be approached by the same mourning strategies because its specific traumas remain unavailable, yet to transpire. This very unknowability, then, requires not recourse to an archive but, as we shall see, figuratively becoming of an archive. Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium* presages *Sunset Park* in this respect, linking the writer melancholically with the archive of his work. In the novel, characters from Auster's back catalogue return to put the writer, referred to as 'Mr. Blank', on trial for the various tribulations to which he subjected them and for abandoning them in often-perilous situations. The author, in turn, becomes imprisoned in a work of fiction, revenge for his actions as a writer.[193] Boulter, thus, argues that *Travels* imbues 'the author-as-archive' with melancholy, Mr. Blank haunted by his responsibility for the characters he has written and, like them, 'encrypted within this archive, never to die, never to disappear.'[194]

Sunset Park similarly aligns an artistic with an archival sensibility, but in Auster's later novel this union proposes a strategy for coping with the haywire contingency of the uncertain future. The artistic mode, enacted by the novelist Renzo and the actor Mary-Lee, sees movement between intense, dedicated work on a project and periods of anxiety between assignments. Awaiting fresh creative epiphanies or new acting jobs, each must live with the feeling that every project will be their last. Morris narrates: 'Renzo is always in a slump, each book he finishes is always the last book he will ever write, and then, somehow, the slump mysteriously ends, and he is back in his room writing another book' (149-50). After the most frenzied period of writing in his

---

[192] Sarah Henstra, *The Counter-Memorial Impulse in Twentieth-Century English Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 5.

[193] Paul Auster, *Travels in the Scriptorium* (New York: Picador, 2006), p. 129.

[194] Boulter, p. 50, 57.

life, Renzo lives out '*an anxious repose*' until he is struck by 'the tiniest germ of an idea', a '*flicker*' of inspiration (150-51, emphasis in original). Renzo's mode of living from book to book mirrors the conditions for surviving temporal unpredictability more broadly. Personifying malleability, Renzo embodies the necessary anxious patience for creative renewal that might never arrive. Unlike Mr. Blank, Renzo's archive of work does not haunt him so much as evince his ability to realign himself to new stories and new worlds as they emerge.

Sunset Park explores this creative orientation more thoroughly through Mary-Lee, who, like Renzo, lapses into fretful unease during breaks between roles. Miles remembers his mother as someone subject to swift switches in mood and recalls that between acting jobs she would anxiously hustle for another role or another career opportunity (63). These struggles, however, lead to a wide-ranging career filled with diverse performances: 'Mary-Lee has been smart and flexible, willing to reinvent herself at each step along the way' (190). Fashioning a pliant persona forms a particular skill and virtue when faced with the perils of an uncertain future, enabling Mary-Lee to portray a range of characters. The result is a figuring of Mary-Lee as an archive of acting roles, a shape-shifter who, like Miles says of baseball, contains an entire universe inside of her: Morris 'wonders how this attractive but wholly ordinary woman, this woman with her fluctuating moods and vulgar passion for dirty jokes, has it in her to transform herself into so many distinct and totally different characters, to make one feel she carries all humanity inside her' (191). The successful actor, thus, appears uniquely suited to morphing along with the violently variable times because she contains within herself an archive of characters, an array of roles played and of potential roles left to cycle into when the future demands it.

The range of possibility that resides within the artist—different books written and characters embodied—transforms them into just the mercurial creature demanded of the contemporary subject. This flexibility, borne of an archive of varied artistic achievement, carries with it the anxiety of a career perpetually at its end, constantly contending with the futureless position to which Miles vows to adhere at the novel's conclusion. The artistic disposition, for Morris, seems necessarily troubled:

> Renzo is the same as Mary-Lee, they are both prisoners of what they do, for years both have been plunging forward from one project to the next, both have produced lasting works of art, and yet their lives have been a bollix, both divorced twice, both with a tremendous talent for self-pity, both ultimately inaccessible to others—not failed human beings, exactly, but not successful ones either. Damaged souls. The walking wounded, opening their veins and bleeding in public. (192)

The quality that allows Renzo and Mary-Lee to thrive as artists and to contend with the postmodern terrain of swift changeability also dooms them, at least in Morris's eyes, to despair and isolation.[195] In pursuing the only possible relationship to time still viable at the novel's conclusion, Renzo and Mary-Lee reveal both the means and the cost of committing to the moment at the expense of the future.

Pilar presents the apotheosis of the adaptable subject, and this affiliation is, again, figured in archival terms. In her review of the novel, Marlene Watrous argues that, in trying to justify their illegal romance, 'Auster overcompensates for potential misgivings, making Miles and Pilar too good to be true.'[196] Pilar, she notes, is unbelievably vivacious, particularly for a teenager: 'extraordinarily bright and intellectually curious, with brilliant SAT scores and essays that need not one correction.'[197] In addition to neutering the scandal of their affair, Pilar's unbelievable precocity, I suggest, aligns her with Peggy, a character in *The Best Years of Our Lives* of whom Alice takes special notice. Like Pilar, 'Peggy is too perfect to be credible as a human being—too poised, too good, too pretty, too smart, one of the purest incarnations of the ideal American girl she can think of' (101). Her very perfection, though 'the weakest link in the film', for Alice, 'ends up holding the story together' (101). Pilar occupies the same position in *Sunset Park*, a figure too faultless to be credible who ends up encompassing the story's thematic concerns by most fully epitomising the embodied archive of possibility.

Alice notes that the mastery of Teresa Wright's portrayal of Peggy resides 'entirely in her eyes and face' (101). Pilar's hold over Miles is similarly figured as an

---

[195] Mary-Lee's relationship to Miles bears the scars of her impetus to pursue work over raising a family. Yet, it is precisely this move that lends her greater perspective on Miles's initial departure, because she can sympathise with his need to withdraw (257).

[196] Malena Watrous, 'Learned Lolita', *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, 10 December 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/books/review/Watrous-t.html?pagewanted=all> [accessed 5 February 2011].

[197] Ibid.

ocular matter: Miles falls for her, 'Because of the way she looks at him, perhaps, the ferocity of her gaze, the rapt intensity in her eyes when she listens to him talk, a feeling that she is entirely present when they are together, that he is the only person who exists for her on the face of the earth' (14). Morris lends an archival aspect to Pilar's 'intense concentration', confident as he answers her barrage of questions 'that she would not forget a word you had said' (284). This rendering of Pilar as a databank finds fuller expression just a page earlier, when Morris subtly evokes a camera in his description of her gaze: 'the dark steady eyes that absorb everything around her, that emit the light that has made the boy fall in love with her' (283). In this description, Pilar literally becomes an archiving technology, recording the people around her and the knowledge they have to offer. Pilar's flashbulb eyes gesture towards her position as the uncanny double of the other characters, a position she can embody because she is afforded so few plausible distinguishing features. With exception to Pilar, the novel narrates at least one chapter from the perspective of every main character. Pilar throws the absence of her own voice into relief when she observes that *The Great Gatsby* relies on the 'compassion and understanding' of its narrator (11). Provided with no occasion to tell her story, Pilar can only appear as a cypher, a mirror to the other characters.

Throughout the novel, Pilar is figured as a doppelganger, a reproduction of those around her. Twice Morris refers to her as the embodiment of possibility, personifying the lost potential of Willa and of Suki Rothstein, the dead child of his friends. After Pilar decides to attend Willa's alma mater, Morris narrates: 'You told her that your wife went to Barnard as well, that you saw her for the first time when she was a Barnard student, and the torch has now been passed from the boy's stepmother to her' (283). For Morris, Willa's studentship at Barnard stands for a time of possibility prior to her catalogue of traumas, and he wonders what their life might have looked life if they had married in these early days: 'what if your little dalliance had led to marriage? Result: no dead husband, no dead son, no runaway stepson. Other sufferings and sorrows, of course, but not those' (267). Evoking youthful potential prior to the effects of trauma, Pilar represents the uncanny return of an earlier moment of opportunity. Morris repeats this pattern when he calls Pilar 'the twin of Suki Rothstein' (282). Suki, dead by suicide, was

for Morris, 'the quintessential embodiment of youthful exuberance and promise' (141). Pilar stands as the second coming of the young Suki, the new 'promise of youth in its fullest, most glorious incarnation' (282). Pilar in these figurations is, on the one hand, the incarnation of indiscriminate potential, and yet that future is always someone else's and never her own to determine.

Miles unwittingly envisions Pilar as his own double, illuminating the tension between the openness of her prospects and their subsumption by the terms of other people's failures. Pilar emerges as Miles's doppelganger upon the couple's first encounter, seeing each other in a Florida park while reading the same edition of *The Great Gatsby* (8). I argue, however, that Pilar becomes an extension of Miles and that meeting her eyes is a moment of non-seeing, a moment of seeing himself: recall that under her gaze Miles narcissistically feels that 'he is the only person who exists for her on the face of the earth' (14). Pilar mimes the young Miles in her voracious reading and devotion to studying. Miles reciprocates by projecting his own lost dreams onto Pilar's future, identifying her with a time before the traumatic death of his stepbrother: 'He, the young man without ambitions, the college dropout who spurned the trappings of his once privileged life, has taken it upon himself to become ambitious for her, to push her as far as she is willing to go' (11). Treating her as an avatar of his previous life, Miles imagines that Pilar will abandon her desire to become a nurse and instead 'go on to medical school one day and become a doctor' (12). Medical school, we later learn, was one of Miles's own squandered ambitions (67). Pilar's future, here, is not one she constructs but one that Miles has lost, his past aspirations deferred onto his young lover.

On her visit to New York, Miles again figures Pilar in terms that call to mind her hopeful future while limiting that future to the language of his own past. In one very long sentence, Miles swings from denying that he is 'telling her what to do' to ossifying her future in his imagination, fixing a picture of her adulthood in his mind:

> he suddenly understood what she would be like ten years from now, twenty years from now, Pilar in the full vigor of her evolving womanhood, Pilar all grown into herself and yet still walking with the shadow of the pensive girl walking beside him now, the young woman walking beside him now. (206-7)

Miles's presumed knowledge of Pilar's future strikingly occurs at a moment when she

refuses to vocalise her own intentions, a moment when 'for once Pilar was silent, not willing to share her thoughts with him' (206). Here we find Pilar's future once again pulled away from her, posited according to the desires of her lover at a time when she does not speak, just as she is refused the ability to narrate within the tapestry of the novel.

Miles also figures Pilar as the double of Mary-Lee's current stage role, imagining that he will guide her into New York gradually, 'letting her tell him when she was ready to go in up to her waist, up to her neck, and if and when she wanted to put her head under' (204-5). Miles's terminology invokes Mary-Lee's role in Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*, in which she begins the play covered in sand to her waist and, in the second act, to her neck. Yet, even Miles recognises that, in reality, Pilar bucks this projection, more closely resembling the passionate real-life Mary-Lee than her onstage persona. Having researched the city in advance, 'Pilar ran into the lake with flapping arms [...] gliding along as smoothly as a practiced veteran' (205). Pilar's passionate reaction to city life, her commitment to experimentation, resonates with what Miles earlier termed 'her emotional excesses, her combustibility' (14). This attitude echoes Mary-Lee's own volatile and intense moods, Morris calling her 'the queen of excess, the Madonna of naked feelings' (275). The affiliation lends Pilar the same flexible quality possessed by Mary-Lee, one reinforced by the young girl's status as an archive of those around her. Recall that Pilar abhors the idea of parenthood and its disruption of the future, a disinterest similarly expressed by adaptive artist-archivists Renzo and Mary-Lee. Pilar, then, stands as one of their kind, and her amorphous nature is at once acknowledged and foreclosed by Miles and Morris.

In Miles's and Morris's imaginations, Pilar stands prior to the future's determining moment, when the present fans out into several options, embodying the uncanny subject of Renzo's essay: 'the things that don't happen, the lives not lived' (153). It is for this reason that she is, in her various associations, transported back to the time before Miles runs away, before Willa first parts with Morris, and before Suki graduates from high school, moments when alternative futures are still possible. In recreating those around her, Pilar appears to be a figure of hope for the future, a chance

to make new choices and arrive at a different future untainted by trauma. This future is, in one sense, impotent, only a recapitulation of others' failures, of moments already lived. Yet, the very fact that she can accommodate this universe of comparisons, that she can become the archive of so many others, suggests that, like Renzo and Mary-Lee, Pilar is naturally equipped to cycle through roles as the future unleashes itself in unforeseen ways. Although the open future that Miles and Morris imagine for her is perpetually stained by other people's grievances, Pilar's own propensity to become an archive, to record fastidiously the information imparted to her, suggests a mercurial status, a way of resisting those projections and struggling against the traumatic temporality of the present moment.

Pilar's final status, however, remains somewhat unclear, evoking the tension between two melancholic orientations that the novel never fully resolves: the wounds that spring from destroyed companionship and the ones that tarnish a detached lifestyle. When Miles compromises their happy future together by attacking the police office, Pilar is presented with two options. Threatened with the loss of Miles, Pilar's easy relationship to the future might be traumatically spoiled as she mourns their failure to secure a desired future together. Yet, as an embodied archive, Pilar also seems endowed with the subjective openness required to spiral towards a yet-unlived and unarticulated future, by moving on from Miles and into a new persona. To become an archive, as Morris notes, is to be 'ultimately inaccessible to others', but it is also to endure and even thrive against the inevitable onslaught of the future (192).

The Archive as Psychoanalytic Mirror
in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*

The previous chapter situated archiving within a programme of working-through the traumatic past, where recording history photographically or the body artistically stages a form of catharsis. This chapter continues this investigation by interrogating how acts of curation can imaginatively harness and address the distressing past. Drawing significantly on the object relations psychoanalytic literature of D.W. Winnicott and Christopher Bollas, this chapter develops the concept of 'archival play', in which creative interaction with personal objects enables a form of self-analysis involving the revelation and interpretation of the collector's internal world. I make this argument through a reading of Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved* (2003), which places an archive of play at the heart of self-definition and narration. Its narrator, Leo, collects objects abandoned by loved ones as they leave him and, by fashioning them into different series and systems, he participates in a game of self-exploration that ultimately produces the novel itself. The novel compares Leo with Mark, wayward child of Leo's friend and artist, Bill, and an archetype of antisocial disorder. This chapter views Leo and Mark as the embodiments of psychoanalytic concepts put forward by Winnicott and Bollas, animating their theories and orientating them around a relationship to the archive.[198]

In his recent writing on the 'aesthetic subject', Leo Bersani argues that psychoanalysis should move beyond diagnosing the human impulse to assert dominion over the material world, to use objects merely as screens for the projection of the interior self. Bersani argues: 'External reality may at first present itself as an affective menace, but psychoanalysis—like art, although in a more discursive mode—might train us to see our prior presence in the world, to see, as bizarre as this may sound, that, ontologically, the world cares for us.'[199] The distinction that Bersani draws between object-mastery and object-relationship gestures towards the difference between Jean Baudrillard's and Walter Benjamin's theories of collecting. As Judith Pascoe notes, where Baudrillard

---

[198] Hustvedt frequently refers to Winnicott in her non-fiction and cites his work in the Acknowledgements section of *What I Loved*. Her writing, however, does not explicitly reveal engagement with Bollas's psychoanalytic work.

[199] Leo Bersani, 'Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject', *Critical Inquiry*, 32.2 (2006), 161-74 (p. 174).

stresses the collector's authority over his or her objects, Benjamin, she insists, 'imagines the owner of an object courting its favor.'[200] Benjamin's mode of collecting, modelled after the inquisitive and acquisitive child, encompasses an ethos of creative play. Baudrillard, conversely, views each collection as a personal language isolating because it is readable only by the collector him or herself. These theories, extrapolated within the chapter, provide models through which to explore the collection as a personal mirror, play space, and language within Hustvedt's text. *What I Loved*, like Bersani, asks what might be gained from being attentive to the world's materiality and its symbolic resonances.

In an essay on Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, published just one year after *What I Loved*, Hustvedt details a model of subjectivity premised on the ability to narrate the self intelligibly in language. The first step in this process is one of self-reflection. Hustvedt writes, 'In order for the self to exist, it must be able to represent itself as another, a mirror image, and the recognition of that whole self gives birth to the subject.'[201] The image of the mirror that Hustvedt calls upon is particularly potent in psychoanalysis, and in the essay she undertakes a brief reading of Lacan's 'mirror stage'. For Lacan, the child's reflection in a mirror presents it with an image of harmony, an 'ideal-I', towards which it continues to strive in vain despite its tumultuous internal landscape.[202] While for Lacan the 'mirror stage' establishes an enduring discord in the infant, a yearning for unity that can never be achieved, Hustvedt also stresses the psychological necessity of attempting to render the self whole even if any such conception is spurious or incomprehensive.[203] But confronting the mirror image is just

---

[200] Judith Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 25. Indeed, as Pascoe notes, Benjamin writes of the collection's objects, 'We don't displace our being into theirs; they step into our life.' Benjamin, 'The Collector', p. 206.

[201] Siri Hustvedt, 'Charles Dickens and the Morbid Fragment', in *A Plea for Eros* (London: Sceptre, 2006), pp. 153-93 (p. 187).

[202] Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 1-7 (p. 2).

[203] Glossing the 'mirror stage', Hustvedt writes, 'For Lacan, the person seen in the mirror represents a form of therapeutic wholeness, a kind of ideal body, one that is never completely achieved because it has been built over a substrata of fragmentation.' Hustvedt, 'Charles Dickens', p. 164. Malcolm Bowie highlights that, for Lacan, perpetual self-alienation follows the 'mirror stage', noting that several theorists

the preliminary act of self-creation. Hustvedt contends that, for it to have meaning, the mirror image must be translated into the legible register of language, into narrative pointed outwards to an interlocutor. Even if we tell our story to ourselves, Hustvedt declares, 'the tale must become comprehensible to a listener.'[204]

    What I Loved, I suggest, tracks the same process of self-articulation from internal fragmentation to inscribed narrative through the mirror image. In it we find a variety of mirrors, including the self-portrait, the hysteric, and the collection, which reflect the interior self or mainstream society in a distorted but recognisable form that calls out for analysis. Caroline Rosenthal argues that *What I Loved* 'stresses that we need art and narrative as reflective aesthetic spaces to achieve some kind of a vantage point on our lives, however temporary and fragile.'[205] My argument departs from Rosenthal's by distinguishing between the novel's mirroring surfaces—like art, the body, and the archive—and its treatment of narrative. Rather than equivalents to language, the novel's artistic, somatic, and archival structures stimulate language through their internal heterogeneity. Significantly, Rosenthal's essay, like most work on *What I Loved*, fails to offer an in-depth consideration of Leo's collection or his blindness in terms of the novel's broader logic. I argue that Leo's macular degeneration, by forcing him to view the world through his periphery, finds a corollary in the novel's mirrors, including the collection, which similarly facilitate a form of indirect vision that exposes previously disguised outlooks.

    In situating the archive as an intermediary between the undifferentiated internal self and the self cohered in narrative, *What I Loved* complicates Susan Stewart's distinction between the souvenir and the collection. For Stewart the souvenir is a vehicle of nostalgia for an event that can never be repeated, 'generat[ing] a narrative which reaches only "behind,"' whereas the system of classification constructed within the

---

ignore the delusion of mastery or unity inscribed at this moment. See Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 23.

[204] Hustvedt, 'Charles Dickens', p. 189.

[205] Caroline Rosenthal, *New York and Toronto Novels after Postmodernism: Explorations of the Urban* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), p. 117.

collection overwrites the past with an order of its own.[206] Stewart's theory suggests that a collection can never be retrospective but functions only to eliminate the past. As such, by reaching back to figures and moments now distant, Leo's objects seem to form not a collection at all but what Peter Schwenger calls 'an unordered group of *souvenirs*.'[207] Yet, in the space of Leo's drawer, the definitions of souvenir and collection rub up against each other, articulating a more complex dynamic. As a series of souvenirs becomes ordered, as they accumulate into a collection, the affiliations they generate spark a transition into autobiographical narration. Mixed and remixed into new arrangements, the personal collection stages an arena of personal interpretation in which the self, mirrored back at itself through its objects, offers itself up like a dream for interpretation. Evoking Krzysztof Pomian's definition of the collection as a bridge between the invisible and the visible, I argue that the archive in *What I Loved* functions as a personal mirror that in distancing Leo from himself, allows him to play with his past, metabolise its traumas, and compose a personal narrative that is, for Hustvedt, the ultimate sign of subjective health.[208]

Looking Indirectly

Hustvedt is a writer frequently concerned with issues of seeing. Asbjørn Grønstad, for instance, observes that her first three novels all begin 'with acts of looking', specifically with 'women gazing at the bodies of men.'[209] In *What I Loved* the primary visual quandary is what Leo terms '[t]he difficulty of seeing clearly', emphasised by his encroaching blindness.[210] Hustvedt's first observation in 'Notes on Seeing' points in broad strokes to the eye's deficiencies: 'To look and not see', she decides, is 'an old problem. It usually means a lack of understanding, an inability to

---

[206] Stewart, p. 135.

[207] Peter Schwenger, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 87.

[208] Pomian, pp. 24-5.

[209] Asbjørn Grønstad, 'Ekphrasis Refigured: Writing Seeing in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*', *Mosaic*, 45.3 (2012), 33-48 (p. 34).

[210] Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved* (London: Sceptre, 2003), p. 255. Further references to this novel will be provided within the text.

divine the meaning of something in the world around us.'[211] Vision is frequently, for Hustvedt, correlative to knowledge, and yet we ought not conclude that Leo's blindness metaphorically points to an intellectual shortcoming.[212] As Hubert Zapf argues, 'It seems [...] that this external limitation of his vision allows [Leo] to see all the more sharply with his inner eye'.[213] Indeed, it is only after his eyesight fades that Leo's life comes into focus, that he transforms his past into the narrative that is the novel.[214] I argue that the particularities of Leo's blindness point to a way of seeing and knowing that evades the problems affiliated with direct observation.

That Leo will be diagnosed with macular degeneration is revealed early in *What I Loved*, although his eyesight does not become foggy until the narrative's primary action has ended, one year after Bill's second wife, Violet, leaves New York. Significantly, he does not suffer from a total absence of sight but from cloudiness just in front of him: he narrates, 'I still have my peripheral vision, but directly in front of me there is always a ragged gray spot, and it's growing thicker' (19). Consigned to see through the margins of his visual field, Leo must employ his other senses to gain insight into the world around him. He indicates, for instance, that focusing on Lazlo's voice reveals 'new sides to his cryptic personality—resonances of feeling that I never saw on his face' (20). Yet, this form of blindness, in which Leo cannot look at anything head-on also literalises the means for analysing society and the self present elsewhere in the text, by observing them indirectly, through their expression in artwork, on the body, and in the collection. We might consider this visual strategy akin to Slavoj Žižek's method of 'looking awry': staging Lacan's writings through the 'mise-en-scène' of popular culture, he argues,

---

[211] Siri Hustvedt, 'Notes on Seeing', in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (London: Sceptre, 2012), pp. 223-31 (p. 223).

[212] In her essay 'Yonder', Hustvedt writes plainly, 'The expression "I see" in English for "I understand" is hardly haphazard.' Siri Hustvedt, 'Yonder', in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 1-43 (p. 16).

[213] Hubert Zapf, 'Narrative, Ethics, and Postmodern Art in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*', in *Ethics in Culture: The Dissemination of Values through Literature and Other Media*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes, and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 171-94 (p. 178).

[214] Hustvedt also contemplates blindness in *The Blindfold*. Alise Jameson argues that, while the novel aligns seeing with power, the helplessness borne of being blindfolded during a sexual encounter offers the protagonist Iris a freedom to fantasise more extensively but also presents the danger that her partner might ignore her subjectivity. Jameson, 'Pleasure and Peril: Dynamic Forces of Power and Desire in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*', *Studies in the Novel*, 42.4 (2010), 421-42 (p. 439).

'renders visible aspects that would otherwise remain unnoticed.'[215] In *What I Loved*, seeing peripherally or through mirror reflections sheds light on previously obscured domains of society and of the self.[216]

Hustvedt warns that, inured to the habituated rhythms of everyday life, conventional vision risks taking note only of expectation. Leo's initial failure to identify Mark's deceitfulness results from his presumption of and desire for the boy's honesty: 'spectacular lies', he explains, 'rely less on the liar's skill than on the listener's expectations and wishes' (219). The novel's third section begins with three anecdotes of misrecognition stemming from the collapse of familiar visual cues: after getting lost, Leo's father does not recognise his own house; in a foreign hallway, Leo mistakes his own mirror reflection for another man; thinking that he poured himself juice, Leo is disgusted by the taste of milk. For Leo, these frissons of estrangement, 'when the familiar turns radically foreign,' can only occur with,

> a loss of the external signposts that structure vision. Had my father not lost his way, he would have recognized his family's house. Had I known there was a mirror in front of me, I would have seen myself immediately, and had I identified the milk as milk, it would have tasted like itself. (254)

These moments reveal the extent to which preconceptions structure sensual experience. Without identifiable markers, these characters fail to register their acquaintance with a building, a taste, even themselves. These ruptures produce alienating moments of misrecognition that provide rare glimpses of and insights into the familiar uncloaked of habituation.

In *What I Loved*, by projecting a virtual double into space, mirrors offer a distinctive perspective, often facilitating the viewer to transcend their expectations and inspect the world and the self anew. Just as when he fails to recognise his own reflection in the hotel hallway, as Leo chases Mark across the country he is surprised by his

---

[215] Žižek aligns this strategy of illumination with the modes of philosophical inquiry of late Wittgenstein and Hegel. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1997), p. 3.

[216] Juhani Pallasmaa argues that the blurriness of peripheral vision represents a form of seeing that overcomes 'patriarchal domination.' The periphery, then, becomes a space of indefinite knowledge, a space to be creatively inquired into, and this is precisely the function of the collection in *What I Loved*. Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: Wiley, 2005), p. 13. In a similar light, James Elkins argues that seeing through the periphery is always an act of contemplation, 'a kind of seeing that is really thinking.' James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1996), p. 100.

reflection in these unfamiliar spaces. The mirrors of an Iowa mall confront him with a body that is 'suddenly alien' (316). Set against a foreign backdrop, Leo is faced with a radically changed perspective on himself: 'Surrounded by the inhabitants of Iowa, I looked like a gaunt Jew wandering through a mob of overfed Gentiles' (316). Leo experiences an even stronger sense of self-alienation when he checks himself in the mirror after being assaulted by Mark and Teddy Giles. Hunched and decrepit, Leo is '[a]ppalled' by his reflection, and it provokes an attempt to realign his appearance with his own vision of himself, 'to replace the inhuman stare I had seen in the mirror with a man's gaze' (328).

While the mirror can puncture expectation and facilitate visual clarity, so too does it resolve the problem of viewing the self. I noted earlier the link that Hustvedt draws between self-narration and mental health, her stipulation that the self exists only when it is able to understand itself as 'a separate and distinct whole being'.[217] Yet, as both Leo and Matt note, the self is absent from its own visual field. As the subject gazes out at the world, his or her body hides itself in 'a kind of hole', meaning that, as Leo states elsewhere, 'I'm only whole to myself in mirrors and photographs and the rare home movie' (129, 255). The confrontation with the mirror, Hustvedt's 'mirror stage', is a necessary step towards subjective stability, an image of wholeness that is the gateway to a self-narrative, without which we would be condemned to psychosis or, what she calls, the 'morbid fragment.'[218] In *What I Loved*, Mark embodies the inability to self-narrate, and this failure is tethered to his psychological problems, his incapacity to feel empathy. Rosenthal explains that Mark 'suffers from a personality disorder because he cannot integrate the different spaces, and the different demands they make on him, into a narrative of self.'[219] What Mark lacks, and what Hustvedt and Lacan suggest the mirror provides, is a unified angle on the self to then decipher in language. The mirror emerges as a palliative to the eye's failure to capture the subject in its wholeness, a site necessary for the self to communicate itself in a language comprehensible to others.

---

[217] Hustvedt, 'Charles Dickens', p. 187.
[218] Ibid., pp. 162-63.
[219] Rosenthal, p. 94.

The mirror image, we have seen, generates the possibility of self-interpretation by displacing the '"I" [to] the position of a "you."'[220] The process of mirroring is not confined, for either Hustvedt or Lacan, to the mirror as such but can be performed by an array of substances. Baudrillard suggests that 'as a mirror the object is perfect, precisely because it sends back not real images, but desired ones.'[221] For Baudrillard, the collection is above all narcissistic, reflecting back at the collector an attractive self-portrait while establishing in its objects a personal language that 'has lost any general validity.'[222] As a result, the collection is a place where melancholy festers because its vernacular is never made legible to others. Although *What I Loved* similarly positions the collection as a mirror and imbues it with a linguistic undertow, here the archive's discourse remains hidden even from the consciousness that organises it, requiring meditation and interaction to interpret its symbolism. Schwenger writes, responding to Baudrillard, 'Whatever general paradigm we may put forth, the narrative of any one collection—or, more precisely, collector—remains not only private but largely unconscious. This is not to say that such narratives can never be written; they are, rather, a challenge to the skills of the novelist.'[223] Likewise, in *What I Loved*, the collection works as a kind of personal cipher, allowing Leo to decode the hieroglyphics of his internal domain and, subsequently, to synthesise the traumatic departures of his family and friends into an autobiographical story. It is through the collection-as-mirror that, I will contend, Leo transitions from internal fragmentation to narrative fullness, uniting his past into the story that is presented as the novel. Before turning to the collection, however, I first analyse the novel's other reflective surfaces that demonstrate the particular valences of the psychoanalytic mirror, which produces narrative paradoxically by hitting up against the limitations of language.

---

[220] Hustvedt, 'Charles Dickens', p. 163.
[221] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 96.
[222] Ibid., p. 114.
[223] Schwenger, *Tears*, p. 85.

Artistic Plethora and Representing the Mixed Self

When Leo states that, in his art, 'Bill was hunting the unseen in the seen', his words recall the role Pomian affords the collection, as the vessel between the invisible and the visible (13). They also evoke Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writing on artistic practice. Meditating on Cézanne's paintings, Merleau-Ponty names the goal of the work of art: 'The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things.'[224] While both Bill and Merleau-Ponty call for artwork to illuminate the invisible, the content of the unseen and their strategies for approaching it divide their thinking. Significantly, Bill positions his work against that of Cézanne and, thus implicitly, against Merleau-Ponty: 'Nothing is clear. Feelings, ideas shape what's in front of you. Cézanne wanted the naked world, but the world is never naked. In my work, I want to create doubt' (12). In Merleau-Ponty's reading, Cézanne strove to achieve the impossible task of painting reality at its most foundational level, capturing on the canvas the multitude of sensuous registers beyond just the visible traces of a scene.[225] Bill, however, envisions no stable and accessible substance underwriting the visible world. Rather, for Bill, the visual field takes shape around the spectator's particular emotional and intellectual terrain. Instead of Cézanne's totality of senses, he argues that the purpose of art is to portray the uncertainty of every act of visualisation, to produce doubt.[226]

The passage of art from personal mirage to public object is, we might recall, similarly the process of self-creation outlined by Hustvedt, the imagination of the self as a stable whole followed by its articulation in language. But while Bill does experiment with more linear forms, his *Self-Portrait*, the first of his works that the reader

---

[224] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 9-25 (pp. 17-8).

[225] Martin Jay writes of Merleau-Ponty's conclusion, 'To render reality in all its sensual manifestations in a medium that remained stubbornly visual proved an intractable problem.' Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 159.

[226] Matt articulates a similarly individualistic phenomenological position, where one's vantage point rather than emotional state or personality makes every act of spectatorship unique. After watching a baseball game, Matt comments, 'we saw a game that was a little different from those guys with the beer next to us. It was the same game, but I could've noticed something those guys didn't' (129).

encounters, is not constructed of narrative language. This, for Leo, is 'the paradox' of the work, that while it attempts to represent 'invisible movement', it does so 'in figurative painting, which is nothing if not a frozen apparition—a surface' (13). Hustvedt, in her own writing on art, similarly differentiates painted work from literary narrative based on their temporalities. Whereas on a canvas every element 'is there all at once', novels, she contends, 'are meaningful only as a sequence of words'.[227] Hustvedt's poet-narrator in *The Summer Without Men* makes a similar observation about narrative's inability to attend to overlapping moments: 'simultaneity is a BIG problem for words. They come in sequence, always, only in sequence'.[228] The simultaneity of the painted surface resists the movement and ordered stability of narrative. Instead, in *What I Loved*, artwork signals the midway point in the translation of personal vision into language, into interpretations that strive to capture the doubt that shades the canvas.

Leo views all of Bill's artistic production as emerging from his personal life. He calls the work *O's Journey* a 'fabular autobiography' even though it 'didn't mirror Bill's life in any of its details' (126-7). Bill's *Self-Portrait*, however, more overtly connects his artwork with an excavation or a mirroring of the self. Despite its self-referential title, the *Self-Portrait* portrays three people: Violet, marked with a bruise and holding a miniature taxicab, is seemingly the subject of the portrait; also visible is the loafer of another person leaving the scene, a shoe later revealed to belong to Bill's soon-to-be ex-wife Lucille, as well as the artist's shadow cast over the canvas. Bill's literal presence in his *Self-Portrait* is only as the ephemeral trace of his shadow haunting the two women to whom he will be married over the course of his life.[229] The portrait points to two critical terms, elaborated on elsewhere in the text, which are fundamental to comprehending the logic of self-mirroring in *What I Loved*: that the self is composed of its 'mixing' with the external world and that the artistic work thrives through a symbolic 'excess' that exceeds linguistic representation.

---

[227] Siri Hustvedt, *Mysteries of the Rectangle* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), p. xv.
[228] Siri Hustvedt, *The Summer Without Men* (London: Sceptre, 2011), p. 134.
[229] At the time of painting, Bill is married to Lucille and he has only just met Violet. It is only later in the novel that Bill leaves Lucille for Violet.

By representing Bill as a composite of three people, the *Self-Portrait*, Hubert Zapf suggests, illustrates Violet's contention that the self is a 'mixed' substance, strung together from external influences that trespass its borders.[230] Against the conventional humanist ideal of a contained and unified self, Violet's 'mixing' emphasises that people are above all porous, our physical membrane infiltrated by food, our intellect pierced by books and images, and our very self composed from our engagement with others. For Violet, 'It isn't: I think, therefore I am. It's: I am because you are' (91). This process of mixing is the inevitable recourse of engaging with the world, but Violet also cautions that 'sometimes it's dangerous' (91). In a novel where the self requires unity in order to exist, formulating its amorphous substratum articulates a specific tension between the reality of subjective comingling on the one hand and, on the other, the necessary internalisation of an anchored, coherent sense of self from which to speak. The failure to manage this tension, the danger of which Violet speaks, is the stuff of abnormal psychologies and cultural hysterias. Leo's initial reaction to the *Self-Portrait* immediately links it with the discourse of mixing. He wonders, 'Did that title next to a man's name suggest a feminine part of himself or a trio of selves?' (4). When first viewing the *Self-Portrait*, Leo mistakes the shadow as his own, and Bill later offers it up to him: the shadow 'can be yours, too' (15). The shadow, thus, marks out an ambiguous space in which Bill's viewers might similarly become a part of his *Self-Portrait*, of his mixed identity.[231] Leo makes this very observation—that every viewer takes the place of the artist's shadow—in an essay he writes on Bill's work, tellingly titled 'Multiple Selves' (25).[232] Bill's gift of the shadow consolidates the two men's relationship, 'mark[ing] the moment when a meandering conversation between two men took an irrevocable turn toward friendship' (15). The painting, then, is both a representation of and a conduit for mixing.

---

[230] Zapf, p. 191. Rosenthal similarly links the portrait, and specifically the small taxi it depicts, with Violet's notion of 'mixing'. Rosenthal, p. 82.

[231] Rosenthal notes that the shadow 'exemplifies the theme of mixing identities and moreover signifies the triangular relationships at the heart of the novel.' Rosenthal, p. 86.

[232] Zapf, p. 191.

The shadow's indeterminacy, its refusal to be fixed to any one name, also points to Leo's key term of artistic 'excess' or 'plethora', the quality of mystery that he uses to define good art. In *Mysteries of the Rectangle*, Hustvedt differentiates the simple images of consumer culture from noteworthy works of art based on similar criteria. What Hustvedt derides in the 'facile images' of popular culture is that they are 'so easily read that they ask nothing of us but our money'.[233] Whereas poor art, for Hustvedt, presents easily comprehensible narratives, successful artworks are semantically slippery, their symbolic abundance defying the linearity of language. It is this internal complexity that Leo terms 'excess' or 'plethora', the quality of 'good works of art [...] that escapes the interpreter's eye' (121). While bad art can be immediately understood, for Hustvedt, meaningful art—work with a 'plethora'—confounds narrative and, for this very reason, demands to be read into language however inadequately. Hustvedt is wary of confining an artwork's mélange to a narrative that would only denude its complexity. Yet, while she damns any narrative that sets out to '*understand*' or '*solve*' a painting, to master it, she nevertheless remains invested in personal dialogues with the work of art, 'stories of traveling in that illusory, strange, and motionless world'.[234]

What I Loved animates the discrepancy between artworks with and without 'excess' through the conflict between Bill and *enfant terrible* Teddy Giles. Rosenthal states their distinction plainly: 'While Giles typifies an art that is all surface and effect, Bill represents an art that is interested in the repressed and hidden.'[235] Giles fashions horrific and graphic scenes of violence, mannequins bloodied and torn apart, which Leo contends, 'reproduced the gruesome images of horror flicks and cheap violent porn' (203). As mere facsimiles of the culture of violence, Giles's installations are, for Leo, too-perfect mirrors to reveal anything unknown. He states, 'They criticized nothing and they revealed nothing. The work was simulacra excreted from the culture's bowels—sterile, commercial feces meant purely for titillation' (203). Bill's work, on the other hand, possesses that elusive excessive substance because it seeks to 'create doubt', to

---

[233] Hustvedt, *Mysteries*, p. 9.
[234] Ibid, p. 9, xxi.
[235] Rosenthal, p. 101.

overflow narrative language (12). This plethora compels Leo to decode Bill's work diachronically, to return to his images anew and expand his interpretations. Zapf recognises that 'Leo keeps making ever new discoveries in this picture which are connected to the events taking place in the novel and seem to foreshadow these events almost prophetically'.[236] This personal and drawn-out consideration is the kind of viewing that Hustvedt advocates when she writes, 'every painting worth talking about reveals itself over time and takes on its own story inside the viewer.'[237]

As a simulacrum of the culture of violence, the voice of Giles's gruesome work is described in terms of language that is terse and unsubtle. Leo calls its style, like the self-satisfied style of many contemporary art critics, 'a language I've come to hate, because it admits no mystery and no ambiguity into its smug vocabulary, which arrogantly suggests that everything can be known' (203). Where Giles's work 'feels like a joke—a one-liner', Leo presents Bill's fairytale-inspired dioramas as a verbal melee, a 'visual argument' (200, 113). If Giles's installations speak too obviously to be a useful mirror—that is, they mirror too narrowly and too exactly—Bill's work provokes attempts at narration precisely because they represent a challenge to the requirements of discourse. What compels Leo to write a retrospective about Bill's oeuvre is precisely its 'investigation of the inadequacy of symbolic surfaces', and Leo struggles with its subtlety for 'several years', his book 'growing and shrinking and then growing again' (297, 362). In comparison to Giles's arrogant self-assuredness, Leo describes writing on Bill's work in terms of a 'tormenting mistress whose bouts of passion were followed by inscrutable coldness, who screamed for love and then slapped my face' (298). *What I Loved*, read alongside Hustvedt's non-fiction commentaries, conceives of an artwork's aesthetic value in terms of its overloaded uncertainty rather than its polemical precision, its resistance to interpretation compelling the drive to discover in language a provisional analysis.

This section has excavated the mirroring qualities of the work of art and its facility through symbolic excess to produce narrative responses. Hustvedt's essay

---

[236] Zapf, p. 191.
[237] Hustvedt, *Mysteries*, p. 12.

'Embodied Visions' articulates something akin to this process of self-formation, arguing that 'the experience of looking at visual art always involves a form of mirroring, which may be but is not necessarily conscious.'[238] Hustvedt suggests that engaging with a work of art stages a confrontation between the subjectivity of the viewer and the creativity of the artist. A loved work of art, she contends, 'reflects the vision of the other, of the artist, that we have made our own because it answers something within us that we understand is true.'[239] Like Bill's concept of aesthetic plethora, Hustvedt argues that the personal truth, discovered within the creativity of the artist, takes the form of a 'vast discursive statement' or transcends discourse altogether.[240] Significantly, Hustvedt lends pieces of art this capacity as 'objects without utility', noting that even nonfigurative works can produce such reflective moments.[241] We might recall from the previous chapter that, for both Benjamin and Baudrillard, collecting eliminates the object's use value. Hustvedt's writing on the mirror of artwork, then, seems equally applicable to the collection, and indeed, Leo, as we shall see, engages with his drawer of abandoned objects by reflecting upon their symbolic and material resonances. Notably, in 'Embodied Visions', Hustvedt applies the rhetoric of play and the 'potential space' theorised by D.W. Winnicott to the encounter between spectator and artwork. This same terminology animates my own discussion of the collection in *What I Loved*, but first I turn to the mirror of hysteria to further illuminate Violet's concept of 'overmixing' and its constitution of Mark as pure reflection.

Hysteria, Overmixing, and the False Self

In the novel's array of hysterics, we find a mirror itself composed of excess, one that projects a critical angle on society through the unruly dialect of bodily symptoms. In his essay 'Of Other Spaces', Michel Foucault argues that in order to stabilise their cultural order, societies create 'heterotopias', physical locations where that very

---

[238] Siri Hustvedt, 'Embodied Visions: What Does It Mean to Look at a Work of Art?', in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 336-54 (pp. 338-39).
[239] Ibid., p. 354.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid., p. 339.

authority might be contested.[242] These spaces consolidate social orthodoxy while also revealing it to be messy or arbitrary. Foucault's heterotopias are an amorphous concept, but they point to sanctioned spaces where society reveals itself obliquely, and it is for this reason that he likens them—like utopias—to the mirror. In his essay, Foucault calls psychiatric hospitals, alongside prisons and rest homes, 'heterotopias of deviation', quarantining those people who diverge from social norms and, thereby, delimiting those very orthodoxies.[243] *What I Loved* similarly situates the hysteric, the asylum's occupant, as a heterotopic lens through which to understand broader cultural structures.

The three intellectual projects that Violet pursues all take hysteria as their focus but scrutinise the illness in its distinctive historical permutations. For Violet, the hysteria treated and displayed in the Salpêtrière in nineteenth-century France has modern corollaries in both eating disorders and the antisocial disorder that plagues Giles and Mark. Every hysterical illness is, however, marked by particular symptoms, and Violet ponders why the same somatic expressions abound at particular moments in time. She concludes that, in Leo's words, 'the contagions [...] move in language, pictures, feelings, and in something else I can't name, something between and among us' (366). Hysteria is, for Violet, 'the sickness that moves in the air', but it also presents 'a permissible way out' of unbearable personal and cultural settings (365, 54). Hysterias are subjective states generated by yet operating in opposition to social mores, widespread conditions that bear the marks of the mainstream precisely because they react against it. Mark Micale, for instance, notes that like hysteria, eating disorders and other contemporary psychological ailments 'are perceived as social and cultural diseases reflective in some direct, if undetermined, way of social and cultural conditions unique to the present.'[244] Widespread hysterical ailments form pervasive movements in opposition to social regulations, articulating this resistance through bodily signs unutterable in language.

---

[242] Rosenthal also applies Foucault's concept of the heterotopia to *What I Loved*, but she employs this terminology only to dissect Bill's painting and not to conceptualise hysteria.
[243] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p. 25).
[244] Mark S. Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 290-91.

When there are no words to express an injury, hysteria can take over to mime that disenfranchisement through the body. In her account of contemporary hysterias, which situates the United States in the 1990s as 'the hot zone of psychogenic diseases,' Elaine Showalter notes that men and women alike 'convert feelings into symptoms when we are unable to speak—when, for example, we feel overwhelmed by shame, guilt, or helplessness.'[245] Indeed, it is the uncontainable quality of their communication, its resistance to linear masculine discourse, that makes the hysteric a revolutionary figure in the feminist theories of Luce Irigaray.[246] Thus, the heterotopic mirror of hysteria, by speaking in the multifaceted patois of the body, possesses a symbolic plethora whose translation into language is particularly fraught. Christine Marks argues that, in *What I Loved*, the hysteric at the Salpêtrière is caught in 'a struggle between individual rebellion and discursive regulation', between the indeterminate language of the body and the analytic language of the medical profession.[247] Marks contends that, in their endeavour to name and, thereby, to categorise hysteria, these nineteenth-century physicians circumscribe its expressive potential. In doing so, they enact another form of violence on the hysteric, literalised when the doctors would sign their patients like art objects. The doctors' symbolic brutality warns that interpreting the mirror of excess entails a responsibility to those figures whose bodies, images, or objects form the material of the reflective surface.

Hysterical symptoms not only reveal society through the excessive register of the body, but the hysteric is itself the embodiment of society's excess, those pushed to its outskirts unable to attend to its shifting regulations. As such we might consider hysteria

---

[245] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 4, 207.

[246] Irigaray writes of 'a revolutionary potential in hysteria. Even in her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desires... A movement of revolt and refusal, a desire for/of the living mother who would be more than a reproductive body in the pay of the polis, a living, loving woman.' Luce Irigaray, 'Woman-mothers, the silent substratum of the social order', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford, trans by. David Macey (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwells, 1991), pp. 47-52 (pp. 47-8).

[247] Christine Marks, 'Hysteria, Doctor-Patient Relationships, and Identity Boundaries in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*', *Gender Forum*, 25 (2009), <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/literature-and-medicine-i/hysteria-doctor-patient-relationships-and-identity-boundaries-in-siri-hustvedts-what-i-loved/> [accessed 10 June 2013] (para. 19 of 19).

as a social mirror with a plethora, an obscure voice translated into language by Violet through her concept of 'mixing'. Whereas the nineteenth-century hysteric's wild performances embraced mixing to critique a culture with a surplus of strictures, Violet argues that eating disorders conversely strengthen the border between the self and society in reaction to a contemporary culture in which traditions have collapsed.[248] The epidemic of eating disorders, Violet argues, results from wide-ranging social changes, 'including the breakdown of courting rituals and sexual codes, which leaves young women formless and vulnerable' (163). To translate the symbolism of eating disorders into language, Violet develops her idea of 'overmixing': easily penetrated by the outside world these individuals naturally 'find it hard to separate the needs and desires of other people from their own' (88). In response, eating disorder sufferers react to external pressures by shoring up their boundaries, either by refusing to allow food to enter their body or by binging on it to ward off any erotic interest.

The terminology of 'overmixing' similarly applies to Mark and Teddy Giles, whose antisocial disorder is the novel's most contemporary form of hysteria.[249] Enmeshed in a youth culture that strives, as one rave flyer announces, to 'ELIMINATE BOUNDARIES', Mark's personality becomes influenced by those around him, leaving him with no stable subjective core (213). His psychological makeup appears to be a combination of the novel's other hysterical forms. Like eating disorder sufferers, Mark is easily infected by the outside world, but he responds to this impingement by embracing external influences rather than shutting down his borders.[250] As such, like nineteenth-century hysterics, Mark inhabits a mirror-like orientation. Violet notes that, lodged next to the epileptics' ward, the hysterics at the Salpêtrière started having seizures: 'They became what they were near' (56). As his name implies, Mark, or 'the Mark' as his friends sometimes call him, is an embodied impression of the people

---

[248] Violet contends, 'Nowadays girls *make* boundaries [...] The hysterics wanted to explode them. Anorexics build them up' (81). Emphasis in original.

[249] Rosenthal similarly notes that Mark 'illustrates a case of over-mixing.' She does not, however, relate this state to Winnicott's theory of true and false selves, nor to any psychoanalytic discourse. Rosenthal, p. 94.

[250] Andrew Scull similarly acknowledges that hysteria 'is a chameleon-like disease that can mimic the symptoms of any other, and one that somehow seems to mold itself to the culture in which it appears.' Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 6.

around him, shape-shifting in order to meet their expectations and their desires. Violet, for instance, understands Mark's displays of empathy as emerging not from his own sympathetic nature but from her own desire that he behave as such: 'He gives us the performance he thinks we want' (275). Leo, similarly, discards the possibility that, like many adolescents, Mark is merely experimenting with different identities when he spies him speaking and acting with a wholly unfamiliar cadence with Giles: he writes, 'For years I had seen in Mark the shifting colors of a chameleon, had known that he changed according to the circumstances in which he found himself, but at the sound of that unknown voice, the disquiet that had been lurking in me for so long seemed to find its horrible confirmation' (318). Leo's terror emerges from the realisation that Mark possesses or expresses no default self, no ethical or personal compass from which to deviate but embodies an array of distinct selves without underlying coherence or structure.

Mark embodies Winnicott's concept of the 'false self', the 'polite or socialized self' that bends to social convention even when this requires unfaithfulness to a sense of personal authenticity.[251] Although the false self is at times a social necessity, in abnormal development it hides and overrides the 'true self' through its performance of compliance, evoking a feeling of being unreal or inauthentic.[252] For Winnicott, compliance is the sign most revealing of psychological problems, while spontaneous and creative action evince well-being. Mark's pathology is one in which his self exists exclusively in relation to people with whom he interacts, structuring his appearance towards the goal of unanimous appeal: Bill relays to Leo that 'when he had asked Mark what he most wanted from life, the boy had replied with apparent candor that he wanted people to like him' (238). As a result, Mark cannot narrate a coherent story about himself, a deficiency revealed during his spell in rehab where, Violet notes, he could only parrot other people's accounts of his affliction. Violet reveals to Leo:

---

[251] D.W. Winnicott, 'The Concept of the False Self', *Home Is Where We Start From*, ed. by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 65-70 (p. 66).
[252] D.W. Winnicott, 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self (1960)', in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1994), pp. 140-152 (p. 148).

> They wanted him to feel—to tell his story. So he started to talk, but when I think about it, he never said much of any significance. But he did cry. That made them happy. He gave them what they wanted—feeling, or the appearance of it. But a story is about making connections in time, and Mark's stuck in a time warp, a sick repetition that just shuttles him back and forth, back and forth. (308)

Like the eating disorder patients Violet analyses, Mark is 'overmixed', but rather than shutting down his borders, he absorbs other people's desires, tailoring his voice and his actions to their specific appetites.

In this respect, Mark personifies the shadow-figure in Bill's *Self-Portrait* that waits to be assumed by someone else's body. Mark's languid posture is just one expression of his compliance. Twice, an enraged Leo tackles him only for the younger and stronger man to offer no resistance, his 'rag doll's' body radiating only amazing 'passivity' (229, 321). Violet analyses this compliance as stemming from Mark's chaotic upbringing, being sent away by and returned to his mother for erratic behaviour having 'turned him into a docile, agreeable replica of himself' (352).[253] Leo believes that, because he was at the age of seven 'an unusually agreeable child', Mark's hardships 'seemed to have left no trace on his character' (238). Yet, such a deferential attitude is, for Winnicott, a telling symptom of abnormal psychological development and a buoyant false self.[254] Mark's somatic compliance mirrors the subjugation of his violent inner voice for a position of outward conformity. He explains: 'There's a voice inside my head. I hear it, but nobody else does. People wouldn't like it, so I use other voices for them' (323). Rather than a singular craven false self, Mark takes on several unique social personas bearing little congruity. It is for this reason that Mark finds it confusing 'when I've met two different people in two different places and then I meet them at the same party or something, and I don't know how to act' (322). Mark is seemingly a blank space, written anew in each social arena. He is, then, both overmixed and unmixed, animated by other people yet left curiously unmarked by their possession.

---

[253] Winnicott also links stealing and lying, Mark's other most significant symptoms, to the search for the absent mother. See Winnicott, 'Stealing and Telling Lies', in *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 161-66.

[254] D.W. Winnicott, 'What Do We Mean by a Normal Child', in *The Child, the Family*, pp. 124-30.

Using People as Objects

Whereas Mark's pathology prevents him from registering the influence of other people, Leo compiles the components of his 'mixed' self in a collection of objects. When the novel begins, Leo keeps in his drawer photographs of family members who perished in Auschwitz: he says, 'The black-and-white figures of the photographs have had to stand in place of my memory, and yet I have always felt that their unmarked graves became a part of me. What was unwritten then is inscribed into what I call myself. The longer I live the more convinced I am that when I say "I," I am really saying "we"' (22-3). The drawer functions as a repository for artefacts of those intimate figures whose influence has shaped Leo, bearing the materials of his 'mixed' self. As the text progresses, Leo adds to this drawer objects of others he has loved but who are no longer present either because, like Matt and Bill, they have died or because, like Erica and Violet, they have moved away. In Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*, Mr. Morning similarly employs the object world to access the dead, hiring Iris to tape-record whispered descriptions of the items his neighbour has left behind '[f]or a kind of biography'.[255] Here, as in Leo's collection, the characteristics of material possessions fill in the silhouette of the lost person. In addition to projecting information about its owners, the collection of objects harkens back to a familiar home-space lost to the past. In *The Sorrows of an American*, Eric contemplates his father's preoccupation with archiving the experience of Norwegian settlers in America as a way to revisit his own history, 'to return home again and again.'[256] Like Eric's father, in his collection Leo organises around him the components of his vanished home, reuniting through amulets those loved ones lost to distance and to death.

The collection, I will argue, forms a psychoanalytic space where Leo can analyse his past relationships, finding in its materials a fountain of meaning from which to form an autobiographical story. Yet, the text implies a curious symmetry between Leo's therapeutic collection and the psychotic behaviours of Giles and Mark. After finally coming to terms with Mark's psychological abnormality, Leo characterises his absence

---

[255] Siri Hustvedt, *The Blindfold* (New York: Picador, 1992), p. 13.
[256] Siri Hustvedt, *The Sorrows of an American* (New York: Picador, 2008), p. 175.

of empathy as being like 'when others aren't a part of us anymore but are turned into things' (346). In a sinister twist, the economy of Leo's collection corresponds quite literally to his description of Mark's anti-social disorder, his archival objects standing metonymically for their absent owners. Like this unexpected salience, the disturbing rumour that Giles collects children similarly gestures towards Leo's archive, itself a collection of people in absentia. These two subtle similarities between Leo and the psychotic new guard of Mark and Giles cast a disturbing shadow over the collection, and insist that Leo's collection be considered in relation to Mark's unethical position within the text.

Leo charges Mark with objectifying others because he cannot sympathise with them, whereas his own collection makes objects of people who have receded from his life but continue to exert a gravitational force on his identity. Mark's personality illustrates an inability to differentiate others from himself, and this failure distinguishes his acts of objectification from Leo's collection. In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott argues that relating to objects precedes object-usage in the maturation process.[257] At birth the infant cannot distinguish itself from the outside world, and so no object is felt to be part of an external, shared reality. Successful parenting involves anticipating and mirroring the child's desires in order to maintain its sense of omnipotence, failing it only slowly and thereby forcing it gradually to acknowledge a world outside itself. Only when this work of weaning is achieved can the child recognise a shared object world. That Mark cannot distinguish himself from other people, that he shapes himself to their desires, suggests that he is unable to use them as objects.[258] The episode in which Mark bites the sleeping Leo hints at this developmental stasis, aligning him with the infantile

---

[257] The following argument is elaborated in Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971), pp. 86-94.

[258] There is some evidence to suggest that, because of her crippling self-consciousness, Mark's mother, Lucille, might be what Winnicott terms a *not-good-enough mother*. Leo notes upon first meeting her, 'She talked as if she were observing her own sentences, looking at them from afar, judging their sounds and shapes even as they came from her mouth. [...] She was both the subject and object of her own statements' (17). Later, when Mark is hospitalised for a drug overdose, Violet condemns Lucille for her decision not to visit her ill son. Leo, however, is more forgiving, because he 'knew that self-consciousness and uncertainty paralyzed Lucille' (294). Such an inability to lose sight of oneself and respond wholly to the baby's needs and desires is precisely, for Winnicott, what produces a powerful false self, its overwhelming compliance and its creative impotence.

stage in which the baby chews an object in order to make it 'part of himself' so that he might then use it.[259]

Leo's acts of objectification, unlike Mark's, emerge from the contemplation of his past, objects taking the place of those no longer present because they continue to contour his subjectivity. *What I Loved* suggests that possessing an identity, producing or discovering a mirror of the self and then articulating it in language, inevitably involves the objectification of others, whose influence forms the bedrock of that mixed self. Bill's *Self-Portrait* is one example of this phenomenon, turning Violet into a work of art for the sake of self-enlightenment: Leo notes, 'you borrowed her to show yourself' (15). Rosenthal argues that the novel diffuses Violet's objectification by portraying the painting first through her own words, by presenting her as a dialogic partner in the painting process, and by positioning the composition itself as subverting the eroticised male gaze.[260] Rosenthal, however, does not mention the *Self-Portrait*'s most obvious sign of violence, the bruise that Bill applies to Violet's knee. Erica notes: 'It's like he loved doing it, like he wanted to make a little wound that would last forever' (6). The bruise, in Erica's account, emerges as the alarming underside of infatuation, the romantic feelings Bill holds for Violet taking the form of an indelible bruise to ensure his imprint on her body and, therefore, her memory. Leo repurposes this imagery after confessing his love to Violet: 'Neither Violet nor I ever mention the night I told her I loved her, but my confession still lies between us like a shared bruise' (358). The bruise, then, becomes the emblem of mixing, the self forming around an assemblage of influences conceived of as small brutalities.

This twining of physical desire and representational brutality, present on the canvas of Bill's *Self-Portrait*, implies that infatuation enacts a violence on its target. In her essay 'A Plea for Eros', Hustvedt elucidates this very argument, suggesting that, 'Desire is always between a subject and an object.'[261] Initiating a relationship and maintaining it, in this account, requires attempts to understand the partner's wishes, but

[259] D.W. Winnicott, 'The Baby as Person', in *The Child, the Family*, pp. 75-79.
[260] Rosenthal, pp. 77-8.
[261] Siri Hustvedt, 'A Plea for Eros', in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 45-60 (p. 49).

these interpretations can easily lapse into misunderstanding. Relationships, then, always occur between subjects and the objectified version of their partner, imagined with varying degrees of nuance and depth. Within a novel that defines the self in terms of its mixing with others and requires its evocation in language to ward off psychosis, the realisation of a self must come with such acts of objectification, the violence of—to paraphrase Leo—borrowing others to show oneself. Here we are not far from the doctors at the Salpêtrière who treated their hysterical patients like art objects: 'Medicine had granted permission to a fantasy that men have never abandoned, a muddled version of what Pygmalion wanted—something between a real woman and a beautiful thing' (74). This fantasy of omnipotent control, however, comes through unexpectedly, and with varying degrees of intensity, in the archive.

Whereas nineteenth-century doctors treated their patients as bodies over which they executed total control, Leo uses objects abandoned by his friends and family as the gateway into an analysis of himself, operating with a sensitivity of analysis absent in medical diagnostic protocols. Nevertheless, Leo's endeavour still symbolically exerts power over his friends: to reveal the 'mixed' self and then narrate it in language requires taking control over their lives, fashioning them according to terms meaningful to one's own self-narrative. Jacques Derrida acknowledges this process in his analysis of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's 'Monologue with Freud', which, by uniting the Jewish community, the author, and the psychoanalyst under the pronoun 'we', corrals the dead Freud into the religion's ranks. Derrida argues that Yerushalmi's use of 'we' exercises 'the violence of this *communal* dissymmetry', instrumental to the foundation of any common category or group: 'It is the origin of the *common*, happening each time we address ourselves to someone, each time we call them while *supposing*, that is to say while *imposing* a "we," and thus while inscribing the other person in this situation of an at once spectral and patriarchic nursling.'[262] Yerushalmi can, without Freud's consent, re-subscribe him into the Jewish community because he is dead, and, as Derrida notes, phantoms, like newborns at their initial circumcision, cannot contest that invocation. In *What I Loved*, where every individual is a 'we', a 'mixed' constellation of intimacies, the very

---

[262] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 30. Emphasis in original.

formation and possession of a self requires this communal violence, bruising others, objectifying their lives and appropriating their stories, in order to reveal the person around whom they orbit.

In this section I noted a strange violence that unites Mark's antisocial disorder with the archival strategy that Leo employs to understand himself. The novel, however, also compels these two characters to be compared based on their relationships to play. The next section investigates the games developed by Mark and Leo, respectively, and introduces the concept of 'archival play'. Leo's collection, we shall see, becomes the platform through which he addresses his past, but its malleable form enables a series of curations that, as a form of play, permits him to analyse and, eventually, narrate this series of departures.

Archival Play

Both Mark and Leo develop games expressive of their psychological makeups, demonstrating again the differences between Mark's false-self compliance and Leo's more developed object-usage. In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott contends that 'it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.'[263] Play is, for Winnicott, a communicative gesture that can be analysed for meaning and the basis for the practice of psychoanalysis itself. Moreover, Winnicott argues that only through playing and through acting creatively does the true self find expression and conquer compliance. Mark's and Leo's games, I argue, correspond to Christopher Bollas's notions of trauma and psychic genera. For Bollas, the subject's ability to evolve over time, rather than lapse into repetition, hinges on its facility at using objects to express its internal domain. Whereas the traumatic subject is disposed to contain disturbing events through their cyclical repetition, psychic genera see the establishment of a new subjective orientation through a process of unconscious re-arrangement.[264] Like Bollas's traumatic position, Mark's monotonous game strives to confine the psychological wounds emanating from his

---

[263] Winnicott, *Playing*, p. 54.
[264] Christopher Bollas explains these contrasting concepts in the fourth chapter of *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 66-100.

vertiginous childhood, while Leo's game materialises and externalises the establishment of psychic genera through its remixing of archival objects.

Master Fremont, the game Mark plays as a child, illuminates his burgeoning false self and his pathological concern with mixing. Violet describes the game:

> Mark is Master Fremont and I'm his servant. I wrap him up in his robe and carry him out of the bathroom to his bed. I put him down on the bed and then I start hugging and kissing my little master. He pretends to be very angry and he fires me. I promise to be good and never hug him again, but I can't control myself, and I throw myself at him and kiss him and hug him all over again. He fires me again. I beg to be given another chance. I get down on my knees. I pretend to cry. He relents, and the game starts all over again. He could play it forever. (92)

In Master Fremont, Hustvedt mimics the Fort-Da game played by Sigmund Freud's grandson and analysed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.[265] Although Fort-Da begins simply as a game of tossing a toy away, when the child acquires a wooded reel with a string attached, it evolves into a game of disappearance and reappearance: the boy throws the toy and then, to his great pleasure, pulls it back into view. Since the child permits his mother to leave him without causing a fuss, Freud analyses the game as an enactment of his repressed anxiety around her departure. Fort-Da, Freud decides, is a form of revenge upon the mother for leaving, a way for the child to take control of her departure by sending her away himself if only in the form of the cast-away object.

As in Fort-Da, Mark moves from a position of passivity to one of authority. Violet, echoing Freud, analyses Master Fremont as a way for Mark to master his milieu of neglect. The anxiety of being shuttled between households, sent away by his mother, Lucille, to live with Bill and Violet, is channeled into his obsessive game. Violet says: 'it's a mixing game. He gets to reject me, send me away and then take me back over and over again. He has the power' (92). In the form of Master Fremont, Mark attempts to acquire a feeling of self-control: reacting against his fluctuating environment, Mark invents a game in which he has ultimate jurisdiction, where he controls the mother's movement and her affection. Master Fremont is, however, premised on eternal repetition, the initial game presenting no opportunity for spontaneity. It thus both voices the root of Mark's compliance, his feeling of being out of control, and enacts

---

[265] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick (London and New York: Penguin, 2003), pp. 43-102 (pp. 52-55).

compliance by structurally forbidding creative action. In weeding out spontaneity, the game seemingly prefigures the repetitive pattern that will animate Mark's future life, his predictable fluctuations between his compliant state and eruptions of theft and deception. Leo's later contention that Mark is 'a machine of perfect repetition, [...] driven to do what he had done before', could equally well describe the structure of Master Fremont (268).

This image of Mark as a machine recalls Leo's description of his own melancholy state following Matt's death, when he terms his failing marriage 'a machine [...], a churning repetitious engine of mourning' (146). Leo, in the novel's second game, interrupts his depression through a creative remixing of his past in what I term 'archival play'. Whereas Master Fremont is a traumatic and repetitive reaction to an anxiety over external vacillations, the game Leo plays with his objects embraces and contemplates his mixed self, and in doing so functions as a form of therapy rather than traumatised reenactment. For Freud, Fort-Da was a primary example of the death drive, the impulse to repeat material in opposition to the drive for pleasure.[266] Baudrillard links Fort-Da to the collection's own economy of mourning. By fixing objects in a series and subjecting them to a game of disappearance and reappearance, Baudrillard argues that the collector strives to overcome death by taking control of time:

> What man gets from objects is not a guarantee of life after death but *the possibility, from the present moment onwards, of continually experiencing the unfolding of his existence in a controlled, cyclical mode, symbolically transcending a real existence the irreversibility of whose progression he is powerless to affect.*[267]

Time, materialised in the series of objects, can be made to replay over and over again, the forward movement towards death undermined by this cyclical, repetitive game.

What I Loved contests Baudrillard's idea that the collection is neutered of creativity, aligning itself instead with Walter Benjamin and his figure of the child collector. Graeme Gilloch argues that, in Benjamin's writing, 'Through the playfulness of the child, the broken and forgotten object is transformed into something new, something valuable.'[268] Benjamin affords children a natural zeal for collecting, their

---

[266] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 14.
[267] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 104. Emphasis in original.
[268] Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p. 89.

faces baring a passion for the archival hunt 'which lingers on, but with a dimmed and manic glow, in antiquarians, researchers, bibliomaniacs.'[269] The child's heightened attention to the outside world becomes, for Benjamin, the purview of the collector, who remains constantly on alert for new wares. If, for the collector, the world vibrates with potential encounters, objects waiting to be discovered and collated, this intensity of meaning overlaps with the experience of living within the dream: 'For in the dream, too, the rhythm of perception and experience is altered in such a way that everything—even the seemingly most neutral—comes to strike us; everything concerns us.'[270] While Leo does not intensively seek out his objects, his engagement with them corresponds to the imaginative play that Benjamin lends the collector. Leo's collection, we shall see, manifests itself within the logic of the dream, his archive charged with meaning that shifts with every new addition and rearrangement. Benjamin writes that, taking on a new meaning with each additional object, the collection 'shows [the collector] his affairs in constant flux.'[271] Not only does Leo's collection grow with, and thereby register, the changes in his personal life, but these additions provide new fodder for investigation, new items to be mined for significance, as the entire review of the archive shifts with each addition.

After Matt's death, Leo finds it impossible to mix with the world: he narrates, 'light, noise, color, smells, the slightest motion of the air rubbed me raw with their stimuli' (148). With his collection, however, he stages a kind of controlled mixing, a theatre of remixing wherein he contemplates those people now gone and sorts them into networks of meaning. Whereas Master Fremont systematically repeats itself, Leo's archival play corresponds to Bollas's opposing term, psychic genera: 'a combinatory play that leads to the eventual establishment of a new perspective.'[272] I have already noted that the novel explicitly links Leo's drawer with his interior terrain. As he adds mementos to the drawer, Leo begins to play a 'game of mobile objects', in which he

[269] Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London and New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 45-104 (p. 71).
[270] Benjamin, 'The Collector', pp. 205-6.
[271] Ibid., p. 205.
[272] Bollas, *Being*, p. 76.

moves the items into various organisational schemes and analyses these juxtapositions for meaning (364). Leo explains:

> Each thing was a bone that signified absence, and I took pleasure in arranging these fragments according to different principles. Chronology provided one logic, but even this could change, depending on how I read each object. [...] For days I worked on possible time tables and then abandoned them for more secret, associative systems, playing with every possible connection. (191)

Leo, discovering himself in the objects left behind by loved ones, externalises Bollas's psychic genera, physically playing with and rearranging his objects in order to achieve a new outlook on his past. Like the 'combinatory play' of the generative process, Leo's game is one of reorganisation, objects shuffled into new schemes to divine their meanings. Whereas the recombinations of Bollas's genera occur unconsciously, Leo manifests this process through his collection.

Bollas suggests that the true self—and its unique internal idiom—'finds its expression through the choices and uses of objects that are available to it in the environment.'[273] When selecting the first objects to add to his collection, culled from his dead son's possessions, Leo calls his selections 'purely a matter of instinct' (149). As in Bollas's theory, Leo's choices seemingly reflect his subjectivity, projecting it into material objects and thereby opening himself up for analysis. In *Being a Character*, Bollas articulates a connection between dreaming and these objects infused with subjective meaning. The world, he notes, is littered with objects that provoke a personal response, objects laden with affiliations and memories much like those items installed in Leo's drawer. Coming into contact with these objects is like dreaming, he argues, the dream's environment orientated by the unconscious and so similarly outfitted with objects of subjective significance.[274] Indeed, these objects, which Winnicott terms subjective objects, establish the vocabulary of dream life, furnishing the dream with its implicit symbolism. For Bollas, both dreams and subjective objects reveal the internal idiom of the true self and provide the material with which to take stock of it.

---

[273] Christopher Bollas, *Forces of Destiny: Psychoanalysis and Human Idiom* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 10.
[274] Bollas, *Being*, pp. 22-3.

By curating them into different orientations, Leo extracts fresh associations from his talismans in a process related to psychoanalytic dream interpretation. Early in the novel, Erica says of Bill's *Self-Portrait*: 'It's like looking at another person's dream, isn't it?' (5). Like the mirror of the portrait, so too is the mirror of the collection a means of glancing at the self in an oneiric state, providing a framework for dream analysis. Gaynor Kavanagh similarly calls the curated public museum a 'dream space' for its propensity to elicit unpredictable personal associations. Echoing the Winnicottian vocabulary of games we find in *What I Loved*, she contends that in the museum, 'The mind is at play, free-wheeling and open to itself.'[275] That Leo only plays with his objects in the liminal time preceding sleep further associates the collection with the dream, Leo noting that, 'My drawer proved to be an effective sedative' (192). *What I Loved*, thus, positions the collection as what Hustvedt elsewhere calls 'dream consciousness', the slackening of rational thought that occurs 'in reverie, in the hypnagogic visions that precede sleep, in the free associations of analysis, and in the making of art.'[276] Susan Hiller, similarly, suggests a loose correspondence between the layers of meaning in a collection—the disjunction between the story its curator is trying to convey and the one interpreted by the audience—and the dream narrative's possession of 'both a manifest and a hidden content'.[277] Addressing objects as though they are the latent content of a dream, Leo attempts both to decode their unity and, later, to fashion their meanings into a self-narrative.

Leo interprets his objects as lexical signifiers in the 'free association' form of dream analysis developed by Sigmund Freud. Freud advises that the analysand, when approaching his or her dream, voice whatever comes to mind in an unmediated and non-selective way, likening this state to the time before bed, the period during which Leo contemplates his objects.[278] These lines of associations strive to articulate what Freud

---

[275] Gaynor Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), p. 161.

[276] Siri Hustvedt, 'Freud's Playground', in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 196-219 (p. 217).

[277] Susan Hiller, 'Working Through Objects', in *Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller*, ed. by Barbara Einzig (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 226-41 (p. 227).

[278] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 127.

calls the 'dream-thoughts' that are abbreviated and condensed in the formation of the dream, and by interpreting these links of affiliated but seemingly unrelated ideas psychoanalysis attempts to decode the dream's meaning.[279] Thinking of Leo's objects as terms of free association elucidates their relationship to the concept of artistic 'plethora': just as Freud notes that dream-thoughts need to be abbreviated in the formation of the dream, so too does the symbolism carried by each object overrun the structure of narrative, each arrangement eliciting different correspondences. Leo's objects, thus, manifest material indicative of the interior self, providing not a narrative but a series of signifiers to approach through the psychoanalytic process.

Leo treats his collection's 'associative systems' as trains of thought, dispersals whose network unity he tries to uncover. Leo describes one instance of his play:

> I put Erica's lipstick beside Matt's baseball card one day and moved it near the doughnut box on another. The link between the latter two objects was delightfully obscure but plain once I noticed it. The lipstick conjured Erica's colored mouth, the doughnut box Mark's hungry one. The connection was oral. I grouped the photograph of my twin cousins, Anna and Ruth, with the wedding picture of their parents for a while, but then I shifted it to sit beside Matt's play program on one side and the photo of Bill and Violet on another. Their meanings depended on their placement, what I thought of as a mobile syntax. (191-92)

In this game, Leo attempts to decipher his collection—and, therefore, to analyse his connections to lost friends and family—through playful juxtaposition. Forming them into networks, Leo treats his objects like terms in a string of free association, searching for himself in their connective threads. Bollas suggests that by performing free association in psychotherapy, the analysand compiles 'a network of thought that constitutes the matrix of [his or her] unconscious as it functions within the psychoanalytical space.'[280] Free association, he insists, both teaches the analyst the patient's internal vocabulary and challenges the patient to participate in a creative process. Leo, exercising free association without an analyst, attempts to understand the discourse of his collection in a game that, unlike Mark's Master Fremont, presents him with the creative challenges of forming novel arrangements and uncovering latent connections. Leo narrates: 'Talismans, icons, incantations—these fragments are my frail shields of meaning. The game's moves must be rational. I force myself to make a

---

[279] Ibid., p. 298.
[280] Christopher Bollas, *The Evocative Object World* (Hove: Routledge, 2009), p. 25.

coherent argument for every grouping, but at bottom the game is magic' (364). Treating his objects as signifiers in a game of free association, Leo thus employs the collection as a psychoanalytic space of self-interpretation.

Winnicott provides two goals for the psychoanalytic encounter: mirroring and playing. Like the *good-enough mother*, who by anticipating her child's desires facilitates its spontaneity, Winnicott advises that psychotherapists play with their patients, stimulating creative exchanges by refusing to pin them down with definitive interpretations. To avoid engendering compliance, Winnicott urges analysts not to place themselves in a position of supremacy by telling their patient what is wrong with them, instead calling psychotherapy 'a long-term giving the patient back what the patient brings.'[281] Winnicott emphasises playing with the patient so that they come to self-analyse, to discover what might be the analyst's interpretation within themselves. Adam Phillips briefly summarises in his book on Winnicott: the analyst 'aims to be an attentive but unimpinging object.'[282] The collection, by reflecting the inner panorama of the self, literalises this description by offering up the contents for analysis, provoking a game through which Leo unravels his 'mixed' self and, in the process, develops his creative capacities.

Like Master Fremont, Leo's 'archival play' articulates a specific relationship to Violet's concept of mixing. Whereas Master Fremont follows a script in which young Mark perpetually controls the mother and ensures her love for him, the archive orientates Leo within an analytical space in which to consider and come to terms with his past through a fluid process of remixing. Writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, Werner Muensterberger locates collecting objects within a repetitive temporality centred on defeating anxiety: 'Repeated acquisitions serve as a vehicle to cope with inner uncertainty, a way of dealing with the dread of renewed anxiety, with confusing problems of need and longing.'[283] *What I Loved*, however, distances the archive from the discourse of mastery, relating it instead with discovery and play. Leo's game of

---

[281] Winnicott, *Playing*, p. 117.

[282] Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (London: Fontana, 1988), p. 142.

[283] Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 11.

recombination, unlike the mechanical repetition of Master Fremont, investigates the 'mixed' self rather than obsessively attempting to mediate its relationships. In this section, I have argued that the archive functions as a psychoanalytic space providing the materials of free association to parse for meaning and significance. The collection stands as a mirror that promotes self-knowledge, a balm for the eye's failure to capture the subject in its totality. In the next section I continue this conversation, considering Winnicott's writing on the 'potential space' of play and Hustvedt's own interpretation of this space as a narrative landscape.

Potential Space and Narrative

Winnicott situates play within a 'potential space', which he contrasts with both internal and external reality. Play, Winnicott suggests, inhabits the nexus of the world infused with subjective meaning and objectively perceived reality, and he applies it to the mother-child and the analyst-analysand bonds, both relationships whose success rests on playing and on mirroring. The collection represents a potential space, containing objects evocative because of their emotional ties to their previous owners but whose meaning is also discovered in their physical characteristics. Leo keeps Violet's letters, for instance, not 'to study their contents' but simply 'as objects, charmed by their various metonymies' (364). These metonymies include the emotional ties Leo has to the objects in addition to their formal qualities: recall, for instance, when Leo compares Erica's lipstick with Mark's donut box for their connection with the mouth. Indeed, the drawer proves a particularly salient metaphor for the potential space, swaying between the outside and inside worlds, just as Winnicott distinguishes the play space from internal and external domains. While I have already demonstrated how Leo's drawer functions as a space of play, here I further elucidate its role in organising his internal world and producing a self-narrative.

In Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American*, psychoanalyst-protagonist Eric employs the figure of the house to metaphorise the robust self. He advises, 'we all need to hold ourselves together, to shore up the walls of our houses, to patch and to paint, to

erect a silent fortress where no one leaves and no one enters.'[284] The self as an architectural structure is frequently invoked in *What I Loved*, when, for instance, Bill's imagination is called a 'secret room' and when Leo compares his colleagues' sympathy to 'walls of silent respect' (29, 143). Whereas, for Eric, the walls of the self are meant to keep others at bay, in *What I Loved* the house provides an apt metaphor because it evokes the duelling demands that the self be both unified and open to outside influences. Those people who refuse to mix healthily with others are twice equated to closed-down structures. Violet, for instance, calls Lucille, debilitated by self-consciousness, 'all boarded up and shut down like a condemned house' (353). She similarly says of a binge eater, 'She's turned her own body into a cave where she can hide' (124). Both images signal the pathological failure of the self to mingle with the outside world, the house's various entrances and windows boarded up or eliminated altogether.

Thinking of the self as a house, either precariously built or stable, is a means, within *What I Loved*, for describing the struggle for mental stability. As such, despite Mark's apparent psychological problems, Bill hopefully imagines 'a room where he held on to those who loved him and whom he loved' (329). Here, the inner chamber would signal the traces of a stable self, a healthy consistency of character that Mark lacks. Mark does, however, possess a room of his own, Leo donating Matt's old bedroom to him as a sign of trust and camaraderie. Whereas Mark keeps his private space overwhelmingly cluttered, the enclosed space of Leo's drawer provides a source of memory, meaning, and order. Gaston Bachelard argues that the architecture of the childhood home is seminal in contouring the mind, accentuating the role played by furniture with closed compartments like desks, wardrobes, and chests for providing 'a model of intimacy.'[285] Tellingly, it is his intimate bonds that Leo parses in his drawer, whereas Mark's own personal space is left as messy and undifferentiated as his own relationship to others. Bachelard contends that the order produced in the enclosed spaces of drawers and wardrobes establishes the organisation of the entire dwelling,

---

[284] Hustvedt, *Sorrows*, p. 250.
[285] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by John R. Stilgoe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 78.

'protect[ing] the entire house against uncurbed disorder.'[286] The drawer, in *What I Loved*, as we have seen, proves a space where the house, and thus the stuff of the self, is categorised and sorted through.

With their accumulation of personal artefacts and photographs, Carol Mavor suggests that 'dresser drawers [...] function as miniature museums of our archived selves'.[287] In different ways, Nicole Krauss's *Great House* and Hustvedt's *Sorrows*, in addition to *What I Loved*, demonstrate the propensity for drawers to become the site where the self, the home, and narrative itself discover forms of stability and design. Nicole Krauss's *The Great House* tracks the movement of a desk of drawers as it changes hands and infiltrates the sensibilities and psychological lives of its owners. If the novel is, as its title suggests, a 'great house' then it is the desk that provides its coherence. Composed of four seemingly distinct narrative frameworks, the chest's presence in each designates a primary cohesion for the novel-as-house. Likewise, within the novel, we see the arrangement of the desk dictating the psychology of its owner. The writer-protagonist of the text's first chapter sees in its ostensibly mundane construction 'a far more complex design, the blueprint of the mind formed over tens of thousands of days of thinking while staring at them'.[288] While in Krauss's novel the desk's arrangement of nineteen drawers permeates the writer's mind, in *What I Loved* a single drawer provides a gateway into its owner's interior world, a place where the inner constitution of the self is materialised and arranged.

Hustvedt's *Sorrows* similarly explores the relationship between bureau and body. The novel begins with Eric and Inga sorting through their dead father's study, specifically his desk, a venture that Eric compares to 'ransack[ing] a man's mind, dismantl[ing] an entire life'.[289] Amongst the meticulously collated and arranged files, the siblings discover a mysterious letter hinting at a possible crime in their father's past, a secret never spoken and yet not wholly withheld, the incriminating evidence stored

---

[286] Ibid., p. 79.

[287] Mavor is responding to the drawer in Roland Barthes's autobiography but applies this reading to her own family histories. Carol Mavor, 'Collecting Loss', *Cultural Studies*, 11.1 (1997), 111-137 (p. 121).

[288] Nicole Krauss, *The Great House* (London: Viking, 2010), p. 16.

[289] Hustvedt, *Sorrows*, p. 2.

where it is certain to be discovered. Throughout the rest of the novel, Eric and Inga seek out information about the letter's secret, as well as a different secret announced by another archive, a series of love letters sent by Inga's now-deceased husband. Inga relates the pursuit of these unspoken histories to the first section of Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, in which a beloved desk, when attacked out of frustration, reveals a hidden drawer and, with it, a manuscript. For Inga, in Kierkegaard's anecdote, 'the secretary is standing in for a living body, a person giving up secrets under duress,' with the hidden drawer's contents 'its *inner voice*'.[290] In addition to connecting the drawer with the inner world, *Sorrows* positions the desk's contents as a secret history, not forgotten and never vocalised but also not fully disguised. The drawer, thus, awaits its movement from concealment to revelation, from silence to expression.

Like the desks in *Great House* and *Sorrows*, the drawer in *What I Loved* occupies a liminal space between interior and exterior worlds, moderating the generation of narrative by objects temporarily concealed. In her own writing on psychoanalysis, Hustvedt calls Winnicott's potential space, 'not phenomenal reality, the here and now, but an illusory narrative terrain alongside of it.'[291] By conjoining the potential space with the development of narrative, Hustvedt hints at a connection between Leo's collection and the composition of his autobiographical story. Indeed, Hustvedt elsewhere suggests that writing narrative requires a process of imaginative play. She states: 'I have discovered that a novel can be written only in play: an open, relaxed, responsive, permissive state of being that allows a work to grow freely.'[292] As I have already noted, the novel compares the objects in Leo's collection to language, to a 'mobile syntax' through which Leo excavates their latent meanings (192). In my discussion of 'archival play', I termed Leo's arrangements not stories but dream-thoughts, strings of symbols rather than narrative arcs, drawing on Bollas's observation that significant objects become repurposed as dream symbolism. Bollas, mirroring the syntactic quality that Leo affords his collected items, terms the object world 'an extraordinary lexicon' for

---

[290] Ibid., p. 253. Emphasis in original.

[291] Hustvedt, 'Freud's Playground', p. 214.

[292] Siri Hustvedt, 'Playing, Wild Thoughts, and a Novel's Underground', in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 37-40 (p. 38).

elaborating the true self's interior idiom.[293] Like the excessive mirror of the portrait, I suggest here that the collection, as a factory of symbolic meaning, propels Leo's self-narration, presented to the reader as the novel.

While most accounts of *What I Loved* only mention the collection in passing, Benjamin Markowitz's review calls the novel 'a record of these items' significance.'[294] Indeed, Leo terms the collection a record of 'what I missed', editing but clearly evoking the novel's title (191). The close relationship between the story and the collection is implied by Leo's contemplations of the narrative form:

> We manufacture stories, after all, from the fleeting sensory material that bombards us at every instant, a fragmented series of pictures, conversations, odors, and the touch of things and people. We delete most of it to live with some semblance of order, and the reshuffling of memory goes on until we die. (120)

The reorganisation of memory that Leo here places at the foundation of autobiography is just the work that he pursues in his collection, arranging fragments of memories and of people into different orders. Yet, while Leo suggests that narratives elide much of the past, the archive seemingly courts the sustenance of those people and those objects threatened with erasure. Whereas narrative, says Leo, 'flies over the blanks, filling them in with the hypotaxis of an "and" or an "and then"', the collection strives to shade in the gaps between objects and moments in time, to nourish memory rather than skate over its absences (365). Leo sees his collection doing the work of remembering his dead son at times during the day when his thoughts wander on to other topics: 'I think my collection was a way to answer those blanks' (149). Likewise, Leo seeks for his archive to expose and to understand Mark's erratic behaviour, 'to fill in the features of that missing face' (284). A storehouse of remembrance, the collection contains a plethora of signification, gesturing towards content often elided by narrative systems.

Both the novel's beginning and its end indicate its debt to the archive. The narrative's composition is initiated by the collection's fulfilment. The discovery of letters written by Violet to Bill years earlier, the final objects he commits to the collection, spurs Leo to commence writing: 'When I put the letters down,' he writes, 'I

---

[293] Bollas, *Being*, p. 21.

[294] Benjamin Markovitz, 'You can't get there from here', *London Review of Books*, 19 June 2003, pp. 37-8 (p. 37).

knew that I would start writing this book today' (3). The past, and the contents of the novel, come into focus with the collection's completion. So too does the narrative's indecisive ending mirror the workings of the collection. Leo concludes:

> Every true story has several possible endings. This is mine: the children upstairs must be asleep, because the rooms above me are quiet. It's eight-thirty in the evening on August 30, 2000. I've had my supper, and I've put away the dishes. I'm going to stop typing now, move to my chair, and rest my eyes. In half an hour, Lazlo is coming to read to me. (367)

Leo's conclusion refuses to offer up a key to the preceding narrative, instead providing only a provisional endpoint, a moment of time that will quickly fade away. The novel, I suggest, inherits this inconclusiveness from the collection. Like the collection, which in its frequent rearrangement possesses no fixed conclusion, the narrative offers conclusions about the past while resisting a definitive final word that would fix the story's meaning. These various saliences between collection and novel imply that the objects form a necessary middle-step in the production of an autobiographical narrative, which produces and stabilises Leo's subjectivity in the aftermath of various deaths and departures. In this chapter's final section I also relate the novel's insistent indeterminacy to a particular kind of distance that the archive facilitates, which repeats in Leo's narrative. If, as I have suggested, the archive provides a rare glimpse of the 'mixed' self in its entirety, it achieves this affect through a self-distancing mechanism that, by foregoing strict conclusions, permits Leo to both rearrange and totalise the past and the collection.

Self-Distance and Clutter

Mark Currie argues that in order to partake in the therapeutic process of self-narration, one necessarily creates another kind of schizophrenia in which the self that is narrated is divided from and controlled by the subject doing the narrating. Currie highlights the odd moment when the narration of the past catches up with the present moment, the 'narratological shipwreck' at which point the two figures, the narrator and its narrated avatar, collide.[295] Leo calls to mind this moment towards the novel's conclusion: 'Every story we tell about ourselves can only be told in the past tense. It

---

[295] Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), p. 123.

winds backward from where we now stand, no longer the actors in the story but its spectators who have chosen to speak' (364). *What I Loved*'s final sentence, quoted above, reveals this 'shipwreck' moment but unlike the fraught conclusion to Currie's example—*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*—Leo's self-encounter hardly causes a wrinkle in the water. This effect is achieved through Leo's abnegation of moral authority. Currie suggests that temporal distance facilitates the creation of moral distance, the opportunity to make judgments about a past self requiring the erection of a distinct, enlightened self in the present. Borrowing from the work of Hayden White, we might consider *What I Loved*'s ending more like that of the chronicle, which refuses closure, rather than a narrative with its impulse to conclude by moralising.[296] Earlier in the novel, Leo notes, 'The recollections of an older man are different from those of a young man. What seemed vital at forty may lose its significance at seventy' (120). *What I Loved* refuses the conclusive end, instead gesturing towards a future moment in which the inflections of the past will have shifted with the arrival of new events, information, and insight. In doing so, the novel offers up readings of the past without insisting on their singularity or authority.

The moralising distance that Currie observes in *Jekyll and Hyde* enables the present self to elucidate confidently the past in its entirety, ignoring the shortcomings and failures that mark any historical narration. In narrating *What I Loved*, however, Leo occupies a middle-distance from which the past is synthesised into a complete document while still acknowledging that no account can ever achieve total transparency or veracity. The temporal remove from which Leo relays his story is complemented and enabled by the spatial distance between himself and his objects. During the course of the novel, before Leo has achieved a long temporal remove from the past, the archive provides a self-distancing mechanism, a means of gazing upon the past and the present from a distance. That is to say—before a large temporal gulf has been established, the archive enables a spatial distance on the past in order to bring it into clear view. It is the quality of remoteness that compels Leo to clip out one particular photograph of Bill and

---

[296] Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 7.1 (1980), 5-27 (p. 24).

Violet, which he savours 'because the photo's small dimensions imitated the proportions of distance—two figures standing very far away from me' (191). The collection of objects, miniature enough to all fit inside a single drawer, thus, fulfils Leo's desire to 'take a far view of myself from the top of a hill' (255). In its spatial manoeuvring, then, the collection accomplishes the ideal of distance that Bollas applies to his model of psychotherapy, where the analyst, while 'interpreting the roots of free association, [...] must find some way to catch glimpses of the forest.'[297]

The archival distance found in Leo's interaction with his objects and weaved into his narrative account permit him both to read and to shift the archive. Roland Barthes's and Michel de Certeau's writing on observing the city emphasise the necessity of distance to make sense of an otherwise overwhelming mass of signification. Roland Barthes notes that the construction of the Eiffel Tower for the first time made Paris observable from a bird's-eye view, transforming it into 'a corpus of intelligent forms.'[298] Barthes argues that this perspective enables a strategy of 'decipherment', interpreting the metropolis by encountering it at once as a seamless entirety and a series of recognisable landmarks: 'Paris offers itself to him as an object virtually *prepared*, exposed to the intelligence, but which he must himself construct by a final activity of the mind'.[299] The Eiffel Tower, for Barthes, allows the city to be read as a complete document because the panoramic view elicits and interacts with memories of experiencing the city on ground level. It is precisely this act of navigating the city that, de Certeau argues, is sacrificed by inspecting New York from the heights of the World Trade Center. De Certeau argues that this ascent 'makes the complexities of the city readable,' while at the same time 'immobiliz[ing] its opaque mobility in a transparent text.'[300] Being able to read the text of the city, then, comes at the expense of freezing its rush of activity and absconding from its composition. To make New York discernible as a text is to eliminate one's

---

[297] Bollas, *Forces,* p. 49.
[298] Roland Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower', in *Barthes: Selected Writings*, ed. by Susan Sontag (London: Fontana, 1982), pp. 236-51 (p. 243).
[299] Ibid.
[300] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 92.

ability to participate in it, which remains the occupation of walkers who 'write without being able to read it.'[301]

Barthes and de Certeau foreground two modalities of the urban text, the experience of occupying it and of observing it from above. Rather than only providing distance, Leo's analysis the archive maps on to both of these aspects of engaging with a monumental scene: tangibly interacting with its distinct parts and interpreting its entirety for meaning as a unified network. The archive enables Leo to address the past by offering a distanced view on it. Like Lacan's 'mirror stage', the archive provides a removed perspective from which to see the self in its entirety, and it thus enables Leo to strive to describe his history in narrative language. Yet, Leo seems to operate from a mobile middle-distance that, in addition to allowing the necessary remove to see the archive whole, also provides the immediacy to touch, rearrange, and play with the past. This mobile relationship facilitates reading the collection, harnessing the 'excess' signification latent in each object: the balance of interactive play and distant reading enables Leo to engage and to read the clutter of his objects rather than be overwhelmed by them. Mark's room represents the danger of clutter. Congested by a glut of objects, it connotes an overloaded subjectivity that resists being transferred into a coherent narrative. Phillips writes: 'Clutter, as chaotic accumulation, could be both a thwarting and a source of revelation. One might think of the difference as being two different kinds of unconscious work, the good mess and the bad mess—the mess that can be used, and the mess that stultifies.'[302] If Mark's room is a 'bad mess' because it overwhelms narration, Leo's collection, by galvanising self-analysis, provides an example of a useful mess. Allan Hepburn similarly argues that '[c]lutter appeals to the collector's sense of discovery.'[303] Refusing to nail down a constant arrangement, Leo turns his cluttered drawer into a 'good mess', whose adjustability and readability creates a system of analysis.

---

[301] Ibid., p. 93.

[302] Adam Phillips, 'Clutter: A Case History', in *Promises, Promises* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp. 59-71 (pp. 70-1).

[303] Allan Hepburn, *Enchanted Objects: Visual Art in Contemporary Fiction* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 27.

Benjamin writes that '[a] sort of productive disorder is the canon of the *mémoire involuntaire*, as it is the canon of the collector.'[304] For Benjamin, disorder benefits the collector by eliciting unexpected memories, and it is just these types of meanings and correlations that Leo draws from his objects. In *What I Loved*, this disorder is expressed in the collection's openness to being creatively reordered, engaging with its quality of excess. Loaded with metonymies, each object speaks a new significance when provided with a different logical order. Leo's comment on Bill's final, fragmentary work of art applies equally well to his own collection: 'when strung together the fragments had formed a syntax that might be read for possible meaning' (336). Teasing out their different connotations, the work of rearrangement exposes the excess of meaning within each object. Leo, for instance, asks: 'Were Erica's socks the sign of her leaving for California or were they really a token of the day Matt died and our marriage began to fail?' (191). The ability to adjust its curation institutes the collection as a middle stage in the development of a stable if provisional narrative order. Leo notes that, 'The truth was mobile and contradictory', implying that his 'game of mobile objects' might better articulate reality than a narrative fixed in writing (255, 364). Yet, Hustvedt's diagram of psychological health requires the representation of the self in language, in narrative comprehensible to a reader. While the novel structurally approximates some of the traits of the collection, specifically its open-endedness, the narrative inevitably loses the collection's plasticity when fixed in linear language. For this reason, Leo refuses to administer a final conclusion that would ignore the slipperiness of the past, its resistance to signification. The novel, instead, insists that the archive provides a bendable, adjustable means of approaching the past from which to derive narratives that, because of their insistent stability, can never indefinitely feel accurate or full.

In his analysis of *Jekyll and Hyde*, Currie notes a competition between the mirror and the self-narrative as structures of subjectivity. He writes: 'If the mirror image has dominion over the present tense, it is incapable of grasping identity over time; and if self-narration has mastery over past events, the present tense represents a crisis in its

---

[304] Benjamin, 'The Collector', p. 211. Emphasis in original.

power.'[305] While Currie limits this reading to *Jekyll and Hyde* in particular, it nevertheless speaks to the division of psychic labour administered in the production of the self in Hustvedt's text. However, rather than casting them in conflict, *What I Loved* envisages a symbiotic relationship between mirror and narrative. Functioning as a mirror, the collection compiles an overloaded quantity of symbolism whose underlying language and meaning is exposed through play and then refashioned as narrative. The narrative, flowing across time but fixed in its linear order, stabilises the subject by projecting a version of the past that will inevitably lose veracity over time. The archive, easily reshaped, can grow and change and, in doing so, spur on new narrative ventures. The archive-as-mirror, evolving with time, collects and registers relationships as they pass away, providing the material and the distance for a psychoanalytic encounter to transform them into a narrative that will, however briefly, consolidate the self.

This chapter has argued that the archive, by providing a removed perspective on the self, delivers both the elements for a playful game of self-analysis and a totalising distance from which to write a unified narrative. The next chapter, however, sees the critique of any distancing mechanism that would fantasise about capturing a terrain of knowledge in its totality. E.L. Doctorow's *Homer and Langley*, we shall see, rebuffs distance for immediacy and rejects the presumed certainty of visual knowledge for a tentative objectivity borne of blindness. Unlike Leo's collection that, confined to a drawer, floats in an indeterminate space between real and dream worlds, Homer and Langley's collection grows to fill every cranny of their mansion. Emphasising tactility and materiality, their unruly archive overpowers the domestic space rather than instigating its reordering.

---

[305] Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 131.

Archive Fever in the Doomed Domestic of
E.L. Doctorow's *Homer and Langley*

Although this dissertation excavates several ways the archive functions as a 'technology of self' in contemporary literature and culture, this chapter embeds that analysis within a longer aesthetic and cultural tradition that begins with nineteenth-century realism. Roland Barthes has observed that it is only with Honoré de Balzac, a founder of literary realism, that objects are integrated into literary investigations of the human passions.[306] Peter Brooks adds: 'You cannot, the realist claims, represent people without taking account of the things that people use and acquire in order to define themselves—their tools, their furniture, their accessories.'[307] In nineteenth-century literary realism, the constellation of objects surrounding a person, often those installed within their home, comes to provide a gateway into their character. As such, realism provides a critical node of inquiry for an analysis of the history of the personal archive, of the relationship between collecting objects and enacting the self. E.L. Doctorow's *Homer and Langley* investigates the nineteenth-century literary inventory, recalling and, more often, undermining its tropes to commentate on the present culture of self-archivisation. The novel re-imagines the story of the eponymous, real-life Collyer brothers who, born in the late-nineteenth century, notoriously hoarded themselves to death in their Fifth Avenue New York mansion.[308] Langley pursues their father's obsession with collecting but turns his sights on the cheap and discarded objects of the metropolis, tracing the inheritance of nineteenth-century collecting and its overstuffed interiors to a fatal conclusion: the heaps of objects collapse, crushing Langley and leaving the blind and newly-deaf Homer to starve.

The Collyer brothers' story has resurfaced in various artistic settings and, as a result, Joyce Carol Oates observes that 'their story has become a kind of cautionary tale

---

[306] Roland Barthes, 'The Plates of the *Encyclopedia*', in *New Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 23-39 (p. 23).

[307] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 16.

[308] The prevalence of hoarding within the contemporary American imagination is evinced by recent television shows: *Hoarders*, which ran for six seasons from 2009 to 2013, and *Hoarders: Buried Alive*, which began airing in 2010 and has thus far produced 75 episodes.

as memorable as any of the Grimms'.'[309] In readdressing their tale, however, Doctorow changes several of the brothers' biographical details: pushing the narrative forward twenty years, extending the brothers' lives to the 1980s, conscripting Langley to service in the first World War, making Homer an accomplished pianist, and blinding him at a much earlier age.[310] Doctorow has, I will demonstrate, long contested the representational strategies of realism within his novels.[311] With *Homer and Langley* he revisits these earlier critiques by turning to the prevalent locale of the nineteenth-century novel: the bourgeois home.[312] In focusing on the nineteenth-century domestic interior in a contemporary novel, and by extending Homer and Langley's lives in this dwelling through to the third quarter of the twentieth century, Doctorow acknowledges a link between the archiving habits of these two eras.[313] Langley's magpie impulse, we will see, represents the flowering of his own father's explicitly nineteenth-century habit while also marking the brothers as 'prophets of a new age'—that is, ours.[314] While recognising the roots of contemporary archiving within the walls of the nineteenth-century home, Doctorow also undercuts the realist novel's typical representational strategies through his selection of perspective and voice, and through his treatment of objects independent of, even rebellious towards, subjective mastery. The result is a text sceptical of the unifying lens of the realist text and of the classification strategies of the archive amidst an overflow of objects. Instead, implicitly contemplating our current information-dense

---

[309] Joyce Carol Oates, 'Love and Squalor', *New Yorker*, 7 September 2009, pp. 80-81 (p. 80).

[310] Both Joyce Carol Oates and Matthew Reynolds take stock of the novel's renovation of the brothers' biographies. Oates, p. 81; Matthew Reynolds, 'The Taste of Peapods', *London Review of Books*, 11 Feb 2010, pp. 22-3 (p. 22).

[311] Theophilus Savvas notes Doctorow's consistent abnegation of the realist voice in his earlier novels, *The Book of Daniel* and *Ragtime*, and suggests that, though his more recent text, *The March*, appears distant from postmodernist writing, it nevertheless continues his earlier refusal of realist methodology. Savvas, *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 124-55.

[312] Matthew Beaumont contests the postmodernist's belief in the certainty of the realist narrative perspective. Matthew Beaumont, 'Introduction: Reclaiming Realism', in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. by Beaumont (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

[313] Jay Clayton notes that 'postmodernism has a hidden or repressed connection with nineteenth-century culture.' Here, though, Clayton is stressing the similarly anti-Enlightenment discourses of contemporary and Romantic thought as opposed to a likeness in modes of collecting or in the structures of novelistic composition. Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterthought of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 5.

[314] E.L. Doctorow, *Homer and Langley* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), p. 142. Further references to the novel appear in parentheses within the text.

era of digital technology, *Homer and Langley* recommends a form of archival curation dependant not on strict categorisation and total knowledge but on the swaying musical intonations of literary discourse and on the disqualification of visual certainty.

Alain Robbe-Grillet, in 1956, advocated a new, non-realist novel that would prioritise the materiality of objects ahead of their symbolic resonance:

> No longer will objects be merely the vague reflection of the hero's vague soul, the image of his torments, the shadow of his desires. Or rather, if objects still afford a momentary prop to human passions, they will do so only provisionally, and will accept the tyranny of significations only in appearance—derisively, one might say—the better to show how alien they remain to man.[315]

Robbe-Gillet's demands on the novel anticipate much recent theory and philosophy that emphasise the thingness of objects ahead of their conceptualisation by human systems.[316] *Homer and Langley* mediates between these two positions, treating its archival goods as both symbolic—politically, historically, and personally—and harshly material, their violence registered both intellectually (to systems of meaning) and physically (to the brothers' well-being). The novel addresses realism and materiality most fully, however, through its critical deployment of the blind Homer as narrator. Zadie Smith calls upon Robbe-Grillet's essay, and those lines quoted above in particular, in delineating a counter-tradition to the realist novel still active today and with which we might provisionally associate *Homer and Langley*. These texts, she notes, frequently call attention to the disembodied, removed, and knowing narrator of realist novels: 'most avant-garde challenges to Realism concentrate on voice, on where this "I" is coming from, this mysterious third person.'[317] Like several of Doctorow's other novels, which I survey in the opening section, *Homer and Langley* disavows the realist convention of

---

[315] Alain Robbe-Gillet, 'A Future for the Novel', in *For a New Novel* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp. 15-24 (pp. 21-22).

[316] In philosophy, 'speculative realism' has insisted on turning focus away from the study of texts and discourses and towards the material basis of reality. Despite their different orientations, such philosophers 'in one way or another, have begun speculating once more about the nature of reality independently of thought and of humanity more generally.' Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, 'Towards a Speculative Realism', in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. by Bryant, Srnicek and Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), pp. 1-18 (p. 3). Bill Brown's thing theory similarly attempts to address objects outside of the stamp of human purpose, philosophising 'the specific unspecificity that "things" denotes.' Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory,' *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 1-22 (p. 3).

[317] Zadie Smith, 'Two Paths for the Novel', *New York Review of Books*, 20 Nov 2008 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/nov/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/> [accessed 3 Feb 2014].

distanced and unifying narration, here by employing a blind narrator who can offer neither the panoramic unity nor visual certainty.

Like this critique of perspectival distance, archives of trash are commonplace in Doctorow's fiction, but Langley's collection is unique in the hostility it presents to the brothers. If the collection of outmoded technologies previously represented the ideal of preserving lost history, the eventual collapse of Langley's archive introduces the possibility of overloading the material apparatus of memory. Langley's untamable archive materialises an anxiety in Doctorow's thinking about historical writing: Doctorow, as I will demonstrate, calls for the recuperation of as many historical perspectives as possible, but the threat of overburdening the archive renders this desire problematic. This tension, that Doctorow advocates the expansion of the historical archive at the same time that he warns of overtaxing it, recalls a cultural condition described by Andreas Huyssen that is, itself, a repetition of the conditions of the long nineteenth-century.

Huyssen associates American and European culture since the 1970s with a memory boom, a turning away from high modernism's investment in the future for a proliferation of interest in the past.[318] He positions this invigoration of memory and museum discourses as strategic resistance to the acceleration of time in contemporary capitalism, marking out a stable environment amid rapid social transformation.[319] While the digital landscape has expanded the capacity for remembrance, Huyssen notes that these same technologies frequently bear the charge of inciting cultural amnesia.[320] These seemingly contradictory accounts—that ours is a time with both an abundance and a dearth of memory—recalls Richard Terdiman's analysis of post-Revolution France. Terdiman argues that the long nineteenth century (1789-1920) inherited from the French Revolution a 'memory crisis', characterised by a diachronic temporality in which the past seemed increasingly distinct from the present and resilient to containment in

---

[318] Huyssen, *Present*, p. 15. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that Doctorow extends the brothers' lives up to the 1980s, just overlapping with the emergence of Huyssen's memory boom.

[319] Ibid., p. 23.

[320] Ibid., p. 18. I delineate at greater length the quickening of postmodern temporality in Chapter One.

memory.[321] Yet, the obsession with the past at this time encompassed not just a sense of history's inaccessibility but also, simultaneously, its ever-presence. Terdiman, thus, names the nineteenth century's 'two principal disorders: *too little memory*, and *too much*.'[322]

This chapter will argue that *Homer and Langley* attempts to navigate this paradox, tracking its legacy from the late nineteenth-century but posing it as a principle issue in the writing of history today. I situate the hazards of rampant collecting within the discourse of 'information overload' and argue that its dangers present Doctorow's earlier ideas about historical writing with particular difficulties. John Johnston notes several post-1970 American novels that witness the immense flow of data produced by new technologies and cybernetics. These novels, he suggests, 'demonstrate the necessity of discovering alternatives to mimetic and expressive models in a culture of noise and entropic dissemination'.[323] Doctorow, I argue, portrays the menace of overload through the unruly archive, but provides, in Homer's diary, a model for curating history that might cure archival destruction. While Doctorow advocates a varied tableaux of historical accounts, the risk of overloading interpretation, of there being too much data and too many objects, proves a potent conundrum. On the one hand, the novel continues Doctorow's project of expanding the historical register, contributing new historical narratives that complicate and expand on conventional understandings of the past. Yet it also critically reflects on the practice of memorialisation, warning of a surplus of information borne of retaining too much history. As such, the novel manifests a contradictory promotion and questioning of the personal archive in contemporary life, but it also proposes, through its narrative form, an ethical means of curating the past resilient to the hazard of overwhelming the archive. *Homer and Langley* implicitly promotes a curational protocol consonant with Homer's blindness and the diary it produces: cautious about its direction, melodic in its prose, tentative of its knowledge of

---

[321] Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithica, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 3-4.

[322] Ibid., p. 14. Emphasis in original.

[323] John Johnston, *Information Multiplicity: American Fiction in the Age of Media Saturation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 3

fact, and open to a variety of historical perspectives.

Perspective and the Politics of Realism

Scholarly discussions of Doctorow's novels frequently foreground their indeterminate political allegiances. Michelle Tokarczyk, for instance, calls Doctorow's politics a 'skeptical commitment,' comparing the 'detached, alienated stance' of several of his characters to Peter Sloterdijk's notion of cynical detachment.[324] Rather than articulating a strong oppositional credo, these characters, she observes, remain 'unable to commit to a political or even a personal belief system.'[325] Likewise, while Doctorow is typically affiliated with radical, leftist, and socialist politics, his novels refuse to align themselves with one side of America's bipartisan government system. Stephen Cooper argues this case, noting that Doctorow's novels scrutinise both the American Left and Right, pursuing 'a postmodern politics' that insists on a prismatic view of the past.[326] Doctorow's emphasis on circulating an array of historical perspectives communicates his opposition to history's ossification into a single, monolithic myth.[327] As such, John G. Parks contends that 'Doctorow's ultimate political enterprise is to prevent the power of the regime from monopolizing the compositions of truth, from establishing a monological control over culture.'[328] For Parks, Doctorow employs a 'polyphonic fiction' to disrupt history's singular script with marginalised or ignored voices.[329]

Doctorow's politics throughout his career have been premised on indecision, on the expansion, diversification, and complication of the official historical register.[330]

---

[324] Michelle M. Tokarczyk, *E.L. Doctorow's Skeptical Commitment* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 6.
[325] Ibid.
[326] Stephen Cooper, 'Cutting Both Ways: E.L. Doctorow's Critique of the Left', *South Atlantic Review*, 58.2 (1993), 111-25 (p. 112). Doctorow explicitly contests the Right and the Left's unified belief in American exceptionalism in 'Narrative C', *Dædalus*, 141.1 (2012), 118-25.
[327] In explicating Doctorow's radical, Jewish humanism, John Clayton both articulates the conflicted political position of Doctorow's characters and locates his work as 'always an act of demythicizing.' John Clayton, 'Radical Jewish Humanism: The Vision of E.L. Doctorow', in *Critical Essays on E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Ben Siegel (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 2000), pp. 184-92 (p. 189).
[328] John G. Parks, 'The Politics of Polyphony: The Fiction of E.L. Doctorow', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 37.4 (1991), 454-63 (p. 455).
[329] Ibid.
[330] By aiming to complicate mythic historical narratives with suppressed voices, Doctorow's aesthetic process can be situated within Jean-François Lyotard's definition of the '*postmodern* as incredulity toward

Doctorow's 1977 essay 'False Documents' forms the bedrock of most accounts of his politics of representation and orientates his work in conflict with the realist genre of fiction.[331] In the essay, he expresses the political and ethical necessity of questioning authoritative accounts of the past that claim veracity, demoting the official archive to the level of any other historical narrative. 'False Documents' begins by naming two forms of power—'the power of the regime' and 'the power of freedom'—and connects these forces with different kinds of language.[332] Drawing his example from *The New York Times*, Doctorow defines the regime's language as a discourse that demands corroboration with the outside world and thereby constructs a landscape of fact. While the regime's discourse claims authenticity for being empirically verified, Doctorow observes that its doctrines are nevertheless constructed, 'the questionable world we ourselves have painted'.[333] Conversely, the language of fiction (for Doctorow the language of freedom) can approach reality from the oblique angle of a convincing lie, challenging conventional wisdom with an imaginative discourse unbound from observable fact. In contrast to regime language that seeks to confirm accuracy, fiction, Doctorow suggests, can fashion itself towards the future and strive to invigorate cultural transformation. At the essay's end, however, Doctorow collapses his distinction between linguistic registers, arguing that instead of languages of the regime and of freedom, 'There is only narrative.'[334] This final move serves further to deaden the truth claims made by official accounts based on external, visual corroboration, which Doctorow demotes to just one amongst many narrative possibilities.

'False Documents' affords the novelist a special, visionary place within the domain of language. Already aware that history is made, distributed, and altered by

---

metanarratives.' Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

[331] This is not to say that Doctorow refutes all of the political valences of realism. George Lukács's case in favour of realism for its aim to depict how individuals are bound up with their societies in many ways mirrors Doctorow's own desire for contemporary fiction to engage with the political landscape. See George Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, trans. by Edith Bone (London: Hillway Publishing, 1950); E.L. Doctorow, 'Living in the House of Fiction', *Nation*, 23 Apr 1978, 459-62.

[332] E.L. Doctorow, 'False Documents', in *Poets and Presidents, Selected Essays, 1977-1992* (New York: Random House, 1993), pp. 149-164 (p. 152).

[333] Ibid., p. 153.

[334] Ibid., p. 163.

narrative, as guardians of the language of freedom, writers can modify the past by amending it with new voices and unheard perspectives. In his most recent volume of essays, Doctorow reiterates: storytellers 'may not realize when they commit to the practice of fiction that they are ordained to contest the aggregate fictions of their societies.'[335] Doctorow's desire not just to upset official history but to upend the idea that there might be a single authentic account positions him in tension with the doctrines of realism, the dominant artistic mode of the mid-nineteenth century.[336] The predominant goal of realist art was, as Linda Nochlin outlines, 'to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life.'[337] It is precisely this objective perspective, however, that Doctorow critiques in 'False Documents'. Indeed, he applies the name '*realism*' to the hegemonic language of the regime, for its translation of consensus into truth, its valorisation of visual corroboration.[338]

Doctorow expresses this aversion to a singular view of history in his frequently-cited interview in Heidelberg, where he hypothesises that historical truth might be made accessible through the proliferation of perspectives. Doctorow proposes:

> I think history is made; it's composed. There is an objective event, but until it is construed, until it is evaluated, it does not exist as history. As Nietzsche said, you need meaning before you know what the fact is. [...] Events in the past, too, don't totally exist until we construe them, and quite clearly, since they can only be recorded in words or in pictures, the judgment that is made has far more leeway. [...] So I suppose my view of history is a phenomenological one, and you might call it cynical or pessimistic, you might say it verges on the existential, but there is a saving grace: since

---

[335] E.L. Doctorow, 'Introduction', in *Creationists: Selected Essays, 1993-2006* (New York: Random House, 2007), pp. ix-xiii (p. xii).

[336] Santiago Juan-Navarro similarly links Doctorow's regime language and 'our easy acceptance of the authority of facts' with the tenets of literary realism. Juan-Navarro, *Archival Reflections: Postmodern Fiction of the Americas (Self-Reflexivity, Historical Revisionism, Utopia)* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), p. 228. John Williams aligns Doctorow's postmodern aesthetic with a non-realist form. He writes, 'Those who embrace Doctorow as a serious, valuable writer have understood or accepted ours as a postmodern age that calls for an "irrealist" or nonmimetic fiction that may use a mélange of effects and genres to achieve its purpose.' John Williams, *Fiction as False Document: The Reception of E.L. Doctorow in the Postmodern Age* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), p. 12.

[337] Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 13.

[338] Paul Levine also notes the connection between the mechanics of literary realism and regime language: 'The characteristic devices of historical narrative turn out to be closely linked to the fictive conventions of realism.' Paul Levine, *E.L. Doctorow* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 22.

> history *can* be composed, you see, then you want to have as many people active in the composition as possible. A kind of democracy of perception. Thousands of eyes, not just one.[339]

While Doctorow refuses to occlude the reality of a historical event outside of language, he nevertheless concludes that it can only be successfully approached, and should always be disseminated, through a 'multiplicity of witnesses'.[340] While Doctorow emphasises the diversification of interpretation, realism thrives on its fusion. Elizabeth Ermarth calls realist fiction an 'aesthetic form of consensus', which unifies a variety of perspectives into a system of agreement.[341] She explains: 'To the extent that all points of view summoned by the text agree, to the extent that they converge upon the "same" world, that text maintains the consensus of realism'.[342] Whereas the stability of a realist novel rests in the harmony between its vantage points, Doctorow insists on a varied historical ecology that would resist the limiting measures of such consensus.

David Michael Levin's distinction between the 'assertoric' and the 'aletheic' gaze provides a useful terminology through which to conceptualise Doctorow's ocular rebellion against realist unification. For Doctorow, realism submits the world to what Levin calls an 'assertoric' gaze:

> the 'propositional' looking that I would associate with the correspondence theory of truth, with truth as 'correctness', essentially tends to see from only one perspective, one standpoint, one and only one *position*. Such a gaze will therefore tend to be narrow, dogmatic, intolerant, rigid, fixed, inflexible, and unmoved: in sum, not very caring.[343]

Doctorow's project in *Homer and Langley*, as well as in some of his earlier fiction, is to write history from an 'aletheic' perspective:

> the way of looking that I would associate with the hermeneutical theory of truth, with truth as 'unconcealment', would essentially be moved by a tendency to see from a multiplicity of standpoints and perspectives: with an awareness of contextuality, of field and horizon, of situational complexity; and with a corresponding openness to the possibility of *different* positions.[344]

---

[339] E.L. Doctorow, 'A Multiplicity of Witness: E.L. Doctorow at Heidelberg', interviewed by Herwig Friedl and Dieter Schulz, in *Conversations with E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Christopher D. Morris (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 112-128 (p. 113).
[340] Ibid., pp. 113-14.
[341] Elizabeth Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. ix.
[342] Ibid., p. x.
[343] David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 440.
[344] Ibid.

Levin argues that, whereas the 'assertoric' perspective anchors itself in place while suppressing alternative viewpoints, the 'altetheic' is democratically and inclusively kaleidoscopic. For this reason, he suggests, the 'aletheic' 'is a gaze that cares.'[345] Undercutting the tenets of 'assertoric' vision and developing an 'aletheic' style of historical writing are consistent elements of Doctorow's fiction, and I track their development across his back catalogue in the remainder of this section. Like these novels, Homer's blind narration, I argue at this chapter's conclusion, forms another attempt at establishing an 'aletheic' narrative vision, wherein writing from no visual perspective opens his narrative up to a range of visual standpoints.

Doctorow's dissatisfaction with realism shapes *The Book of Daniel*, his novel that contemplates the arrest, trial, and execution of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, reminiscent of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, through the eyes of their son, Daniel. As Naomi Morgenstern notes, Daniel calls his own accuracy into question and includes in his story scenes he never could have witnessed, such as his parents' execution. In Morgenstern's analysis, *The Book of Daniel* represents not only an attempt to capture the past as such but to understand the *traumatic* past, the execution of his parents, which is, for Daniel, the shocking 'primal scene' observable only in its reenactments. Morgenstern, thus, reads *Daniel* as addressing the question of 'how we come to see again what we could never have seen in the first place.'[346] Acknowledging Doctorow's pronouncement that history can only be encountered through heterogeneous perspectives, Daniel's impossible endeavour mixes narrative styles, voices, and temporalities. Theophilus Savvas notes that *Daniel* juxtaposes the story of his parents' involvement in the old radical Left with his own participation in the new Left of the 1960s alongside other, seemingly random content. In so doing, Savvas argues, the novel embodies 'a circuitous kind of dual narrative' in contrast to '[t]he sequential style of a linear narrative', emblematic of realism, of which both novelist and protagonist remain dubious.[347] Santiago Juan-Navarro similarly terms the novel antirealist because, as the

---

[345] Ibid.

[346] Naomi Morgenstern, 'The Primal Scene in the Public Domain: E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*', *Studies in the Novel*, 35.1 (2003), 68-88 (p. 83).

[347] Savvas, p. 136.

narrator, Daniel reveals 'the limitations of his vision' and attempts to transcend 'closure through self-consciousness and indeterminacy.'[348]

Daniel's refusal to write a typical, linear historical account evokes the novel's central metaphor of electricity. Geoffrey Galt Harpham notes the text's frequent use of electric imagery, arguing that, as a metaphor for the novel, the electric circuit binds together the desire for narrative closure and the brutality born of such determinacy.[349] He argues that, within the logic of *Daniel*, disparate elements must be brought into a sequential system in order to be legible; however, creating a circuit in which electricity can flow freely incites violent outbursts, the shock treatment undergone by Daniel's sister, Susan, or Paul and Rochelle's final executions in the electric chair. Thus, he argues, the novel twins the necessity of narrative closure to make the past readable, and to ward off incessant repetition, with the hostility of narrative finitude. Harpham notes that, for the novel to end, Daniel must write the concluding electrocution scene, closure achievable only through the Isaacson's murder.[350] Yet, we might ask if *Daniel* does properly conclude. Savvas, positioning the novel against realist conventions, notes that Daniel 'refuses to close his own circuit, refuses to make the final connection, by leaving the book with three possible endings.'[351] Indeed, while Daniel does, on the final page, complete his novel-as-dissertation, he designates it as, 'A Life Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctoral Degree in' a range of disciplines as variously odd as 'Gross Entomology' and 'Arch Demonology'.[352] The novel has ended but without the clarity we might typically expect, Daniel being called away from his desk by protesters now occupying the library. Thus, through the image of the electric circuit and its dispersed, frayed conclusion, *Daniel* warns of the dangers of unifying a narrative in a harmonic circuit, and thus replaces the realist mode with a decentred structure that calls its own certainty into question.

---

[348] Juan-Navarro, p. 250. Indeed, many of the characteristics the Juan-Navarro identifies in *Daniel* are present in my reading of *Homer and Langley*.

[349] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 'E.L. Doctorow and the Technology of Narrative, *PMLA*, 100.1 (1985), 81-95 (pp. 82-88).

[350] Ibid., pp. 87-88.

[351] Savvas, p. 137.

[352] E.L. Doctorow, *Book of Daniel* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 302.

As John G. Parks notes, Daniel frequently calls himself a 'criminal of perception,' relating his own project of confronting and narrating the past to his parents' purported crime of spying. Parks suggests this moniker 'implies that there is something illicit or transgressive in [Daniel's] keen ability and great desire to perceive his world, to seek out the truth of history, to analyze, to make connections.'[353] Yet, as I have demonstrated above, Daniel declines to pin history down to a single account that aims to reveal and corroborate the past definitively, a technique that would reproduce the mechanisms of realism and the language of the regime. Rather, Juan-Navarro, linking the novel with Doctorow's imperative for a range of historical viewpoints, suggests that *Daniel* forms 'a discursive receptacle of multiple perspectives'.[354] Daniel's position as a 'criminal of perception' gestures towards alternative modes of witnessing the past in its multiplicity—through, to recall Doctorow's previous formulation, 'Thousands of eyes, not just one.' Several of Doctorow's later texts, which I now turn to, address tactics of seeing, critiquing the removed perspective that dreams of revealing the terrain of the visible in its entirety, instead approaching objects and stories from the immediate perspective of the human encounter.[355] The drive against perspectival remove culminates in *Homer and Langley*, which ultimately contests Parks suggestion that, 'if to perceive is transgressive, *not* to see is deadly.'[356] It is, at least in part, Homer's blindness that permits him to capture new observations about his surrounding environment and, more significantly, frees him from the tyranny of observable fact in his account of twentieth-century life.

Ragtime, the next novel published by Doctorow, similarly undermines realist narrative techniques, and I demonstrate that this critique again interacts with the discourse of vision and perspective. Just as *Daniel* fictionalises a historical controversy but changes several of its details, *Ragtime* borrows real life figures, including Sigmund

---

[353] John G. Parks, *E.L. Doctorow* (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. 124.

[354] Juan-Navarro, p. 256.

[355] The contemplation of gigantism arrives in its most extreme form in Doctorow's second novel, *Big As Life*, a science-fiction story about the abrupt appearance of two alien giants on the banks of Manhattan. As one scientist notes, 'What really matters is proportion', and while their gargantuan bodies elicit terror, their size also provides researchers with ideal models to study physics and the structure of the body. E.L. Doctorow, *Big As Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), pp. 118-19.

[356] Parks, *E.L. Doctorow*, p. 124. Emphasis in original.

Freud, Harold Houdini, J.P. Morgan, Evelyn Nesbitt, and Emma Goldman only to reinvent many of their biographic details.[357] In doing so, *Ragtime* adheres to Doctorow's outline of the language of freedom in 'False Documents', by fictionalising reality rather than pretending to offer an impossibly factual account. More than just rattling the distinction between fact and fiction, *Ragtime* parodies the narrative perspective invoked by realist fiction. Disputing Fredric Jameson's famous declaration that, as a postmodern text, *Ragtime* must bear the marks of nostalgia, Linda Hutcheon argues that the novel's nostalgia 'is always ironically turned against itself—and us.'[358] Hutcheon points to several generalisations contained within *Ragtime*'s opening chapter ('There was a lot of sexual fainting. There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants') that the character Emma Goldman discredits only a page later ('Apparently there *were* Negroes. There *were* immigrants.').[359] By exposing Doctorow's irony, Hutcheon explains the contradiction between the initial historical overview offered by the narrator and the variegated narrative itself, which contests these generalisations by pursuing the stories of the beleaguered African-American musician Coalhouse Walker Jr. and the impoverished Jewish immigrants Tatah, Mameh, and Little Girl. This 'detachment' of the narration from the narrator creates what Juan-Navarro calls the novel's 'ironic distance', or 'narrative distance', that he deems its principal innovation.[360]

    The distinction between the narrator's wide-reaching comments and the narrative's own action performs a critique of the masterful intonation typical of realist

---

[357] Lars Ole Sauerberg offers a contradictory opinion, calling *Ragtime* an example of Documentary Realism, which he defines as a predominantly realist mode though one that employs comparatively more references to the world outside the text. Lars Ole Sauerberg, 'The Novel in Transition: Documentary Realism', *Orbis Litterarum*, 44.1 (1989), 80-92.

[358] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 89. Jameson argues that *Ragtime* structurally foregrounds, while still being subject to, the late capitalist condition wherein history is only accessible through simulacra and pop imagery. Hutcheon, however, notes the overwhelming presence of history in *Ragtime*—the presence, for instance, of real-life historical figures—instead situating the novel within a postmodernist genre she terms 'historiographic metafiction'. The 'postmodern' novel, such as *Ragtime*, she contests, 'reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge.' Such a move, we shall see, is characteristic of Doctorow's oeuvre. Jameson, 'Postmodernism', pp. 70-1; Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 89.

[359] E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (London: Picador, 1985 [1975]), p. 11-12, 13, qtd. in Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 89.

[360] Juan-Navarro, p. 225.

narration, its perspectival remove from narrative action.[361] Doctorow has said that he

aimed for *Ragtime*'s voice 'to have narrative distance. To create something not as

intimate as fiction nor as remote as history, but a voice that was mock historical —

pedantic.'[362] While Doctorow situates this desired effect in the 'unusual' space between

history and fiction, I would suggest that it also parodies the realist fictional voice.

Ermarth argues that realist fiction implies that, by providing readers with the 'proper

distance', they can be made 'to see the multiple viewpoints and so to find the form of the

whole in what looks from a closer vantage point like a discontinuous array of specific

cases.'[363] That is, realism achieves its consensus through a perspectival remove that

grants narrator and reader the distance to envision the story as a connected, homogenous

totality. Harpham's account of *Ragtime* associates the novel with this distancing

strategy, where 'everything is presented in miniature and has the curious aesthetic

quality of tiny things.'[364] *Ragtime*, however, problematises the unifying vision provided

by this displaced perspective, its miniaturisation facilitating only the illusion of mastery,

the narrator's generalisations contested by what proves to be a more striated web of

entwined stories.

In later texts, Doctorow conjoins the impulse towards miniaturisation and

distance with the childhood search for symbolic mastery over the world. The eponymous

narrator of Doctorow's most recent novel, *Andrew's Brain*, asks: 'why do things in

miniature bring out our affection? Like those little metal cars we all played with as kids

that were models of real cars. How important to us that they were accurate to scale.'[365]

Doctorow contemplates the trope of scale and perspective within the maturation process

at length in *World's Fair*, the coming-of-age story of Edgar Altschuler in the Bronx in

the late 1930s. Early on in the narrative, Edgar announces that he 'had difficulty with the

---

[361] Savvas similarly suggests that the naivety of *Ragtime*'s voice, in the opening paragraphs highlighted by Hutcheon, 'is constructed quite brilliantly as both product, and simultaneous critique, of the nostalgic consciousness'. Savvas, pp. 139-40.

[362] E.L. Doctorow, 'E.L. Doctorow: I Saw a Sign', interviewed by Victor Navasky, *New York Times Book Review*, 28 September 1980, 44-45, reprinted in *Conversations with E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Christopher D. Morris (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 59-63 (p. 62).

[363] Ermarth, *Realism*, p. 35.

[364] Harpham, p. 89.

[365] E.L. Doctorow, *Andrew's Brain* (New York: Random House, 2014), pp. 72-3.

proportions of things', declaring an interest in scale that trails the remainder of the text in its various models.[366] Christopher D. Morris argues that, laying bare the gap between real and representation, these models, like systems of signification and including the novel itself, necessarily misrepresent the world while providing the only platforms with which to conceptualise it.[367] Morris, however, does not address Edgar's concern with achieving panoramic vision enabled by distance or by miniaturisation, prefigured in his youthful construction of a fortress where 'I had surveillance of the whole vast kitchen floor.'[368] When confronted with the *Hindenburg* zeppelin, Edgar narrates, 'she was visible in her entirety,' an encompassing perspective that three pages earlier is figured in terms of totalising knowledge.[369] Observing a car accident from his classroom window, Edgar notes, 'From this height the spectacle of the event was magnified, the whole field of circumstance could be seen.'[370] Edgar's emphasis on perspectival remove again colours his family trip to a football game, where the group moves to 'better seats, farther back in the section, where with some altitude we could now see the whole field clearly.'[371]

Edgar's belief in and desire for an encompassing vision that omits no detail rests in tension with his curiosity in sleight of hand, the '"now you see it, now you don't" kinds of things' that his father and uncle practice.[372] Such feats of trickery, where the eye is turned against itself, teaches Edgar that, 'You didn't have to broadcast everything you knew all at once, but could reveal it suspensefully'.[373] This realisation that the apparent truth might be the result of trickery challenges the possibility of a distant perspective that reveals a whole field of vision, finally discarded with his anticipated visit to the World's Fair. Leading up to his trip, Edgar worries that he will miss out on something,

---

[366] E.L. Doctorow, *World's Fair* (New York: Random House, 2007 [1985]), p. 7.

[367] Morris, thus, concludes that the novel advocates an aesthetic strategy that invokes its own status as fictional misrepresentation even as it strives to signify. Christopher D. Morris, 'The Models of Misrepresentation in E.L. Doctorow's *World's Fair*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 26.4 (1990), 522-38 (pp. 535-37).

[368] Doctorow, *World's Fair*, p. 8.

[369] Ibid., p. 156.

[370] Ibid., p. 153.

[371] Ibid., p. 204.

[372] Ibid., p. 84.

[373] Ibid., p. 116.

an anxiety curbed when his friend Meg presents him with a comprehensive map of the Fair, showing it 'as if you were looking down from an airplane'.[374] Yet, the Fair confronts Edgar with frequent distortions of scale, its displays featuring small models of future cities and statues of enlarged body parts, giants housed next to little people: he narrates, 'I was made light-headed by the looming and shrinking size of things.'[375] Twice Edgar swings from the distant to the life-sized viewpoint, when he moves from observing a model of the World of Tomorrow to its actual construction outside the exhibit, and finally, when he moves from the heights of the Parachute Jump to a performance of Oscar the Amorous Octopus. These destabilising shifts in perspective recall Roland Barthes writing on the pictorial plates of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, whose presentation of objects he tellingly compares to the real-life World's Fair.[376]

Barthes notes that the encyclopaedic plates present their objects in two different orders: the top of the page shows the object enmeshed in its context of use, while the bottom of the page finds the object enlarged and drawn in its essence. For Barthes, the 'paradigmatic' perspective of the isolated object forms a '*radical language*, consisting of pure concepts', that the 'syntagmatic' *table vivant* transforms into a discursive message with 'an extreme density of meaning'.[377] By demonstrating the object in use, the removed perspective illuminates the object's meaning and its human purpose. The up-close vantage point, however, challenges this didacticism. If the removed perspective portrays a well-organised world controlled by human implements, the up-close perspective demonstrates a grotesque landscape that is wholly unfamiliar: in this gargantuan world, 'the sea urchin is *also* a sun, a monstrance', named objects losing their distinctive qualities and, thus, their systematised order, language collapsing with the shifting of scale.[378] The paradigmatic images thus violently disrupt the comfortable order produced by the contextual syntagmatic scenes, nature undoing rather than

---

[374] Ibid., p. 222.
[375] Ibid., p. 255.
[376] Barthes, 'The Plates', p. 25.
[377] Ibid., p. 31, 30. Emphasis in original.
[378] Ibid., p. 38. Emphasis in original.

confirming human design. The damage the immediate perspective perpetrates on the order produced by the distant viewpoint repeats in Edgar's trip to the World's Fair, his oscillations between the distant and up-close viewpoints finally resolved in the stands of the erotic water ballet.

Literalising the bird's-eye perspective of the Fair's map, Parachute Jump yanks Edgar and Meg into the sky, showing them a frightening vista of New York beyond the borders of the amusement park:

> I saw out over the world now, over the Fair. I saw Manhattan, I saw clouds over the city lit from below by electric light. I grew dizzy. I closed my own eyes and held on to Meg as tightly as she held me. I swore that if I came out of this alive, never again would I go up in such a contraption.[379]

The terror of the ride, its demonstration of the artificiality of every frame of reference, contrasts starkly with Edgar's previous idealisation of the from-above vantage point, abandoned in his subsequent viewing of the Amorous Octopus. The show, which stages the sexual pursuit of the several women, including Meg's mother, by a huge octopus-puppet, marks what Edgar feels to be his maturation. The stadium confounds Edgar's previous confidence that Meg's map would provide an infallible guide to the Fair: 'though it was there for everyone at the World's Fair to see, I shouldn't have seen it.'[380] Hidden in plain sight, Edgar sneaks into the performance and eschews the seats at the rear of the stands, deemed preferable for their panopticism earlier at the football game, for 'the first row, by the rail.'[381] From this perspective of immediacy, achieved through spontaneous action rather than planed out with his map, Edgar meets his sexual maturation:

> I knew everything now, the crucial secret, so carelessly vouchsafed. After all, I had not intended this, it had come to me without my bidding, without any planning or calculation on my part, presented, in fact, as an accident of the adventure. It was not my fault. I had worried before, all the time in this enormous effort to catch up to life, to find it, to feel it, comprehend it; but all I had to do was be in it and it would instruct me and give me everything I needed.[382]

Whereas Todd McGowan argues that this moment demonstrates Edgar's interpolation into late capitalism—satisfied and knowledgeable rather than dissatisfied and inquisitive—I would rather situate it within the novel's consistent consideration of

---

[379] Doctorow, *World's Fair*, p. 266.
[380] Ibid., p. 270.
[381] Ibid., p. 267.
[382] Ibid., pp. 270-71.

scale.[383] By investing in spontaneity and presence, Edgar's development aligns maturity with acknowledging the impotence of the removed perspective, or the miniaturised model, and disavowing the illusion of mastery and total vision that it appears to offer.

This section has demonstrated Doctorow's politically-motivated desacralisation of realist aesthetic practices throughout his literary career. For Doctorow, the representation of history requires a dissonant artistic style that gestures towards the messiness of the past and the conflicting ways it is experienced. Rather than viewing knowledge as a flat screen that once seen can be possessed and known, Doctorow urges us to imagine a multidimensional past that can be reckoned with only through a wealth of distinct perspectives. Whereas the former type of gaze produces a violent and narcissistic form of knowledge, wherein the viewer tames history, the latter is sensitive to the diversity of human experience. This distinction between the vision that masters and the vision that inquires maps on to Levin's 'assertoric' and 'aletheic' gazes. Throughout his oeuvre, I have suggested that Doctorow courts an 'aletheic' narration that strives to see democratically and prismatically. In *Homer and Langley*, this 'aletheic' impulse is woven into Homer's blind narration that can offer neither panoramic unity nor visual confirmation. Instead, the novel-as-diary represents a form of curation that makes sense of the past while revelling in uncertainty and diversity.

Homer and Langley and the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel

This section situates Homer's blindness as a subversion of the typical realist narrator and places it within Doctorow's imperative to overthrow mythic history with marginalised voices. Presented within the milieu of the nineteenth-century realist novel—the domestic interior filled with objects from different times and places— Homer's blind, first-person narration provides a new angle on the museum-like home. We shall see that, by eliminating the removed and harmonizing perspective of realism, *Homer and Langley* strives towards a diversification of history typical of Doctorow's political aesthetics. At the same time, by holding on to history in the form of outdated

---

[383] Todd McGowan, '"In This Way He Lost Everything": The Cost of Satisfaction in E.L. Doctorow's *World's Fair*', *Critique*, 42.2 (2001), 233-40 (p. 237).

technologies, Homer and Langley overcrowd their house and, as a result, fatally entomb themselves in an archive. In this text, then, resisting the realist strategy that would unify at the cost of narrative diversity, and instead maintaining an archive for the sake of a broader, non-hegemonic historical account, seemingly condemns the brothers to death.

Homer's blindness, and its supplementation by '[his] exceptional hearing, which [he] trained to a degree of alertness that was almost visual', locates the novel alongside Doctorow's imperative to broaden history and subvert the traditional realist narrator (4).[384] Blindness, by seemingly disabling his ability to make erotic advances, elevates women to a position of control and exonerates him from adhering to sexual codes: 'it could do lots of things, my sightlessness' (5). If Homer's blindness imbues him with a form of sexual-social deviance, it more generally codes him as a social outsider, and it is from this outsider perspective that the novel gives an account of modernisation and industrialisation. Homer, whose narrative moves across time from the late-nineteenth century to the 1980s, tracks technological development through his other senses: he remarks, 'I [...] gauged the progress of our times by the changing sounds and smells of the streets' (20). As such, just as Doctorow recommends is the novelist's aim in 'False Documents', Homer provides an account of modernity from an often-ignored perspective, his ears registering data missed by other characters. He notices, and Langley misses, that guests at their tea dances sit out the livelier numbers, swaying to the somber songs as an exercise in 'public mourning' (65). Homer comes to this insight by 'hear[ing] the chairs scraping' and 'listen[ing] to the sound of their dancing' (64, 65). While as Brooks notes, 'Realism tends to deal in "first impressions"'—most significantly, 'the way things look'—*Homer and Langley*, voiced without recourse to vision, cannot provide the in-depth descriptions typical of the realist genre.[385]

Homer's blindness specifically dissolves the possibility of offering a removed and unifying perspective, foregrounded in the trajectory of his loss of sight, which forms part of the novel's first passage:

[384] We might note, here, the strategic use of the word 'almost'. While his hearing functions like vision insofar as Homer can navigate the house and the street, it does not permit the kind of optical verification or unification that Doctorow critiques in 'False Documents'.

[385] Brooks, p. 3.

> The houses over to Central Park West went first, they got darker as if dissolving into the dark sky until I couldn't make them out, and then the trees began to lose their shape, and then finally, this was toward the end of the season, maybe it was late February of that very cold winter, and all I could see were these phantom shapes of the ice skaters floating past me on a field of ice, and then the white ice, that last light, went gray and then altogether black, and then all my sight was gone though I could hear clearly the scoot scut of the blades on the ice, a very satisfying sound, a soft sound though full of intention, a deeper tone than you'd expect made by the skate blades, perhaps for having sounded the resonant basso of the water under the ice, scoot scut, scoot scut. (3)

Emphasised here is Homer's incapacity to observe from a distance, the horizon of his visual field moving closer and closer, but it is just this perspectival remove that characterises the realist narrative technique. Like Ermarth, who affiliates it a distancing strategy, Brooks considers the realist novel of the domestic space as exhibiting an aesthetic of the small-scale model: 'More than most other fictions, the realist novel provides a sense of play very similar to that given by the scale model.'[386] Didier Maleuvre similarly writes of the realist novel as a dollhouse, detailing the home in its entirety only by absenting human experience: 'one can grasp its interior as a totality only because one could never fit inside.'[387] Whereas, for Maleuvre, the typical realist novel aims to offer a unified vision of the home's interior at the expense of leaving it, Homer's blind first-person narrative takes stock of the Victorian bourgeois interior from within while skirting realism's demand of totalised vision. Maleuvre argues that the nineteenth-century interior encompasses a museum aesthetic, replete with displayed bibelots 'freezing and conserving an image of the past in a display of collectibles.'[388] He imbues this interior space with an ultimate unhomeliness, one that, he argues, persists in bourgeois homemaking today, making Homer and Langley's death at the hands of the collection appear to be the disturbing apotheosis of nineteenth-century collecting and a parable relevant to the contemporary experience.

Maleuvre notes some exceptional realist texts, including Balzac's catalogue of his house in *L'Inventaire de l'Hôtel de rue Fortunée* and Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A Rebours*, which reveal the homelessness hidden within the over-decorated homes of the nineteenth-century and its realist descriptions. These texts, he suggests, lie at the apex of

---

[386] Ibid., pp. 2-3.
[387] Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 135.
[388] Ibid., p. 115.

realism for their supreme dedication to in-depth object description, and yet end up undoing the realist project by overloading the text with optic specificities such that the scene can never be imagined in a seamless entirety. By showing realism in its extreme form, Maleuvre notes that these texts reveal the uncanny homelessness that rests at the heart of interior-dwelling since the nineteenth century. In *L'Inventaire*, Maleuvre argues, by approaching the object from the human level of the collection, not from above, 'the world is always awfully close, the object always blindingly near, crowding the subject.'[389] Like Balzac in *L'Inventaire*, Homer provides an account of encountering objects, of steering himself through a harsh landscape of objects indifferent to him.[390] Indeed, *Homer and Langley*'s conclusion, like Maleuvre's analysis of *L'Inventaire*, sees the brothers not just cramped by their expanding material repertoire but, in Langley's case, crushed beneath it. *Homer and Langley* thus, we shall see, witnesses the harshness of interior-dwelling that Maleuvre sees at play in the French realist novel but by subverting rather than intensifying its representational methods.

Homer's sightlessness obscures the visual impact of objects, their spectacle, which Maleuvre argues is their primary effect of the nineteenth-century interior. Homer describes his blindness as melting away the object's image, leaving only its materiality intact: he navigates through space purely by sensing 'where the air is filled in with something solid', materiality felt where visual impression remains illusive (5). For this reason, Homer's blindness proves an asset during a power outage: 'it needed the native gifts of a blind man who sensed where things were by the air they displaced to get from one room to another without killing himself in the process' (158). Corresponding with Maleuvre's argument that '[t]he bourgeois observes his objects, he does not live with them', the objects gifted to the brothers by their parents are distinctly ornamental: 'things to really excite a boy, like an antique toy train that was too delicate to play with,

---

[389] Ibid., p. 133.

[390] We might consider Doctorow's aesthetic strategy alongside Brown's analysis of *The Spoils of Poynton*, in which, he argues, Henry James attempts to attend to objects while ridding his narrative of the lengthy descriptions that weighed down the realist text. Without detailing their material specifics, Brown argues, James can register how objects mediate relationships and animate the people who contend for their ownership. Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 155.

or a gold-plated hairbrush' (7).[391] We might, then, identify in Homer the ability to encounter objects precisely because he cannot be seduced by their visual charms. Homer's blindness prevents the long descriptions of objects on which the realist process thrives, and which in Maleuvre's account overpowers the conceptual apparatus in *L'Inventaire*. Instead his reports frequently diminish to lists of objects without lengthy qualifications of them, encountering their materiality rather than their spectacular visuality. While *Homer and Langley* actualises the threatening collection that Maleuvre sees underlying realist discourse and the nineteenth-century interior, it achieves this effect through the pairing down of description rather than its proliferation.

Like the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior, Homer and Langley's house bursts with objects collected and displayed by their parents. Homer describes their home at the novel's beginning as:

> a monumental tribute to late Victorian design that would be bypassed by modernity [...] and which I always found comfortable, solid, dependable, with its big upholstered pieces, or tufted Empire side chairs, or heavy drapes over the curtains on the ceiling-to-floor windows, or medieval tapestries hung from gilt poles, and bow-windowed bookcases, think Persian rugs, and standing lamps with tasseled shades and matching chinois amphora that you could almost step into...it was all very eclectic, being a record of sorts of our parents' travels [...]. (6)

In domesticating objects from faraway times and places and masking the walls with drapes and bookcases, Maleuvre argues that the nineteenth-century interior-dweller negates architectural space for an escapist fantasy.[392] Maleuvre, in his reading of Huysmans's *A Rebours*, pairs the accumulation of objects with a desire for the collector to neutralise himself, to physically degenerate to the status of a physical object as the house fills with material content.[393] Homer's description of his parents' mansion emphasises these same decorative techniques, the walls smothered by furniture and material brought home from their travels. When they inherit the house from their parents, Langley's collection continues to fill the house, forming ramparts in the form of a labyrinth of interior walls and, later, a precarious security system. By dictating the brothers' movement, eventually pinning Homer to his writing desk, these precarious

---

[391] Maleuvre, p. 119.
[392] Ibid., p. 148.
[393] Ibid., p. 144.

archival structures similarly evoke the impulse to self-obstruct that, for Maleuvre, motivates the realist collector.

This section has detailed some of the ways in which *Homer and Langley* overlaps with and subverts the tropes of nineteenth-century realist fiction and its engagement with a museal domestic interior cramped with objects. In recalling realism, Doctorow is able to contextualise the current proliferation of collecting and hoarding within the historical movement in which the object's centrality to self-definition was first interrogated. Rebecca Steinitz notes that nineteenth-century collections, like diaries, 'serve as assertions of control', attempts to bolster a self that 'is always threatened, always in need of such propping up.'[394] Yet, *Homer and Langley*, following Maleuvre, situates collections as antagonistic to their owners, self-abnegation parading as mastery. Like the texts that Maleuvre sets as the apex of realism, *Homer and Langley*'s non-realist, blind narrative demonstrates the antagonism, rather than the harmony, between subject and object in the bourgeois interior and the unhomeliness of the curated home. Doctorow, however, also formally contests realist aesthetic techniques by writing the novel through the blind Homer, who can only attend to the archive's physicality and cannot witness it as an orderly dollhouse.

Impossible Self-Reliance

Homer and Langley come of age in and inherit from their parents a mansion typical of nineteenth-century decorating and realist fiction, and this abode naturalises for them a form of dwelling encumbered by objects: 'it was our legacy, Langley's and mine, this sense of living with things assertively inanimate, and having to walk around them' (7). In part, this obstruction by objects engenders in the brothers a habituated homelessness that permits the archive to mushroom to its ultimately fatal size. Homer's remark that their mansion would be 'bypassed by modernity' signals towards the vogue for collecting that Langley continues to pursue after their parents' demise, a fashion

---

[394] Rebecca Steinitz, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 58.

dispensed with in modern dwellings (6).[395] While Langley inherits the Victorian taste for collecting from his father, Homer suggests that his brother's morbid thriftiness 'bring[s] to his passion for collecting things something entirely his own' (37). Rather than seeking out objects for their aesthetic appeal, Langley brings home outmoded technologies, inexpensive because they have been technologically surpassed. Like the outdated Model T Ford that Langley installs in the dining room, chosen for its discount price, or the bicycle built for two with a blown tire, many of the objects are damaged beyond use yet remain part of the archive's vast contents.

Archiving the broken or outdated material of the modern city, Langley resembles Walter Benjamin's ragpicker. The ragpicker, child of industrialisation, mines the garbage of the street in search of the valuable, the missed, and the forgotten. Benjamin argues, through a reading of Charles Baudelaire, that the ragpicker and the poet alike take as their projects the refuse of industry, cataloguing material excreted by the metropolis.[396] From this material, he suggests, they can offer the usually occluded account of, what Ben Highmore calls, 'the broken promises that have been abandoned in the everyday trash of history.'[397] Writing before the publication of *Homer and Langley*, Michael Wutz notes a sustained commitment to the ragpicker in Doctorow's work, both as characters within his novels and as a method of composition that re-imagines the discarded past. *Homer and Langley* adheres to both of these trends, featuring a practicing ragpicker while fictionalising a real-life story and expanding its parameters to comment upon the contemporary moment.[398] Wutz argues that through both textual

---

[395] Bill Brown acknowledges several early-twentieth-century reactions to the mass ornamentation of interiors and the in-depth description of realist texts. Willa Cather, in 'The Novel Demeublé' (1922), argues against the meticulous renderings of interior decor in realist novels, particular those by Balzac. Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman mirror her advise for outfitting the novel in their comments on interior decorating, recommending the pairing down of bric-a-brac. See Bill Brown, *Sense*, p. 143.

[396] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), pp. 79-80.

[397] Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 65.

[398] Liesl Schillinger notes that 'the Collyers have become the stuff of urban legend', having produced an array of retellings 'titillated by the brothers' ghoulish history'. The sympathetic portrait that Doctorow draws might be considered an act of literary ragpicking, reconsidering a historical story that has since been reduced to spectacle. Liesl Schillinger, 'The Odd Couple', *New York Times Book Review*, 8 Sept. 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/books/review/Schillinger-t.html> [accessed 28 Nov. 2013].

strategies, Doctorow positions detritus as material to be refashioned into cultural critique, 'as unfinished business to be rethought and rewritten, as already consumed trash to be reused and unrefused.'[399] If, as Wutz argues, Doctorow envisions the novelist as a ragpicker, capable of radically recycling the past, we can thereby think of Langley's collection as the material for such a narrative endeavour that might challenge official history with the objects it has misplaced, suppressed, and discarded.

Like Benjamin's ragpicker and poet, Homer's discourse on the collection betrays its investment in political critique. Long before Homer calls the house 'a Temple of Dissidence,' he terms the archive, at its apparent inauguration, 'the collection of artifacts from our American life' (146, 24). Fittingly, Homer articulates this title when Langley mounts his WWI rifle on the drawing room mantel, inducting the archive by recalling a traumatic event whose official memorialisation in the form of public parades upsets the former soldier. Langley's ragpicker archive, thus, commences out of dissatisfaction with mainstream remembrance, but it also bespeaks his troubled relationship with the world outside the house. The collection, which in Homer's estimation rests at the seam of the personal and the political, documenting "*our American* life", implies a relationship with the outside world that becomes increasingly strained as time passes.[400] Langley's collection, thus, claims the place that Jacques Derrida stakes out for the archive, signifying the 'institutional passage from the private to the public'.[401]

Langley's ragpicking stems from and fulfils the homelessness that Maleuvre instates at the centre of the nineteenth-century interior, by troubling the distinction between the outside and the inside. At the novel's conclusion, Homer recalls his childhood as a time without a border between domestic interior and municipal exterior: 'home and park, both lit by the sun, were one and the same' (207). Whereas Homer

---

[399] Michael Wutz, *Enduring Words: Literary Narrative in a Changing Media Ecology* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 145.

[400] By situating the house at the juncture of the personal and the political, *Homer and Langley* demonstrates its potential to upset official history, to propel alternative considerations of the past. Writing on colonial India, Antoinette Burton likewise argues that the home provides 'an archive from which a variety of counterhistories of colonial modernity can be discerned.' Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 5.

[401] Derrida, 'Archive Fever', p. 10.

evokes a time when both inside and outside worlds seemed trustworthy in their orderliness, Langley recasts this observation in terms that highlight his indifference to the homely. When questioned about the logic of installing an automobile in the dining room, Langley articulates an argument symmetrical with Homer's childhood nostalgia: 'What after all can be said about having a roof over your head that is philosophically meaningful? The inside is the outside and the outside is the inside' (80-1). While here Langley disavows the distinction between outside and inside, he nevertheless affords it some credence when he states of the same automobile: 'You wouldn't think this car was hideous to behold on the street. But here in our elegant dining room its true nature as a monstrosity is apparent' (81). As Langley continues to breach the domestic border, the objects he imports become truly monstrous, challenging the very possibility of household dwelling.

Julia Prewitt-Brown has argued that in depictions of the domestic interior, which identify people with the objects they own, 'the bourgeois soul is at once defined and imperiled.'[402] Prewitt-Brown invests the bourgeois interior with a concern for security that becomes increasingly impoverished as capitalism becomes established. Whereas seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, such as Vermeer's *The Love Letter*, depict interiors suffused with security and equilibrium, Prewitt-Brown notes that by the nineteenth-century the outside world appears to more violently encroach upon the domestic scene.[403] *Homer and Langley* presents a congruent image of the domestic collection, wherein Langley's final attempt to establish an independent space separate from the outside world, in which the brothers might achieve a radical Emersonian independence, ultimately proves fatal.

By forgoing the distinction between inside and outside in the form of his collection, Langley creates a distinctly unhomely domestic space, more mausoleum than museum. The supply of phonographs that Langley brings home takes the place of furniture, and this replacement of domestic comforts by archival objects persists as the

---

[402] Julia Prewitt-Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 4.
[403] Ibid., p. 6.

house fills up with bric-a-brac. While Homer calls the interior 'a road on which Langley and I were traveling like pilgrims', this avenue becomes increasingly perilous with the continual influx of objects (112). Its rooms, Homer narrates, develop into 'a kind of obstacle course for me', transforming what should be a familiar layout into foreign territory: 'I was like a traveler who had lost his map' (96). The collection increasingly restructures and obscures the house's design, Langley building maze-like passageways out of his vast archive of newspapers: 'The house by this time of our lives was a labyrinth of hazardous pathways, full of obstructions and many dead ends' (158). The house's troubling reorganisation occurs alongside its literal deconstruction. During WWII, Langley, for instance, 'contributed to what was called the War Effort by selling off the copper rain gutters and chimney flashing of our house' as well as 'selling the walnut wood paneling from the library and our father's study' (86). The collection as a means of domesticating the outside world, thus, imperils the home-space, the comforts of the interior trumped as its living quarters fill up with foreign objects.

As the outside world begins to seem like a more threatening space, Langley shifts from a willingness to invite it into the house through the collection to a maniacal desire to keep it at bay. Homer's narration imbues Langley with 'the strength of no illusions', an inborn sense of alienation that intensifies as the world appears more hostile and less orderly (18). After a mobster holds the brothers captive in their own house, Langley takes stock of house's conditions:

> The lintels over the second-floor windows, he said. Chipped away here and there. And the cornice, chunks of it missing. I don't know when that happened. And there's some sort of filthy bird's nest tucked in one of the gaps. Well why not birds, he said. Home to the world. Thieving servants, government agents, crime families, wives...' (127).

Here, Langley denigrates the notion that the house might be open to the outside, an effect that he previously used to justify his archival endeavour. The police's raid on the brothers' tea dances, as well as their failed relationships with women, Homer notes, 'marked the beginning of our abandonment of the outer world' (76). While Homer's sense of purpose derives from social participation, from his ability to play records at their dances or the community's common investment in WWII, Langley increasingly distances the brothers from society. The brothers again come into conflict with the

police during WWII, when the authorities apprehend their Japanese-American housekeepers and send them to an internment camp. After this violation, Langley advises Homer: 'This house is our inviolate realm [...] I don't care what kind of damn badge they flash' (90).

While Langley previously deconstructed the distinction between inside and outside, he reinstalls the division when announcing to Homer that their primary goal will be '[s]elf-reliance [...] We don't need help from anyone. We will keep our own counsel. And defend ourselves. We've got to stand up to the world—we're not free if it's at someone else's sufferance' (127). Yet, as Homer acknowledges late in the text, **'**Our every act of opposition and assertion of our self-reliance, every instance of our creativity and resolute expression of our principles was in service of our ruination' (200). Attempts to keep the world at bay, to insist on their independence, result in its insistent return in increasingly threatening forms. Such is the case when Langley pulls out the telephone only for the repairman to appear, and for the large black shutters that the brothers install to function as an invitation to real estate brokers to knock at their door (128). Like his swelling menagerie of objects, Langley's schemes to thwart collection agencies render the home increasingly uncomfortable, eliminating its supply of both water and electricity.

When Langley refuses to continue to pay off their mortgage, he attracts the interest of the newspaper media. As a result, the brothers' house becomes a tourist attraction, drawing the ire of the neighbourhood children who throw rocks at its windows. Homer understands this attack as the final stage of the brothers' isolation: after losing electricity, water, and gas, they find themselves 'in a circle of animosity rippling outward from our neighbors to creditors, to the press, to the municipality, and, finally, to the future—for that was what these children were—rather than being of minor significance, well, that was the most devastating blow of all' (200). In order to ward off intruders, Langley fashions his vast archive into a security system, building up precarious structures that threaten to collapse and crush any burglars that might trespass. Here we see the collection swing from an engagement with the outside world, a deconstruction of the notion of the home-space, to a paranoid attempt to shore up its

borders. It is, however, just this sense of security, the imperative to remain self-reliant and free of social influences, that transforms the archive into an ultimately self-annihilating guillotine that destroys the brothers.[404]

Whereas Fredric Jameson sees the nineteenth-century realist narrative contoured by the same historical forces that produced the contained bourgeois subject, this monadic subject cannot extend into the twentieth century in which the brothers come of age.[405] Even if the nineteenth-century collector could tame the outside world through his acquisitions (which Maleuvre would contest), in the chaotic world of the industrialising twentieth-century city this tactic means inviting external chaos into the living room. Surrounded by an impeding municipal and capitalist infrastructure, the brothers' attempt to separate themselves from society must, then, finally destroy them. Yet, this section has argued that their sacrifice appears simultaneously encoded into the collecting spirit that Langley inherits from his parents, the nineteenth-century archival interior having conditioned an indifference to domesticity that permits the archive to swell. The nineteenth-century endeavour to domesticate the outside world ultimately sees that external space, through its collected debris, disrupt the very foundations of the home and the self.

Archive Fever and the Violent Future

This section interrogates the grim conclusion of Langley's archive, the fatal blow it delivers to the two brothers. Morris notes the consistent theme of historical recurrence within Doctorow's works, analysing it through Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, which emphasises the circularity of history and, in Heidegger's interpretation, the impossibility of making an original philosophical conjecture.[406] *Homer*

---

[404] With Homer as its narrator, the novel cannot signify his death other than by simply ending. While in real life, his eventual starvation can be confirmed by newspaper reports, within the novel Homer does not explicitly die, and I will lend this absence significance later in the chapter.

[405] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 153-4.

[406] Christopher D. Morris, *Models of Misrepresentation: On the Fiction of E.L. Doctorow* (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), pp. 5-6. Both Harpham and Mark Busby single out *Ragtime* in particular as a novel about repetition and revolution, stressing the necessity of embracing change in the mode of Little Brother. See Harpham, pp. 88-90; Mark Busby, 'E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*

and Langley similarly scrutinises repetition and revolution, explicitly in Homer's distinction between anarchy and change and in Langley's Theory of Replacements, but also more subtly through the temporal vagaries of the archive. This section will contemplate the temporality of the archive in *Homer and Langley* through the lens of Derrida's 'Archive Fever'. By twinning historical recurrence with historical transformation and archival repetition with archival destruction, Derrida provides a salient model for analysing the novel's logic of prophecy and destruction. As such, I claim that *Homer and Langley* provides a framework through which to examine Derrida's abstract claims about the archive in action.

Doctorow's novel *Billy Bathgate* explores the archive's projection of a future and participation in its construction through another ragpicker archive. Like Langley, Arnold Garbage sifts through the detritus of New York City, discovering objects that will prove valuable. It is from his collection that, as Philip E. Simmons notes, Billy Bathgate buys the gun with which he launches his career in the mob, the narrative propelled by the junkyard. In comparison to the linearity of Billy's narrative, enervated by the archive, Simmons suggests that the ragpicker collection itself rests outside of time: Garbage, he writes, 'provides a model of an alternative mode of existence outside history in the stasis of the collection.'[407] When Billy throws a party in Garbage's trash-filled basement, the children find clothes and costumes from bygone eras to affect adulthood, symbolically transported into their futures through the materials of the past: 'so by and by in the smoke and jazz we were all just the way we wanted to be, dancing in the dust of the Embassy Club of our futures, in the costumes of shy children's love'.[408] The archive, here, provides the raw material for erecting the future in the present, for embodying adulthood though only fleetingly.

---

and the Dialectics of Change', in *Critical Essays on E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Ben Siegel (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 2000), pp. 177-182.

[407] More generally, Simmons notes that Doctorow frequently incorporates collections into his historical novels—including *Ragtime* and *World's Fair* in addition to *Billy Bathgate*—and argues that, through this gesture, he reveals that to write the past depends on convincingly navigating between separate archival objects rather than accessing the truth of the past. Philip E. Simmons, *Deep Surfaces: Mass Culture and History in Postmodern American Fiction* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 99.

[408] E.L. Doctorow, *Billy Bathgate* (London: Picador, 1992 [1989]), p. 98.

While, in *Billy Bathgate*, the archive's old-fashioned clothing allows the children to project themselves into a future space, Doctorow's first novel, *Welcome to Hard Times*, envisions a violence heralded by the archive's initiation. *Welcome* begins with the ruination of a small town at the hands of the Bad Man from Bodie, who, after the town is rebuilt, returns to devastate it for a second time. The novel is written by Blue, called the mayor of Hard Times by its inhabitants because he records the town's distribution of property. Marilyn Arnold notes that *Welcome* stages a competition between the wilderness's chaos and civilisation's order, embodied respectively in the Bad Man and Blue. She argues that, for Doctorow, the historical process involves building 'the future in the image of the past, producing an inevitable cycling of history.'[409] I suggest a reading that, while congruent with Arnold's analysis, accentuates the role played by archival law in the destruction of the town.

Blue, in my interpretation, ensures the town's destruction by stabilising property ownership with his records—that is, by establishing an archival system. When the Bad Man first attacks, he trails Blue such that he cannot recover his ledgers inscribed with the town's records and, later, finds that they have been obliterated: 'The drawers were burnt out and I found just the covers left of my ledgers.'[410] If, here, the records must perish alongside the town, elsewhere the archive appears more conspicuously violent. Blue acknowledges the record's fatal danger when he narrates, 'I'm losing my blood to this rag, but more, I have the cold feeling everything I've written doesn't tell how it was, no matter how careful I've been to get it all down it still escapes me'.[411] In this sentence, as Morris notes, the 'rag' stands ambiguously for Blue's bandages and for the ledgers in which he writes the novel, 'but in either case the flows of blood and ink are concurrent and futile.'[412] As a result of the record's engrained violence to that which it signifies, Blue finally decides that the only record worth pursing is one already marked by death:

---

[409] Marilyn Arnold, 'History As Fate in E.L. Doctorow's Tale of a Western Town', in *E.L. Doctorow: Essays and Conversations*, ed. by Richard Trenner (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 1983), pp. 207-16 (p. 207).

[410] E.L. Doctorow, *Welcome To Hard Times* (New York: Random House, 2007 [1960]), p. 23.

[411] Ibid., p. 199.

[412] Morris, *Models*, p. 7.

> I scorn myself for a fool for all the bookkeeping I've done; as if notations in a ledger can fix life, as if some marks in a book can control things. There is only one record to keep and that's the one I'm writing now, across the red lines, over the old marks. It won't help me nor anyone I know. "This is who's dead," it says.[413]

This integration of annihilation into the logic of invention, in which, as Blue writes, 'our end was in our beginning', voices the self-destruction mechanism that, as we shall see, Derrida embeds within archival memorialisation.[414] Records, Blue notes, serve to establish the town at the same time as they engrave its failure. With this knowledge, after the Bad Man's second strike he obscures his second attempt to set down the town's distribution of property by writing over it the narrative of its destruction: death, in *Welcome*, can be an archive's only topic.

Whereas *Billy Bathgate* figures the archive as a means of envisioning and entering a possible future, *Welcome* sees in the future the necessary effacement of the archive and of that which it represents. Derrida provides a means of considering the archives of these two texts and their alternative relationships to the future alongside each other. He suggests that every archive subjects its objects to an 'archontic principle', or a 'principle of consignation', that unites them into a system of agreement.[415] This archival law possesses both '*institutive* and *conservative*' functions, establishing the terms of the archive and conserving the past through its fabricated regime.[416] Derrida's concepts of the archive and the archontic principle counterbalance two relationships with the future: the future as it might come, such as the smoky jazz club Billy Bathgate and his friends fashion from Garbage's mess, and the future of destruction that consumes both archive and town in *Hard Times*.[417] On the one hand, the archive anticipates the future through its archontic principle, materialising the past and submitting it to a law that can be repeated over the course of time. As Mark Currie notes, the archive—as a 'wager', 'a *pledge*', and 'a token of the future'[418]—'structures the present in anticipation of its

---

[413] Doctorow, *Welcome*, pp. 184-5.

[414] Ibid., p. 184.

[415] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 10.

[416] Ibid., p. 12.

[417] Mark Currie notes, in reference to Derrida, 'there are two futures, the future that we envisage correctly, and the future that comes out of nowhere.' Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 43.

[418] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 18.

recollection.'[419] That is, from the standpoint of an imagined future, the archivist fashions its materials into a system of what ought to have been remembered.[420] Yet, Currie also notes of Derrida's thinking: 'we post things out into the future on the basis of a kind of promise, but amid the possibility that things will go wrong, that our messages may not be received, or that the futures that we have envisaged may not come about.'[421] In the case of the archive, the imagination of the future appears ensconced in a form that, while it strives to remember also actively works to forget.

Derrida twins the archontic principle, which fashions memory into a format that can be repeated in the future, with an amnesic drive that eliminates all trace of the archive. He argues that the principle that organises the archive is premised on an initial trauma that reduces the objects' singularity into a homogenous system: 'The One, as self-repetition, can only repeat and recall this instituting violence. It can only affirm itself and engage itself in this repetition.'[422] This archival repetition at once invites the objectified past into a system of remembrance and encodes it with death, destruction, and the failure of order:

> if there is no archive without consignation in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on what permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than what exposes to destruction, in truth what menaces with destruction introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument.[423]

The archive's destruction, then, is written into its very superstructure from the moment of its inauguration. Thus, we find in Derrida's 'Archive Fever' repetition twinned with destruction, a temporal logic present elsewhere in his writing.

---

[419] Currie, *About*, p. 12.

[420] Currie argues that the Derrida's concept of the archive encompasses his concept of supplementarity, whereby an imagined future can bring about an action in the present. Such a structure, as Currie notes, produces a confused temporality in which 'things which happen later in a sequence are understood as the origins of things from which they apparently originate.' Ibid., p. 42.

[421] Ibid., p. 43.

[422] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 51.

[423] Ibid., p. 14. Emphasis in original.

Derrida frequently twins novelty with repetition, when, for instance, in *Specters of Marx*, he terms the coming of the ghost, 'Repetition *and* first time'.[424] Currie notes the confluence of these seeming opposites in Derrida's concept of invention: 'The making of something new is indissociable from the discovery of something that was already there, and these are, at the same time, the two faces of truth, and two apparently incompatible concepts of time.'[425] Derrida dares us to think of singularity and repetition together in the figure of the event-machine, which Currie suggests, forms 'a model for intellectual change, based neither on the paradigm nor the event, the structure or the irruption, which sees the emergence of novelty as something unthinkable without a sense of what has already taken place.'[426] The impossible event, for Derrida, is always hidden in and hidden from the possibilities of the present, and so the new, or the unforeseen, can only exist in relationship to the context from which it develops. We might apply this logic of change, of the coincidence of repetition and novelty, to the functioning of the archive. By consolidating a structure of repetition, the archive opens itself up to be undone by events or objects that its system cannot handle or consider. The archive, thus, institutes a framework of classification that hardens as it recurs, ensuring that the system will be dismayed by the arrival of items or information that structurally it cannot account for.

Homer and Langley explores this same scheme of archival disaster. The novel sets up this temporal formula through Homer's attempt to distinguish between 'anarchy' and 'evolutionary change': 'The one was the world falling to pieces, the other was only the inevitable creep of time, [...] the turning over of the seconds and minutes of life to show its ever new guise' (25). In an essay on Einstein, Doctorow makes a similar distinction between sudden revolution and incremental evolution, before determining that the great discoveries of science emerge from both forms of temporality at once: 'Perhaps there *is* an evolving communal intellect, and its role is periodically to be

---

[424] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 10. Emphasis in original.
[425] Mark Currie, *The Invention of Deconstruction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 26.
[426] Ibid.

stunned and possibly outraged by the revolutionary ideas that it had not realized it was itself fomenting.'[427] Here, Doctorow advances a theory of historical change in which the accumulation of data and its consolidation of a system of knowledge creates the conditions for that system to throw itself into disarray, producing a new theory that negates yet springs from that previous framework. As is the case with Derrida, Doctorow's theory of systemic change refracts back into his notions of the archive and its eventual destruction. If the creation of a field of knowledge spells its eventual obsolescence, the gradual accumulation of objects once pinned down to a system of meaning leads to the archive's collapse and, in *Homer and Langley*, the catastrophic deaths of the two Collyer brothers. Though Homer initially decides that Langley's collecting and the decomposition of the house rest merely in the realm of natural evolution, its creeping repetition—and, as we shall see, its investment in a principle of repetition—develops into an anarchic system that can only eclipse itself. This slipperiness between 'evolution' and 'anarchy' is coded into their very definitions: within the archive, the slow movement of evolution literally is the anarchic 'world falling to pieces', historical events monumentalised into distinct pieces for display.

Homer and Langley's Archive Fever

Homer and Langley provides the most sustained consideration of archive fever in Doctorow's corpus, and I will track its expression in the novel's two archives: the ragpicker archive, more generally, and the newspaper archive through which Langley hopes to create a newspaper that will never fall out of date. *Homer and Langley* emphasises the archive's engagement with the future, suggesting that its meaning takes shape and changes over time. As such, it agrees with Derrida's assertion that the archive's meaning defers itself to the future. Derrida writes, 'The archive: if we want to know what this will have meant, we will only know in the times to come. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in the times to come, later on or perhaps never.'[428] We might consider this

---

[427] E.L. Doctorow, 'Einstein: Seeing the Unseen', in *Creationists*, pp. 151-63 (p. 156). Emphasis in original.

[428] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 27. Here, Derrida relates the temporality of the archive to the future perfect, or the anterior tense, an almost paradoxical grammar that posits a future in which a yet-to-arrive event has

suggestion through *Homer and Langley*'s consistent deployment of archival objects as retrospectively prophetic at three moments in the narrative.

After the brothers have learned of his death, Harold Robileaux's message recorded on a vinyl disc arrives at their door, temporarily vivifying his ghost and seemingly foretelling his demise. Although its postage stamp reveals that it predates Harold's death, the record's appearance temporarily convinces his grandmother that he is still alive. The funereal music that Harold plays, however, seemingly predicts his death and finally persuades her that he has in fact perished: 'maybe it was that solemnly reflective dirge, the mournful tones filling all our rooms over and over, as if Harold Robileaux was prophesying his own death, that made her admit to herself, after all, that her grandson was gone' (98). The record, then, is embedded with two forms of haunting: the past haunts the present, as Harold's archival remains reemerge temporarily to throw his death into question. More significantly, with hindsight the present seems haunted by the future, Harold foretelling his own death in the mournful tune he opts to record.

Like the record inflected with Harold's future death, so too does Langley's television boast seemingly prophetic powers, Homer calling it, 'the eye of an oracle looking into our house' (111). Soon after Homer watches Vincent testify before a Senate committee, the gangster reappears many years after their initial meeting and commandeers the brother's house as a hideout. Vincent's sudden reentrance into the brothers' lives affirms Homer's 'vague sense of expectation' wrought from coincidentally encountering him on TV and, later, in a radio report (112). Vincent's unexpected arrival, as a result, seems retrospectively predicted by the television that

---

already been completed. This tense, thus, possesses a turbulent relationship to the future, projecting an impossible knowledge of its content. Ben Hutchinson and Shane Weller, like Derrida, conclude that, because it shapes itself against an imagined future, the temporality of the archive 'is arguably the future perfect.' Hutchinson and Weller, 'Archive Time', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 133-53 (p. 150). The archive's anterior temporality is presented most literally in Karen Russell's story 'The Seagull Army Descends on Strong Beach, 1979'. Here, the titular birds scavenge objects from the future and, in their surreptitious thievery, tamper with the townspeople's fates, 'pecking at squares of paper and erasing whole futures'. Russell, 'The Seagull Army Descends on Strong Beach, 1979', in *Vampires in the Lemon Grove* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), pp. 53-82 (p. 73). Currie argues that, for Derrida, the future event whose completion is implied by the anterior tense nevertheless remains elusive, seeing the 'anticipation and retrospection' of the anterior tense and the 'unforeseeable arrival' of the messianic 'as the same structure.' Currie, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 95.

reminded the brothers of his existence and projected his image into the living room he would soon occupy. Homer characterises this recurrence as 'an improbability that had a certain logic to it', and he explains it through desire: 'I think now what happened I had wanted to happen' (112).

A final impossible prediction occurs in the form of Central Park. At the novel's beginning, Homer notes that as industrialisation became more widespread and more chaotic in his late-nineteenth-century childhood, 'the more the American people worshipped Nature' (8). The French journalist Jacqueline Roux, the muse of Homer's diary, theorises that Central Park anticipated this corruption of and consequential fetishisation of nature: 'But to me it suggests what they may not have intended—a foretelling—this sequestered square of nature created for the time coming of the end of nature' (188). Yet, Homer argues that, 'They built this park in the nineteenth century [...]. Before the city was there to surround it. Nature was everywhere, who would have thought about it coming to an end?' (188). Although Jacqueline notes that Central Park was likely constructed as 'a work of art constructed from nature', her temporal remove from its origins allows her to read it anew, to understand it within history as an unexplainably prescient preparation (187).

Rather than lending it the quality of clairvoyance, these moments connote material memory's openness to the unanticipated future for awarding retrospective meaning. As occurs in the examples above, the archive's meaning shifts to accommodate unexpected events, imbuing it with the aura of prophecy. And yet, it is no mistake that these unexpected events, seemingly prefigured by their respective archives—the record, TV, and Park—accompany destruction and danger: Harold's death, Homer and Langley's capture, and Nature's demise all appear encrypted into much more innocent documents. These hints of Derrida's archiviolithic force emerge most fully, however, in the ragpicker archive, where Langley's investment in historical repetition proves ruinous. The example of Central Park is particularly instructive. Jacqueline's wonders if Central Park feels unique '[b]ecause it is so organized, so planned? A geometrical construction with such rigid borders' (186). She hints that it is this stability, this immutability that permits the park to seemingly foretell the end of

nature. This same quality of rigidity, I suggest, similarly becomes responsible for the failure of Langley's two archival structures.

Like Derrida's description of the archive, Langley orientates his collection towards the future, choosing inexpensive objects whose value, he trusts, will reemerge in time. Langley's belief in recycling, in a form of historical repetition in which his outdated objects will find themselves useful once more, encodes the collection with anticipation. Along with saving money, Homer links Langley's ragpicking with 'finding value in things other people have thrown away or that may be of future use in one way or another' (37). When Langley brings home the monstrous Model T Ford, Homer diagnoses its appeal: 'he'd operated from an unthinking impulse, seeing the car on one of his collecting jaunts around town and instantly deciding he must have it while trusting that the reason he found it so valuable would eventually become clear to him' (81). The same sense of temporal delay animates the other assorted objects. Homer lists 'a worn-out chaise longue,' 'an old refrigerator,' and 'stacks of roof shingles' among the 'things accumulated over the years that we had bought or salvaged in expectation of their possible usefulness sometime in the future' (95). Objects that could seemingly be employed to bolster their crumbling abode remain ensconced in the archive awaiting a future utility that finally arrives in the form of Langley's security system.

When Langley decides to heap his miscellany into precarious pyramids and other traps, Homer lends the collection the same retrospective soothsaying that he applied to Harold's record, to his television, and to Central Park. Indeed, as I argued above, the impulse to invite the outside world into the home through collected objects seems already coded with a future where that outside world would need to be shut out. Homer notes that Langley 'began to devise from the hoarded materials of our life in this house—as if everything here had been amassed in response to a prophetic intelligence—the means of our last stand' (200-1). Yet the finality of this statement—their 'last stand'—starkly contrasts with the overwhelming sense of the future's unpredictability that colours the novel. Martin Hägglund argues, in his explanation of 'radical atheism', that Derrida's trace structure of time insists on 'radical finitude', on the threat of future destruction: Hägglund argues, via Derrida, that mutability should be valorised ahead of

constancy because only with the possibility of decay and destruction can objects of desire exist as such.[429] *Homer and Langley* reiterates this same indeterminacy of the future.[430] Homer tells a joke whose punch line depends on this very uncertainty: 'Someone dying asks if there is life after death. Yes, comes the answer, only not yours' (101). The future, here, remains open to retellings and reinterpretations implied by Doctorow's own ragpicker ethics. Indeed, as I suggested earlier, this novel functions as an insurrection into the mythic past, reconsidering the notorious case of the historical Collyer hoarders. Doctorow's novel in the real world, and Homer's diary within the world of the novel, thus answers the text's crucial question: 'How could we cope, once dead and gone, with no one available to reclaim our history?' (200). By rebelling against Langley's final arrangement, the archive thwarts the anticipated future and embraces indeterminacy and disruption.

 Homer and Langley's parable of archival destruction shares much with Derrida's theory of archive fever. The archive's concluding outburst coincides with the realisation of its promise of repetition: it is precisely when Langley discovers a second use for his hoarded objects that they rebel against his design and destroy him and his brother. The curation of the objects into a security system finally sees the archive's organisation, the fruition of Langley's trust in its future usefulness. Like Derrida does in his theoretical writings, then, *Homer and Langley* marries archival destruction with the principle of repetition: the accumulation of objects into a system leads to the detonation of the collection and, within the novel, the termination of the collector himself. In the next section, I link this process of archival accretion with the contemporary discourse of information overload, further elucidating the struggle between accumulation and systematisation in the novel. While typically in Doctorow's oeuvre the archive provides a reservoir of historical knowledge and the impetus for historical narrative, *Homer and Langley* announces a newfound concern over a surplus of historical information that

---

[429] Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-2.

[430] Adam Kelly demonstrates the usefulness of 'radical atheism' in explorations of Doctorow's novels, applying the concept in his analysis of *The Waterworks*. Adam Kelly, *American Fiction in Transition: Observer-Hero Narrative, the 1990s, and Postmodernism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 115-16.

might overpower meaning and consciousness itself. The specificities of archive fever
and its interrelation with information overload come into greater focus with Langley's
attempt to create an eternally-relevant newspaper.

Information Overload

Information overload has become a popular concept for describing the frenetic
style of data consumption structured by digital technology, but Homer and Langley's
demise also allegorically connects with this contemporary anxiety.[431] Nicolas Carr, in
The Shallows, writes of our 'cognitive load' as the information the mind is tasked with
handling at a given moment: 'When the load exceeds our mind's ability to store and
process the information [...] we're unable to retain the information or to draw
connections with the information already stored in our long-term memory. We can't
translate the new information into schemas.'[432] Nancy Van House and Elizabeth
Churchill charge digital media with fostering such an overflow of personal objects,
suggesting that the ease with which memories can be captured and stored has lead to
'curatorial overload: too much information, too difficult to organize and retrieve.'[433] Like
Carr, Van House, and Churchill, Daniel Rosenberg acknowledges the currency of
information overload as a term for explaining contemporary experiences on digital
platforms, but he also emphasises the concept's long history, its salience to the explosion
of printed information between 1550 and 1750. Rosenberg questions how such a
historically-rooted phenomenon can recur with the illusion of novelty, lending
information overload a cyclical temporality by asking whether those technologies

---

[431] While I have decided to explore the archive's systemic disarray through 'information overload', the
term 'entropy', borrowed from information theory, could also be applied. In his exploration of late-
twentieth-century American fiction, Gordon Slethaug defines entropy, within the field of information
theory, as 'an increasing level of complexity that can overwhelm and create its own kind of randomization
and systemic breakdown.' Gordon Slethaug, *Beautiful Chaos: Chaos Theory and Metachoatic in Recent
American Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. xvi.
[432] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton and
Company, 2010), p. 125.
[433] Nancy Van House and Elizabeth F. Churchill, 'Technologies of Memory: Key Issues and Critical
Perspectives', *Memory Studies*, 1.3 (2008), 295-310 (p. 297).

invented to quell overload in turn reproduce it in new forms.[434] Katherine E. Ellison provides an analysis of information overload at a similar historical moment, noting its appearance in early eighteenth-century British literature. Ellison argues that it is at this moment in history that the concept of information comes into focus, with authors imagining it almost immediately 'as a physically and psychologically threatening entity, at once material and immaterial, with the capability of overloading the human body and intellect.'[435]

The dual hazards of information formulated by Ellison both surface in *Homer and Langley*'s archive: I have already discussed the physical threat of the overload of archival objects and I now turn to the conceptual threat posed by information in the novel, specifically in the form of Langley's newspaper project.[436] Alongside his ragpicker archive, Langley hoards newspapers in the hopes of compiling from that vast archive a single edition that will never go out of date. Homer writes:

> For five cents, Langley said, the reader will have a portrait in newsprint of our life on earth. The stories will not have overly particular details as you find in ordinary daily rags, because the real news here is of the Universal Forms of which any particular detail would only be an example. The reader will always be up to date, and au courant with what is going on. He will be assured that he reads of indisputable truths of the day including that of his own impending death, which will be dutifully recorded as a number in the blank box on the last page under the heading Obituaries. (49)

To develop this technology, Langley scours newspapers for repeated events, seeking out those occurrences most telling of human behaviour. In this way, the newspaper, like the ragpicker archive, implies a belief in historical repetition that Langley makes explicit in his Theory of Replacements. This principle articulates what Homer calls 'a metaphysical

---

[434] Daniel Rosenberg, 'Early Modern Information Overload', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64.1 (2003), 1-9 (p. 9).

[435] Katherine E. Ellison, *Fatal News: Reading and Information Overload in Early Eighteenth Century Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 1.

[436] Langley's newspaper archive recalls two other similar archives in recent American fiction. In Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, Sylvie keeps stacks of newspapers in the house that bespeak a tendency toward nomadism and an indifference towards domesticity that I have already related to Doctorow's novel. Robinson, *Housekeeping* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980). In 'Cold War Over, Hot War Begins', the ninth chapter of Tom Rachman's *The Imperfectionists*, Ornella de Monterecchi slowly works chronologically through her archive of past newspaper issues in an attempt to reoccupy a time preceding a traumatic encounter with her husband. When her reading reaches the day of the attack, she finds the issue missing. The trauma has seemingly been addressed, not through an archival encounter, but through its elision and the space that gap opens up for her to reveal the violent moment to her son's ex-girlfriend, the newspaper's editor. Ornella then skims the rest of her archive to catch up to the present. Tom Rachman, *The Imperfectionists* (London: Quercus, 2011), pp. 203-20.

sort of idea of the repetition or recurrence of life events, the same things happening over and over,' wherein the same roles, categories, and structures recur to be filled with members of successive generations (48). When stated most succinctly, the Theory of Replacements evokes Derrida's combination of repetition and newness: 'There is progress while at the same time nothing changes' (14). For Homer, however, Langley's insistence on historical repetition fails to accommodate the reality of radical historical transformation. In the previous section I argued that, by attempting to determine the archive's meaning in the construction of the security system, Langley denies the uncertainty of the future and thereby ensures the objects' rebellion. Here, similarly, whenever Langley attempts to nail down an archival law, 'to fix American life finally in one edition,' events occur that confound any system he might try to instigate (49).

Langley's curatorial project betrays an attempt to control temporal flow through the development of an archival law that delimits those events that will recur over time. Homer reports:

> Langley's project consisted of counting and filing news stories according to category: invasions, wars, mass murders, auto, train, and plane wrecks, love scandals, church scandals, robberies, murders, lynchings, rapes, political misdoings with a subhead of crooked elections, police misdeeds, gangland rubouts, investment scams, strikes, tenement fires, trials civil, trials criminal, and so on. There was a separate category for natural disasters such as epidemics, earthquakes, and hurricanes. I can't remember what all the categories were. As he explained, eventually—he did not say when—he would have enough statistical evidence to narrow his findings to the kinds of events that were, by their frequency, seminal human behavior. (48)

The dateless newspaper would appear to empty the future of unpredictability, suggesting that what is to come will always be a repetition of something that has already been. Building the newspaper, however, hinges on defining an archival system into which repeated events can be slotted, and this endeavour proves impossible: Homer notes, 'it was a big organizational problem for him to cull from years of daily newspapers the signal episodes and kinds of activities that are timeless' (166). Tom LeClair suggests, 'Overload results when the rate of information [...] becomes too high for the receiver to process, to sort and integrate within his operative categories.'[437] This is precisely the organisational dilemma that confronts Langley. Like the volatile ragpicker archive, the

---

[437] Tom LeClair, *The Art of Excess: Mastery in Contemporary American Fiction* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 14.

newspaper project sees Langley attempt to produce a final archival system—the dateless
newspaper—yet the sheer quantity and variety of events explodes the universal system
he seeks to devise.

As Langley strives to unearth the rules of historical repetition, he encounters
occurrences without precedent that fit no archontic principle (49). The moon landing, for
instance, prompts Langley to add a file for 'technological achievement', and he decides
that the apotheosis of this category would be the ability to leave Earth for another planet:

> There will be none after that because we will reproduce everything that we did on earth, we'll go
> through the whole sequence all over again somewhere else, and people will read my paper as
> prophecy, and know that having gotten off one planet, they will be able to destroy another with
> confidence. (136)

Whereas Langley is able to interpolate the moon landing into his theory of historical
repetition, his vast amounts of data struggle against the categories he delimits. 'Where
do you put this event?' becomes the crucial question of the newspaper project: the
bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church that killed four girls in 1963 drives Langley to
develop a category for 'the murder of innocents,' into which he also slots the Kent State
shootings and the murders of people registering others to vote (165). Although he
considers classifying it under 'Fashion', the mass suicide at Jamestown in 1978 forces
Langley to finally create 'a pending file of one-of-a-kind headline events' (166). In
addition to Richard Nixon's '[p]residential malfeasance', Langley decides that he and
his brother also reside in this pending file: 'Unless someone comes along as remarkably
prophetic as we are, I'm obliged to ignore our existence' (167, 176).

The attempted curation of the newspaper repository into a dateless edition sees
Langley strive to apply to the headlines of the past a concrete archival system. Langley's
struggle to discern a viable strategy for organising these events seems to confound his
theory of history's repetition and the predictability of the future. Those categories that
are significant during one historical era recede in others, newly iconic types of events
demanding the institution of fresh categories and files: Langley, for instance, develops
'the murder of innocents' file to attend to the rash of those events during the civil rights
upheavals of the 1960s. The impossibility of compiling a system of meaning broadly
applicable across historical time periods nods towards Derrida's theory of the archive in

which, as Kristin Veel writes, 'The process of appraisal and selection [...] is a continual one, and not just something that takes place when the archive is founded. That which is unexpected and overloads the archival system at one stage may be integrated into it at a later point.'[438] Whereas, in Veel's account, the digital archive is particularly well-suited to a fluidity that immobilises overload, Langley's newspaper project, by attempting to deny unpredictability, ensures the eventual overload of its logical apparatus.

Yet, it is not just the denial of the future but also the sheer quantity of information that proves impossible for Langley and for the archive to handle, and in this respect *Homer and Langley* differs from Doctorow's earlier account of conceptual overload in *The Waterworks*. Published a decade and a half earlier, *The Waterworks* provides a salient comparison by focusing, as Wutz demonstrates, on the relationship between data surplus and the archive—specifically the newspaper archive. *The Waterworks* is a detective story, in which the narrator, a newspaper editor, McIlvaine and trustworthy police officer Edmund Donne seek to track down the supposedly dead millionaire August Pemberton. Its setting is the quickly expanding and industrialising nineteenth-century New York, a metropolis defined in terms of '[e]xcess in everything—pleasure, gaudy display, endless toil, and death.'[439] To become readable, McIlvaine suggests, this frenzied urban milieu requires new forms of mapping, embodied both in the newspaper and in the detective Donne:

> There was something else about Donne—he held the whole city in his mind as if it were a village. In a village, people don't need a newspaper. Newspapers arise only when things begin to happen that people cannot see and hear for themselves. Newspapers are the expedient of the municipally dissociated. But Donne had the capacious mind of a villager.[440]

Wutz argues that Donne and the novel's supervillain, Dr. Sartorius, represent 'two Lords of Information' for their ability to deal with these swarms of data. Donne's ability to transform the chaotic city into a placid and comprehensible village, his ability to keep in mind the various threads of the mystery simultaneously, emerges from adept sorting and storage and from recourse to the archive. Wutz argues: 'only that which is absolutely

---

[438] Kristin Veel, 'Information Overload and Database Aesthetics', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 307-19 (p. 310).
[439] E.L. Doctorow, *The Waterworks* (New York: Random House, 1994), p. 12.
[440] Ibid., p. 87.

essential must be committed to memory; the rest, as with Donne's arcane resources, need only be retrievable from other data banks and not block the human data bank, a.k.a. the brain.'[441]

The archives of *The Waterworks*, thus, operate as a resource to overcome information overload. Donne ensures mental acuity by filtering out unnecessary data, or information otherwise retrievable from archives, thereby freeing his mind to solve the mystery. This formulation, however, requires archives immune to overload, capable of storing and structuring the metropolis's overwhelming output of data. Unlike the Collyer's uncontrollable newspaper archive, *The Waterworks*'s equivalent proves just about manageable, despite being instituted to account for numerous papers printing increasingly voluminous amounts of information:

> Now we had three or four young men sitting down there with scissors and paste pots who were never more than a month or two behind—fifteen New York dailies a day were dropped on their tables, after all—and I could go to a file drawer fully confident of finding a folder marked *Pemberton, August*.'[442]

Whereas *The Waterworks*'s archives allow Donne to navigate the mystery's various leads and piece together the almost-supernatural narrative of Pemberton's death, reappearance, and suspended animation, *Homer and Langley* interrogates the possibility of archives that can support the society's vast fields of data. In the later novel, such broad archives refuse containment, imperilled by overload and threatening the well-being of their owners. In Doctorow's twenty-first-century reconsideration of information overload, the archive, thus, becomes infected by overload rather than a player in its defeat.

Curation, the Newspaper, and the Novel

Matthew Reynolds notes the presence of several figures and objects from Doctorow's previous novels within *Homer and Langley*'s pages. The Model T Ford, which attracts the racialised vandalism that instigates *Ragtime*'s conclusion, resurfaces in Langley's collection but here, Reynolds's notes, it 'stays half-dismantled in the

---

[441] Wutz, p. 162.
[442] Doctorow, *The Waterworks*, p. 28.

dining-room' like the archive's other static machines.[443] He continues: 'In addition to the echoes of *Ragtime*, the hippies come from the world of *The Book of Daniel*; and the gangster Vincent, and the irritating fire inspector, from that of *Billy Bathgate*.'[444] We might classify Doctorow's re-imagination of previously explored characters as another act of ragpicking that resists adding new content to a historical moment already awash in narrative. Indeed, Joseph M. Conte argues that, today, the novelist's job becomes filtering and shaping already-existing data into meaningful forms rather than contributing to what he calls the 'superabundance of information'.[445] Yet, unlike Doctorow's previous novels that seem to valorise ragpicking, *Homer and Langley* also recognises the threat of information overload within the archive of recycled material to destroy systems of meaning and to overwhelm the archivist him or herself. Reynolds, contemplating the reappearance of these iconic figures from Doctorow's oeuvre, writes: 'There is satisfaction in this elegiac review of his career, but also some self-criticism.'[446] Here, I locate that 'self-criticism' in *Homer and Langley*'s newfound wariness over wild conservation that complicates Doctorow's typical interest in the politics of ragpicking.

In asking, through the threatening archive, whether it is possible to hold on to too much of the past, Doctorow throws into contention his previous theory that, when writing about history, 'the important thing is to have as many sources of information, as many testimonies as possible—because if you don't, history turns into mythology.'[447] Langley's interminable newspaper project troubles this strategy of disseminating history, demonstrating how the apparatus of meaning can be overthrown by too much data, too many competing voices. On the one hand, Doctorow prioritises a varied diagram of the past that neither ignores any one account nor insists on weaving them into a seamless, consistent image. *Homer and Langley*, however, demonstrates that such an inclusive representational strategy introduces the threat of overload, of splintering the past into so many shards that they offer only violence to signification. This predicament, that there is

---

[443] Matthew Reynolds, p. 23.
[444] Ibid.
[445] Joseph M. Conte, *Design and Debris: A Chaotics of Postmodern American Fiction* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), pp. 205-6.
[446] Matthew Reynolds, p. 23.
[447] Doctorow, 'A Multiplicity', p. 114.

an ethical imperative to represent more historical narratives at a time of information overload, recalls Huyssen's diagnosis of contemporary culture and the technologies that structure it, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In articulating this paradox, the novel demands thoughtful curational strategies that filter the archive into intelligible but still-diverse arrangements. We shall see that, in proposing curation in the form of narrative attuned to musicality, the novel returns to a discourse of perspective that dismisses realist unification for the uncertainty of vision-in-blindness.[448] In blindness, that is to say, the novel locates an 'aletheic' vision that can acknowledge and leave space for a diversity of perspectives.

Several times the novel implies the necessity of curation to curb the threat posed by the archive as it fills Homer and Langley's home. Homer calls upon the possibility of future organisation when commenting on the G.I. ware that Langley leaves haphazardly strewn across the house: it is, he writes, 'almost as if we were a museum, though with our riches as yet uncataloged, the curation still to come' (102). The cull that might have rescued the brothers, however, never quite happens, although they are presented with several opportunities to purge their supplies. The police raid on the brothers' tea dances leaves Langley's objects in ruins, rooms cleared both of his bric-a-brac and those ornaments collected by his parents: 'the house seemed cavernous. [...] I felt as if we were no longer in the home we had lived in since our childhood, but in a new place, as yet unlived in, with its imprint on our souls still to be determined' (75-6). The police raid, thus, offers the brothers a clean slate to re-imagine the home as something other than a mausoleum. Langley does use the raid as an opportunity to organise his objects, approaching the rubble 'as salvage, inspecting everything for its value [...] and filing things according to category in cardboard boxes' (76). The Hoshiyamas, who housekeep for the brothers, similarly organise Langley's objects: they 'curate these materials, setting them out on furniture or in bookshelves, these odd jumbles of used and discarded

---

[448] *Homer and Langley* is not the first of Doctorow's novel to relate writing to the tone and the structure of music. Brian Roberts acknowledges several critics, including Laura Barrett, John J. Parks, and Walter Clemens, who argue that ragtime music's 'syncopation, structure, and improvisation' infuse *Ragtime*'s form, before linking that same musical style to the racial tensions within the text. Brian Robert, 'Blackface Minstrelsy and Jewish Identity: Fleshing Out Ragtime as the Central Metaphor in E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*', *Critique*, 45.3 (2004), 247-59 (p. 247).

children's things' (83-4). In doing so, the Hoshiyamas restore to the home to working order, though one that will, of course, be short-lived. While these curatorial enterprises do not prevent Homer and Langley from collecting themselves to death, they do demonstrate the need to marshal the archive into meaningful arrangements before it can expand beyond containment.

The novel, however, also shows curation to be a violent endeavour. As we have seen, lending the archive a final organisation meant to sustain their independence ends up destroying the brothers; and, Langley's attempt to categorise the newspaper archive can only produce blind spots that end up undoing the strength of the system. The violence of curation registers in the harsh clatter made by Langley's fast-paced typing on the typewriter he uses to compile the dateless edition: this noise, amplified by its reverberations through the floor below, sounds to the gangster, Vincent, like gunshots, 'like another attempt on [his] life' (120). In its interrogation of the newspaper as a form of curation, the novel again recalls *The Waterworks*, which envisions the numerous columns of the broadsheet as relaying the various coeval workings of the metropolitan environment when read concurrently: McIlvaine writes, 'no meaning was possible from any one column without the sense of all of them in . . . simultaneous descent . . . our life of brazen terrors spending itself across seven word-packed columns of simultaneous descent . . . offered from children's hands for a penny or two.'[449] McIlvaine even uses the model of the newspaper edition (not the singular newspaper story) when composing the novel, as he moves self-consciously between various narrative threads whose overlaps, he insists, will become intelligible in the end: 'let me assure you that finally all the columns will be joined to read across the page . . . like cuneiform carved across the stele.'[450] Wutz argues that *The Waterworks* presents the novel, rather than journalism, as the archival form most adept at processing and disseminating historical information. Whereas the novel's temporal remove enables it to 'submit data to a winnowing or filtering process separating the wheat from the chaff, or the flotsam from the jetsam', journalism, 'bound to the world of verifiable fact and to the protocols of quick

---

[449] Doctorow, *The Waterworks*, p. 115.
[450] Ibid., p. 146.

information delivery, engages with the immediate present, without the privilege of retrospection and ripening reflection.'[451] Wutz thus suggests that the novel emerges as a form of authorship suited to handling data overload, by providing the temporal distance needed for picking out relevant information.

As forms of curation, *Homer and Langley* also prefers the novel to the newspaper, literary fluidity to archival rigidity, but its rationale differs from the one Wutz decodes in *The Waterworks*. His argument too closely evokes, through its language of situational remove, the realist perspective that, as I previously argued, Doctorow circumvents by telling the Collyers' story through the blind Homer. The novel notes several cases in which newspapers fail to report accurately on events, those men seeking donations door-to-door possessing more information about the Holocaust than the papers that fail to call attention to it or mention it only 'on the back pages in dribs and drabs with no appreciation of the enormity of the horror' (93). This failure of reportage leads Langley to charge news organisations with complicity in 'our government's do-nothing policy', identifying the paper as the mouthpiece of official history rather than a voice of criticism or a multi-voiced compendium (93). The technology of the broadsheet, in this account, creates and stabilises fact even as it fails to represent it, a charge that Doctorow articulates in 'False Documents': Homer calls reporters 'a class of disgustingly fallible human beings who turned themselves into infallible print every day, compounding the historical record that stood in our house like bales of cotton' (175). Nowhere is this accusation felt more sharply than in newspaper stories about the brothers' themselves whose apocryphal details, taken seriously, transform them into neighbourhood targets and historical oddballs.

Homer and Langley, thus, situates the newspaper within what Doctorow previously termed 'the language of the regime', the voice of sanctioned history that consolidates a universe of observable fact and omits alternative accounts. The newspaper, then, stands for just the mythology that the novel is designed to contest by plucking the brothers from the dust of history to creatively reexamine and re-imagine their story. Whereas in *The Waterworks*, the newspaper is lent a panoramic viewpoint

---

[451] Wutz, p. 179.

that renders immediately visible and accessible the vast space of the metropolis, *Homer and Langley* finds in it a narrowing down of critical perspectives. Langley comments:

> I look at all these papers [...] and they may come at you from the right or the left or the muddled middle but they are inevitably of a place, they are set like stone in a location that they insist is the center of the universe. They are presumptively, arrogantly local, and at the same time nationally bullish. So that is what I will be. Collyer's One Edition for All Time will not be for Berlin, or Tokyo, or even London. I will see the universe from right here just like all these rags. (98-9)

Langley criticises conventional newspapers for their incapacity to see beyond their cultural location, and, yet, he decides to co-opt the same perspectival bias for his own dateless edition. Langley's volume, meant as a corrective for the reportage of traditional newspapers, remains complicit in the reduction of historical viewpoints, being, like them, of a singular geographical location. Similarly, Langley's satisfaction with the various mergers between newspaper companies allies the ethos of his paper with standardisation. Langley reports to Homer 'with some satisfaction' these mergers 'as early signs of the inevitable contraction of all newspapers to one ultimate edition for all time of one newspaper, namely his' (67). The timeless paper, meant to unify human experience across time, becomes just another newspaper vying for predominance. In offering up an overview of history drained of diversity, the newspaper thus stands as an impoverished form of curation according to Doctorow's own theory of historical composition, for its adherence to realism's privileging of the unified point of view.

The technology of the newspaper, with its single perspective, can be integrated into what Langley views as a gradual decline in the breadth of reporting and opposed to Homer's ability, as a blindman, to encounter the world from more than one viewpoint. Langley comments: 'When you read or listen to the radio, he said, you see the scene in your mind. It's like you with life, Homer. *Infinite perspectives, endless horizons*. But the TV screen flattens everything, it compresses the world, to say nothing of one's mind' (108, my emphasis). Langley's assessment of blindness hints that Homer's non-visual style of narration, because it forces him to invent a mental image of the surrounding world rather than rely on observation, might be more responsive than the newspaper for capturing the vagaries and nuances of the past. In this respect, *Homer and Langley* evokes Derrida's writing in *Memoirs of the Blind*, which posits that the eye's function is not to see but to weep, to be blinded by tears: 'The revelatory or apocalyptic blindness,

the blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes, would be the gaze veiled by tears. It neither sees nor does not see: it is indifferent to its blurred vision.'[452] Chloe Taylor situates *Memoirs of the Blind* within Derrida's frequent critique of vision: for Derrida, as for Emmanuel Levinas, the certainty of the gaze, its conjunction in Western philosophical discourse with knowledge, 'associates vision with an imposition of sameness on the other'.[453] This masculine vision, she argues, stamps out alterity by assuming an impossible knowledge of the other rather than approaching it sensitively and hesitantly, and in doing so it fails to really *see* at all, encountering everywhere itself and not the other in its very diversity. Against this tyranny of vision to presume and project knowledge, Derrida presents the blindman who, perpetually at risk, tentatively explores the world with outstretched arms.

This searching and responsive form of learning, which we might associate with Levin's 'aletheic' vision, contests the tendency to think of truth as singular and accessible only through observation. The tyranny of sight is evident in Homer's one moment of vision in the novel. The only event we witness through Homer's eyes, aside from the fading New York landscape, is his childhood encounter with a pornographic 'blue movie', which, he says, 'enthroned the idea that sex was something you did to them' (11). This sadistic way of thinking about sex, engendered at the only moment of vision, connects sight with the acquisition of violent knowledge. Homer's blindness, however, frees him from the illusion that his own perspective represents objectivity. Langley instructs him that 'among the philosophers there is endless debate as to whether we see the real world or only the world as it appears in our minds, which is not necessarily the same thing' (47). For Langley, the unavailability of the objective world to human eyes means that everyone is as blind as Homer. Yet, while others chain themselves to the fantasy of visual certainty, Homer remains open to new descriptions of external space. Such is the case with Julia, the brothers' maid, who calls her hair 'the

---

[452] Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1990]), p. 127.
[453] Chloë Taylor, 'Hard, Dry Eyes and Eyes that Weep: Vision and Ethics in Levinas and Derrida', *Postmodern Culture*, 16.2 (2006) <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.106/16.2taylor.html> [accessed 12 Dec 2013].

color of wheat' and eyes 'gray like a cat', while several pages later Langley describes her 'dull dark brown' tresses and darting eyes (27, 35). Homer reports these incongruous depictions, but, even though he has previously caressed her face for information, he does not weigh in on their accuracy. They, instead, shimmer as possible interpretations of reality, which Homer need not decide between.

Taylor notes that, for Derrida, the ear rather than the eye becomes the key organ for learning of other people's experiences, and *Homer and Langley* demonstrates the same aural preference.[454] For Homer it is not the loss of sight but of hearing that is most isolating, Doctorow tellingly articulating this remoteness with reference to the terse discourse of the newspaper. By spelling out words on a Braille keyboard, Langley communicates with the deaf Homer, who receives 'what news there is, briefly, as in a headline' (204). In contrast to the limited discourse of the headline, Homer, in literalising Derrida's ethical blindness, employs a style of narrative reliant on the ears and, thus, on an imaginative relationship to the outside world.

As Homer loses sensory contact with external reality, he retreats into his mind and tells his story through a narrative seeking to capture musicality through discourse. His muse and mentor, Jacqueline Roux, advises: 'words have music and if you are a musician you will write to hear them' (202). In tapping into the music of prose to communicate his life story, Homer mirrors Jacqueline's own endeavour 'to write about what cannot be seen' (185). Not only do Jacqueline's words resonate with Homer's diary, which by necessity addresses that which the blindman cannot see, her imperative to translate unseeable secrets into discourse corresponds to Doctorow's own novelistic method. In his non-fiction, Doctorow calls upon Henry James's description of the author when discussing his own novel writing:

> [James] celebrates the novelist's intuitive faculty 'to guess the unseen from the seen,' but the word *guess* may be inadequate, for it is a power, I think, generated by the very discipline to which the writer is committed. The discipline itself is empowering, so that a sentence spun from the imagination confers on the writer a degree of perception or acuity or heightened awareness that a

---

[454] I noted above that Homer pairs his compromised vision with an intensification of hearing, a capacity that allows him to register industrialisation through the changing sounds and smells of the city. Homer also frequently makes deductions based on his hearing. Of the butler, Wolf, he remarks: 'I could tell from his footsteps that he was no longer the youngest of men' (19).

sentence composed with the strictest attention to fact does not.[455]

Here, Doctorow ascribes to the rhetoric of fiction—or, the 'language of freedom'—heightened perception for its blindness to the world of fact. The absence of vision, he suggests, facilitates the imaginative work that opens the world up to a range of alternative considerations, denying supposedly factual accounts based on the veracity and the veneration of the witness. Such a formula raises invention and openness above visual certainty.

This competition between the self-certainty of observable fact and the tentative approach of blindness materialises in the personalities of Homer and Langley as well as the curational technologies they employ. While Langley's lecture to the police is granted the quality of music, his later rants prove more ruthless and one-sided. When first speaking with Jacqueline, Homer narrates: 'I was glad she wasn't trying out her ideas on Langley—he wouldn't have had the patience, he might even have been rude. But I loved hearing her talk, never mind that she had bizarre theories [...] her passionate engagement with her ideas was a revelation to me' (188). In contrast to Langley's rash initiative—recall the violent clamour he makes on the typewriter—Homer lends his own flirtatious dialogue with Jacqueline 'a rhythm' (186). Homer's willingness to listen and respond to outside voices—that is, to trust the ear rather than the eye—translates into a narrative form that refuses to insist on its own comprehensiveness, leaving room for others to complicate his story.

The same responsive quality that Derrida associates with blindness appears in Homer's diary, the certainty of his account fading as it moves closer to his moment of writing:

> I will not pretend to a precision of remembrance as I try to tell of our life in this house in these last few years. Time seems to me a drift, a shifting of sand. And my mind is shifting with it. I am wearing away. I feel I have not the leisure to tax myself for the right date, the right word. The best I can do is put things down as they occur to me and hope for the best. Which is a shame for as I've kept to this task I've developed a taste for an exact rendering of our lives, seeing and hearing with words if with nothing else. (175)

Unlike the realist text that concludes with an assertion of harmony and the archive that dooms itself to overload when it asserts an immovable final form, Homer's narrative

---

[455] Doctorow, 'Seeing', p. 158.

moves towards uncertainty. Homer does not know whether he met Jacqueline for a second time: 'At this point I can't be sure of anything—what I imagine, what I recall—but she did come back, I'm almost sure of that, or let us say she did' (201). Contacting the past through language rather than vision exonerates Homer from making his narrative cohere and claiming his own ultimate veracity. As a result, his account can remain attentive to outside voices and refuse to close off the possibility of other legitimate narratives. Homer, then, assumes what he imagines is Jacqueline's vocation as a writer: 'going around the world and making up things about it' (189).

Throughout, Homer betrays a difficulty pinning down the passing of time. For instance, he cannot recall how long his piano student lived with them (41), how long he rebelled against the police when they came to apprehend the Hoshiyamas (89), when Langley first voiced his Theory of Replacements (13), or which year of WWII Harold Robileaux joined the army (94). This temporal indeterminacy matches Homer's own compositional method and correlates with Langley's newspaper project. Following Jacqueline's advice 'to be fearless and write what comes to mind', Homer's narrative follows his own syncopated remembrance of the past, often pursuing one story into the future and then retreating to take up another angle of the narrative (51). This meandering technique, taken to its extreme at the novels conclusion, gestures towards Langley's newspaper project: 'But now I am not sure when all of this happened. Either my mind is turning in on itself and its memories are eliding, or I have finally understood the prophecy of Langley's timeless newspaper' (169). By forgoing precise chronological order, Homer realises Langley's thesis about historical recurrence, where the inevitable repetition of events renders temporal order meaningless. Homer's diary, however, achieves a balance inaccessible to the dateless newspaper for its elimination of temporal momentum. Through his occasional use of prolepsis, Homer tracks historical echoes and portrays the suspended repercussions of earlier events, while at the same time following a broadly forward movement through history. The diary, then, loosely links events both thematically and temporally, its arrangement determined not by a rigid scheme but by the wavering movements of Homer's mind. Much earlier in the novel, Homer makes this observation in a reference to seeing around his blindness: 'a clarity of organized

impressions amounted to a kind of vision' (45). The lesson of Langley's failed newspaper, achieved in Homer's diary, then, is that history discovers new resonances as it floats provisionally into new arrangements, and these orientations produce a vision of the past missed by typical modes of observation and rigid forms of curation.

Homer's method of composition, its unplanned direction, resembles Hélène Cixous's own myopic strategy of writing. Cixous advocates 'writing blindly', closing the eyes in order to transcribe a book that seems to write itself.[456] This process of tracking the too-quick movements of the present cannot occur with a preplanned trajectory: 'But no manufacturing, no mechanical fabrication. Astounding or stunning sentences come by surprise. Like divine messages: prophecies of the present.'[457] Attuning oneself to the moment through distraction produces a poetic sensibility that gestures towards the future without any definite plan, 'never reach[ing] a goal *hoped for*' though, she writes, 'we can reach a goal unhoped for.'[458] Cixous echoes *Homer and Langley* when she relates this mode of composition to music: 'One must play language quick and true like an honest musician, not leap over a single word-beat. Find the slowness inside the speed.'[459] Homer's narration jumps through time when convenient—such as when communicating his initial run-in with the gangster and, subsequently, the prostitutes he sends to the brothers' house—but it also refuses these trajectories for insistently individualistic reasons. He, for instance, refuses to track Mary-Elizabeth Riordan's story to its melancholy conclusion until much later in the novel because of the emotional distress it causes him: 'I cannot at this moment bear to speak of what became

---

[456] Cixous's essay also resonates with Doctorow's own method of writing novels. He has said of composing a novel: 'It's not calculated at all. It never has been. One of the things I had to learn as a writer was to trust the act of writing. To put myself in the position of writing to find out what I was writing. I did that with *World's Fair*, as with all of them. The inventions of the book come as discoveries. At a certain point, of course, you figure out what your premises are and what you're doing. But certainly, with the beginnings of the work, you really don't know what's going to happen.' E.L. Doctorow, 'The Art of Fiction No. 94', interviewed by George Plimpton, *Paris Review*, Vol. 101 (Winter 1986) <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2718/the-art-of-fiction-no-94-e-l-doctorow> [accessed 3 Feb 2014].

[457] Hélène Cixous, 'Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey', in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 139-52 (p. 147). Taylor links Cixous's notion of 'writing blind' to Derrida's ethical blindness.

[458] Ibid., p. 145

[459] Ibid., p. 144

of Mary Elizabeth Riordan' (43). After narrating Mary Elizabeth's departure, Homer transitions to an earlier stage in his life with the comment, 'But memories are not temporally driven, they detach themselves from time' (43). Just as he announces towards the novel's conclusion, here Homer notes that over time memories slip into isolated events whose chronological order becomes increasingly murky.

The musical ear with which Jacqueline tells Homer to write his diary allows it to conquer overload, to mull over a large archive of events in a relatively abbreviated narrative. Tom LeClair has argued that the encyclopaedic scale of several post-1970 American novels is integral to their project of representing and mastering information overload while foisting that excess of data upon their readers.[460] Unlike those novels, *Homer and Langley* demonstrates a strategy to curtail overload through the canny imagination of reality into a discourse sensitive to musicality. Reynolds comments that writing through the avatar of Homer allows Doctorow 'to write more poetically, relying on tone and rhythm, and taking history as a series of images to be contemplated rather than scenarios with which to become involved.'[461] But, this melodic writing, within the logic of the novel, belongs to Homer, his musical talents creating a document with rhythmic prose and syncopated temporality. If the diary can be seen as one attempt to curate Langley's overloaded collection, its musical intonation permits the book to transmit a vast quantity of data in a small volume. Sarah Churchwell observes: 'The cleverness of Doctorow's tactic is to let his story contract, rather than expand'.[462] Indeed, Homer compares his diary to Langley's newspaper project for 'its overreaching', for the vast terrain it covers but clearly not for its immense size (201). Through its carefully articulated and attenuated form, the music of the discourse and its movements back and forth across time, Homer's diary conveys a curational strategy that condenses the vast archive into a readable form while refusing to fantasise about its ultimate veracity, canonicity, and harmony. These strategies grant the diary a kind of blind vision, capable

---

[460] LeClair, pp. 14-5.
[461] Matthew Reynolds, p. 23.
[462] Sarah Churchwell, 'Homer and Langley by EL Doctorow', *Observer*, 24 January 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/24/homer-langley-doctorow-book-review> [accessed 28 April 2014].

of imagining various perspectives and, thereby, dodging both the ideological failures of realist agreement and the violence of information overload.

Ghosts and Computers

Doctorow's most recent novel, *Andrew's Brain*, overlaps with *Homer and Langley's* treatment of the master archive and its promotion of sympathetic blindness. The narrator Andrew envisions a future computer designed with the developing insights of cognitive science, with 'the capacity to record and store the acts and thoughts and feelings of every living person on earth once around per millisecond of time.'[463] This data coupled with advances in genetic research, Andrew suggests, would, like Langley's newspaper, master time and in doing so eviscerate the notion of temporality. After revealing the tragic story of the deaths of his first daughter and his second wife, Andrew begins to feel psychically tethered to those around him and even to people now dead. Melancholy has transformed him into that computer, capable of understanding and sympathising with others outside of the bounds of time. Andrew wonders, 'Perhaps I'm carrying in my brain matter the neuronal record of previous ages.'[464]

Like Homer's blindness, we might associate Andrew's depression with Derrida's blindness-in-tears, permitting a communal vision and producing a document whose ambiguous accuracy facilitates voicing a range of personal perspectives: seeing with Doctorow's 'multiplicity of witness'. Indeed, throughout *Andrew's Brain*, the reader remains uncertain of Andrew's present whereabouts and to whom he is speaking, and his claims—like being George W. Bush's university roommate and one-time visitor to the Bush family's Texas homestead—begin to seem implausible. Projecting an uncertain veracity, however, is part of the novel's point. Andrew, in a climactic speech, chastises Bush and his advisors for believing in their own infallibility and access to truth. Applying the name 'Pretenders' to the government administration, Andrew renames himself a Holy Fool, who 'mourns for his country', grieving the unbelievable historical

---

[463] Doctorow, *Andrew's*, p. 44.
[464] Ibid., p. 196.

situation that surrounds him.[465] In place of a computer that could hold the entire world and its history, *Andrew's Brain* locates the melancholic who, ethically unwilling to pretend that he or she knows the absolute truth, can tentatively access and imagine the lives and the perspective of others.

Homer and Langley's answer to the master archive—here, the newspaper as opposed to the computer—is similarly a novelistic enterprise whose very unwillingness to assume its own reliability and to offer up a unified conclusion allows it to speak from a multitude of perspectives. Comparing *Homer and Langley* with *Andrew's Brain*, however, permits us to place the capabilities of blind writing in competition not just with the newspaper but with the computer. Doctorow, indeed, suggests the salience between Langley's massive archive and digital memory when, in an interview, he called the brothers 'aggregators. Sort of like Google.'[466] With this in mind, the eternal newspaper and the novel become two means of addressing the flow of information accessible in the digital moment. This chapter has suggested that, in an era characterised by an unsortable surplus of data, the archive as a strict structure of memory loses its potency to make sense of the past. As Langley strives to sort his various editions into a complete summary document, his historical categories fold into each other, collapsing like the walls of objects that eventually crush him. Out of the rubble of this catastrophe emerges Homer's diary as a palliative to this information overload, dexterously threading through time, situating historical events in a personally meaningful and compelling order. Homer's indeterminate diary, thus, stands as a form of curation suited to combating the surfeit of archival memories in a digital age.

In the previous chapter, I confronted Baudrillard's theory of the collection as a space of self-mastery with Siri Hustvedt's novel *What I Loved*. Hustvedt, I argued, problematised Baudrillard's thinking by looking at the creative play that can take place within an object space infused with one's subjectivity. *Homer and Langley*, I have argued, similarly disputes that the personal archive rests indelibly under the thumb of the

---

[465] Ibid., p. 191.
[466] Sarah Crown, 'EL Doctorow: "I don't have a style, but the books do"', *Guardian*, 23 January 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/23/el-doctorow-homer-and-lamgley> [accessed 21 Jan 2013].

collector. Here, the archive overruns the house, kills the brothers, and thwarts conceptual understanding. The self-archive poses the opportunity for thinking through one's past and for writing a personal and political history, which Homer achieves in his diary, but, at the same time, it threatens to suffocate the self with informational and material stuff. This novel, then, turns its insights on nineteenth-century realism, its monolithic method of narration and its emphasis on mass ornamentation, into a lesson for digital-age self-preservation. In *Mechanisms*, Matthew Kirschenbaum argues that, while the technological apparatuses of conservation should not be ignored, in the digital age 'effective preservation must rest in large measure on the cultivation of new social practices to attend our new media.'[467] Doctorow's analysis of two means of archival curation considers how the immense storage capacities of technological devices might best be put to personal use. After realism, in this next era of self-display, Doctorow promotes not the archive, with its charted boarders and logical categories, but a narrative that twists through time; not an archive that demands to be taken as literal truth and that coheres a landscape of information, but a blind narrative that is suggestive but refuses to pretend to master reality.

The continued relevance of the Collyer brothers' myth to contemporary self-curation online or off is suggested by their ghostly appearance at the novel's conclusion: 'we had metamorphosed, we were the ghosts who haunted the house we had once lived in' (198). Likewise, of his fading memories, Homer narrates: 'They become more and more ghostly' (207). Indeed, while we know how the brothers perished from real-life newspaper reports, within the novel neither can die with any certainty. Homer hears the crash that we know has crushed his brother but cannot report that outcome nor, as the storyteller, can he narrate his own death. The brothers' turn towards the ghostly indicates not only their haunting of the present. Derrida argues that, both material and immaterial, their eyes hidden behind a visor, ghosts cannot be seen and, in particular, cannot be encountered by the scholar who believes 'in the opposition between what is present and

---

[467] Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008), p. 21.

what is not, for example in the form of objectivity.'[468] Derrida insists that listening to ghosts, considering the present moment as it relates to the past and to the future, is necessary for a just society, but that to do so requires overcoming a bias towards visual knowledge.[469] Doctorow, by employing a blind narrator who cannot offer a distanced perspective on the historical archive and whose own certainty wavers, demonstrates an ethical means of attending to ghosts, of allowing them to speak even today against and within an overwhelming mass of historical data.

---

[468] Taylor also makes this connection between Derrida's general denigration of visual knowledge and the scholar's inability to speak to the ghost that he posits in *Specters of Marx*. See Derrida, *Specters*, p. 11.

[469] Derrida, *Specters*, p. xix.

**Archive 2.0: Blank Spaces and Database Surveillance
in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad***

Writing in *The Guardian*, the journalist Laura Miller observed that, as of 2011, few mainstream American authors had attempted to novelise the cultural and personal effects of the Internet, despite its infiltration into the most fundamental domains of everyday life.[470] While in the last chapter I argued that E.L. Doctorow implicitly contemplates information overload in the historical novel *Homer and Langley*, in this chapter I approach a text that, as Miller notes, overtly meditates on the parameters of the digital age: Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Although Miller focused exclusively on *Goon Squad*'s final, futuristic chapter, a concern with the digital revolution and its cultural, political, and personal implications runs through much of Egan's recent fiction and journalism. *Goon Squad* is composed of a series of interrelated stories, featuring a cast of connected characters, often involved in the music industry. Its chapters move peripatetically through time, beginning in the mid-2000s, reaching as far back as the 1970s, and concluding with two futuristic chapters set in the 2020s. While digital technology is implicated in almost all of the chapters, it is in these two final stories that *Goon Squad* fully reveals itself as what N. Katherine Hayles calls an '*information narrative*', a text that 'show[s], in exaggerated form' the paradigm shift that attends the digital revolution.[471] It is just this quality of the final chapter, 'Pure Language', that I mobilise, using its satirical and dystopic embellishments to anchor my analysis and to throw into relief the digital concerns of the earlier chapters.

In Egan's work, new technologies are frequently twinned with a budding archival impulse. In *Look at Me*, for instance, the model Charlotte Swenson's initial interaction with the Internet occurs through a proto-social network website on which she is paid to archive her experiences.[472] The archival heart of technology is rendered more subtly in *Goon Squad*. In its chronologically earliest chapter, 'Safari', Mindy remarks on the sense of privacy created by a portable cassette player, 'the way it transforms her

---

[470] Laura Miller, 'How novels came to terms with the internet', *Guardian*, 15 Jan 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/15/novels-internet-laura-miller> [accessed 18 Apr 2012].
[471] Hayles, *How*, p. 35.
[472] Jennifer Egan, *Look at Me* (London: Corsair, 2001).

surroundings into a golden montage, as if she were looking back on this lark in Africa with Lou from some distant future.'[473] Mindy's language evokes the temporality of Derrida's archive fever, defined by Mark Currie as 'a present lived as if it were the object of a future memory'.[474] By the time we reach the final chapter, where handheld, smart phone-like 'T' devices predominate, archive fever is felt even outside the mediation of technology. As Alex watches Scotty's acoustic concert, he feels 'what was happening around him as if it had already happened and he were looking back' (344). Whereas the Walkman generated a temporary sense of archive fever, Alex experiences this effect without technological intervention. The archival ethos so saturates Alex's perception of reality, his surrounding space replete with people recording the concert on their handsets, that he experiences the event as already past and always documented. The trajectory of *Goon Squad*, from the 1970s to the 2020s, is thus, on one hand, an account of the spread of both new technologies and an archival mode of perception. Yet, I argue that, as the social milieu becomes increasingly archival and transitions to digital platforms, the archive is co-opted by surveillance institutions and repurposed into the cultural system of subjection.

Goon Squad's concern with digital surveillance, with who is given access to the archive and authority to interpret it, likewise informs Allegra Goodman's *The Cookbook Collector*. As a prototypical collector of expensive and rare artefacts, George, we are informed, 'told his life history with objects' such that, in his future wife Jess's estimation, he becomes a museum object himself, 'a fly caught in amber'.[475] The archive, here, is imbued with its owner's biography, including his or her secrets. When Jess believes she has unearthed a scandalous affair by deciphering the titular cookbook collection, George condemns her revelation: why go delving into personal archives for dead mysteries and family controversies that will only upset the living? Like Jonathan, whose betrayal of his fiancée, Emily, comes to light at his funeral, in death the cookbooks' previous owner abdicates control over both the archive and the undisclosed

---

[473] Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (London: Corsair, 2010), p. 68. Further page references will appear within the text.

[474] Currie, *About*, p. 11.

[475] Allegra Goodman, *The Cookbook Collector* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010), p. 26, 31.

past it might hide. While portraying the initial optimism around new technologies—to promote ecological sustainability by replacing paper—archivist George refuses to move onto the digital platform, because '[h]e feared government control of information and identity'.[476] Emily's start-up, whose system of data storage is inspired by a collection of take-out menus, acknowledges George's concern. Without her consent, her employees pursue data fingerprinting software, an idea stolen by Jonathan and, after his death, marketed to a fearful post-9/11 American government. That the Internet, despite Emily's remonstration, is becoming inextricably bound up with surveillance lends a sinister edge to her future project: social networking. The collection always contains traces of its owner, secrets that can be decoded, correctly or incorrectly, after his or her death. Through data mining and fingerprinting people lose control over their information, government and corporate groups surreptitiously collecting it and analysing it with uncertain accuracy and uncertain repercussions in the real world.

Goon Squad pursues this evaluation of digital collecting as a mechanism of surveillance, critiquing the cultural belief in data as the defining element of the self and questioning how this form of subjection might be resisted. This theme occupies the fulcrum of the novel's final chapter, 'Pure Language', set in a future New York whose population is in thrall to its T handsets. Here, Alex reluctantly agrees to organise a 'blind team', an illicit advertising scheme, for record producer Bennie. With the help of Bennie's assistant, Lulu, Alex betrays his previous morals to furtively compile a group of people whom Bennie will pay to publicly intimate enthusiasm for Scotty's upcoming concert. Alex cites the inclusion of his information 'in the databases of multinationals' as his reason for abandoning an ethical compass that was once integral to his sense of self (324). Paradoxically, Alex links the stark inversion of his ethical bearings to a technology seemingly structured to preserve: the archival database. Rather than stabilising his identity, however, the database provokes a subjective renovation, a narrative logic that, I will show, emerges in Egan's earlier novel *Look at Me*. I thereby demonstrate in this chapter the interweaving systems of, on the one hand, the staccato

---

[476] Ibid., p. 16.

rhythms of postmodern temporality and, on the other, the deep memory of digital technologies.

I return frequently to Alex's submission to the database, which provides the central terminology of my argument. The database is a digital derivative of the physical archive, an evolution of its material ancestors that, Meredith McGill states, 'imitat[es] and incorporat[es]' the archive as it supersedes it.[477] This chapter considers the database both as a textual form and, what Foucault calls, a 'technology of the self.'[478] Lev Manovich defines the database as a non-sequential collection that eschews the thematic or formal development of a story, casting it as the key 'symbolic form' of the computer era and the antagonist of narrative.[479] Manovich's influential book has provoked an analysis of the database structures of texts from several different artistic media, including film,[480] fine art,[481] and electronic literature.[482] Implicitly structured around the possibility of its chapters being reshuffled, *Goon Squad*, I argue, mimes the database's flexibility under the constraints of the codex book. This malleability, in turn, creates an aesthetic effect emphasising that the characters' futures have already been decided, a loss of agency to the novel-as-database that mirrors the database surveillance that forms the second component of my analysis. Hayles notes the increasing association of information with discipline: 'First the dream of information is figured as an escape, but the more powerfully it exerts its presence as a viable place in which to live, the more it appears not as an escape at all but rather as an arena in which the dynamics of

---

[477] McGill describes their relationship as a case of 'remediation', a term she borrows from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. Meredith L. McGill, 'Remediating Whitman', *PMLA,* 122.5 (2007), 1592-1596 (p. 1593).

[478] Foucault, *Technologies*, p. 19.

[479] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 219.

[480] Marsha Kinder investigates filmic database narratives 'whose structure exposes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and are crucial to language'. She, however, argues against Manovich's contrast between database and narrative. Kinder, 'Designing a Database Cinema', in *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*, ed. by Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 346-53 (p. 349).

[481] Victoria Vesna, 'Databases Are Us', *AI & Society*, 14 (2000), 157-175.

[482] I look at Norman M. Klein's theories of the database computer novel in-depth later in the chapter. Rosamund Davies, however, similarly proposes the significance of gaps to computerised database narrative, as well as a shift to the author as game architect and the reader to archival curator. Davies, 'Narrating the Archive and Archiving Narrative: The Electronic Book and the Logic of the Index', *International Journal of the Book*, 5.3 (2008), 45-56 (p. 53-4).

domination and control can be played out in new ways.'[483] As characters are increasingly defined by their information, detailed in databases, they in turn feel estranged from themselves, possessed by institutions who own their details. Egan, I suggest, positions the database as the digital era's new mode of surveillance, social control, and subjective conditioning. The database, then, in addition to being a 'technology of the self', is a 'technolog[y] of power,' which, for Foucault, 'determine[s] the conduct of individuals and submit[s] them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject.'[484]

In the final section, I look back to the novel's treatment of the material collection, which appears to resolve the problems of the digital and the database. Whereas the database appears to unlock the self through its definite language, the material collection hides it in an inscrutable and personal patois that resists interpretation by outsiders. Whereas the database renders information inaccessible and veils the ways institutions are applying it, the material collection decomposes along with the symbolism it contains. Ultimately, I contend that *Goon Squad* employs a sustained aesthetic of gathering and dispersal, of clarity and muddiness, of coherence and illegibility. Consistently it warns against ascribing to the ideology of the digital screen, the belief in the purity of its aesthetic and its language, promoting instead the necessity of gaps, of indeterminacy, and of silence found in recourse to the analogue, material world.

Digital Subjects

Egan's 2006 novel *The Keep* provides an instructive gateway into her vision of digital subjectivity. Its meta-narrative centres on Ray, who enrols in a writing course while in prison. The nonfiction account that he writes while incarcerated, which focuses on Danny's trip to Europe to help his cousin Howie renovate a castle, meditates at length on the digital condition. Danny is obsessed with being 'wired in', and this reliance on connectivity is explained by his brain's refusal 'to stay locked up inside the echo chamber of his head—it spilled out, it overflowed and poured across the world until it

---

[483] N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 65.
[484] Foucault, *Technologies*, p. 19, 18.

was touching a thousand people who had nothing to do with him.'[485] Danny's capacity to adapt, to read others' desires and to mould himself according to them makes him an ideal second-in-command. It is in reference to this quality that Danny is rendered in technological terms: 'he had radar for how people wanted to be talked to and could switch from one person's way to another person's way without thinking. But right now Danny's radar was down, he was out of range, or maybe he just needed to be reset and programmed in this new place, like his satellite dish.'[486]

Like Donna Haraway's cyborg, the site of subjective and technological intermingling that I described in this dissertation's Introduction, Danny believes he can sense WiFi on his skin and likens his memory to that of a computer. For Danny, digital technologies and their metaphors produce and sustain his sense of himself as decentred and porous. Danny's subjective multiplicity—he possesses more online identities than online friends—affiliates him with the posthuman, linking digital technology with the production of a subject whose boundaries seem indistinct.[487] Raymond Barglow suggests that, unlike other technologies that shore up a sense of personal mastery over external space, the computer encourages users to re-inhabit a time before the solidification of identity. Computers, Barglow writes, are 'internal objects harking back to a time in children's lives prior to personal differentiation and identity.'[488] Representative of this amorphous digital subjectivity, Danny's sense of his own multiplicity carries with it certain relationships to time and space.

Danny struggles throughout the novel to compute historical time, to understand the past through a schema of narrative development. He expresses 'trouble even believing that one chain of days connected his first day in New York to this day, right now—that so many years could have passed in such a thin stream, day by day by day.'[489] This temporal experience can be linked to Danny's attempt to mould his memory after that of a computer, 'pictur[ing] himself deleting things, disconnecting them from his

---

[485] Jennifer Egan, *The Keep* (London: Corsair, 2006), p. 11

[486] Ibid., p. 23.

[487] Ibid., p. 11.

[488] Raymond Barglow, *The Crisis of the Self in the Age of Information: Computers, Dolphins, and Dreams* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.

[489] Egan, *Keep*, p. 84.

brain so they disappeared the way digital stuff disappears—without a memory.'[490]
Although Danny can still sense the shadows of memories after 'deleting' them, he
nevertheless feels dissociated from the past. He, for instance, struggles to connect his
memory of a weak, pale, and portly cousin, Howie, with the powerful, blonde, and fit
man he grows into, identifying in this dissonance just 'a distant connection.'[491] In
Danny's experience, his own history refuses to take the form of a narrative, to betray a
trajectory of maturity, instead detaching into moments without proper coherence. Within
the present moment, however, Danny appears prone to multitask across a variety of
settings concurrently. For Danny, in addition to fracturing temporal development, digital
technologies have naturalised a new sense of homeliness, defined not by emersion in one
place but by being divided across multiple sites simultaneously: 'Being at home meant
being in an even mix of locations'.[492] *Goon Squad*, as I show in the next two sections,
explores Danny's diachronic and synchronic fragmentation, which I later connect to
postmodern and digital discourses.

Liquid Postmodern Time

     Goon Squad features a cast of characters straining to make a story out of their
lives and the lives they see around them, but their attempts to narrativise their
biographies are constantly frustrated. Sasha pictures her therapist as a collaborator with
whom she is 'writing a story of redemption, of fresh beginnings and second chances',
the story of her recovery (9). However, when she allows Alex to trespass on her
collection of stolen goods, emblematic of her kleptomania, she is unsure whether this is
a sign of recuperation or regression—'toward the happy ending, or away from it?' (17).
Rarely can Egan's characters predict, nor can they understand, the direction their lives
take, narratives exploding into shards that resist cohesion. *Goon Squad* describes its
subjects in terms of multiplicity and incoherence, a position explicitly articulated by
Alex early in the novel: 'you have no fucking idea what people are really like. They're

---

[490] Ibid., p. 104.
[491] Ibid., p. 20.
[492] Ibid., p. 68.

not even two-faced—they're, like, multiple personalities' (13). The most detailed deconstruction of the subject is sketched by Jules Jones, who imagines both the actress Kitty Jackson and her waiter through the metaphor of a sandwich: the bottom bread represents continuity with the past, the waiter's typical languor or Kitty's pre-fame suburban adolescent behaviour; the middle layer is the shock experience of the present—for the waiter, an unexpected run-in with the famous actress, and for Kitty the unprecedented experience of her recent stardom; in this model, the upmost piece of bread indicates the 'attempt to contain and conceal this alien middle layer with some mode of behavior that at least approximates the bottom layer [...] that is [the] norm', masking surprise 'with a simulation of [the] normal, or former, self' (178-9). In short, the present action denotes the struggle to maintain a stable subjectivity, constant through time, in the face of unexpected and turbulent events.

Goon Squad frequently bears witness to characters caught in the predicament of Jules's sandwich model, attempting to keep hold of an engrained self constantly threatened by unpredictable shifts. After her public downfall, Kitty attempts to reenact her previous innocence in Dolly's public relations scheme, designed to redeem the dictator, B. Dolly notes, however, upon their reunion, 'She wasn't Kitty Jackson anymore', her youthful face now blemished by a 'sardonic expression' (156). While Kitty mimes her previous charm temporarily, these traces of her adolescent purity ultimately fail to mask the turn in her personality. Kitty's evolution refuses to permit her to re-inhabit a previous inexperience, and she insults the general in a move confirmed by her 'fervid, self-annihilating eyes' (169). Twice the text announces that the 'goon' of its title is time itself, estranging characters from themselves, or the bottom-bun notion of themselves that feels authentic. This precariousness of history is most pointedly articulated by Jules who, after serving time in prison, remarks: 'I go away for a few years and the whole fucking world is upside down' (130). Characters who identify a personal change cannot assimilate it into a cause-and-effect trajectory. When Scotty revisits his childhood friend, Bennie, he demands 'to know what happened between A and B. [...] *A* is when we were both in the band, chasing the same girl. *B* is now' (106). Echoing Scotty's vocabulary, ageing and ailing musician Bosco titles his upcoming

release *A to B*, because 'that's the question I want to hit straight on: how did I go from being a rock star to being a fat fuck no one cares about?' (134). Bosco even fails to plan his own death in a suicide concert tour, a future chapter revealing that he 'ends up recovering and owning a dairy farm' (265). Like the past, which cannot be preserved, the future withholds its design, thwarting attempts to fuse life into a comprehensive narrative.

The tension between the pull of unnoticed change and the desire to nourish an anchored self validated by time, the conflict expressed in Jules's sandwich model, frequently erupts in nostalgia for a lost openness to instability. After hearing about Bosco's planned suicide tour, Steph recalls her early years with husband Bennie as a reckless time of rampant drug use and carefree sex suffused with possibility, a period of life when 'none of it was serious' (139). Yet, in the present moment, she worries that 'everything is ending' (138). Steph's language echoes Zygmunt Bauman's writing on Liquid Modernity, today's era of precariousness where change happens 'faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines.'[493] Bauman envisions 'liquid life' as 'the story of successive *endings*', where success is measured by the 'inconspicuousness of the graves that mark its progress'.[494] For Bauman, to thrive in a time of ceaseless and sudden change means to remain flexible, to deflate radical change into smooth transition. *Goon Squad*'s characters eulogise not only their lost selves but also their former receptivity to the future, to unplanned transformation. In ageing they identify the foreclosure of transience, the loss of the very substance required to prosper in Liquid Modernity. For Steph, for instance, the seeming imminence of Bosco's death is contrasted to her youth when, 'If they didn't like the result, they could go back and start again' (139). With maturity, however, Steph has compromised her ability to comfortably leave the future uncharted.

The dream of turning back time emerges specifically when characters imagine encountering in the present a previous version of themselves or their friends. Jocelyn, like Steph, speaks of the demise of her youthful openness to the possibilities of the

---

[493] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 1.
[494] Ibid., p. 3. Emphasis in original.

future. Whereas her initial encounter with Lou as a hitchhiker 'could be the beginning of an exciting story, a story where anything might happen', it now sounds to her like 'a punch line' (91). When Jocelyn visits Lou, now aged and ill, she cannot reconcile his feeble body with the aura of youth and beauty that once surrounded him. She imagines this historical Lou, for her the 'real Lou', still alive and lounging by the pool, ready to attack the old man who has stolen his place: 'the real Lou and this old Lou will have a fight' (92). Jocelyn, dividing Lou into his youth-obsessed past and his decrepit present, indicates the immensity and the finality of a change explained by Lou's own comment, 'I got old' (93). It is the previous Lou, however, the one lost to the past, that Jocelyn is interested in accessing. She achieves contact with the lost Lou by performing precisely the violent task she imagined him performing on his aged doppelganger. After tackling the feeble Lou into the pool, she at last makes contact with the Lou of her memories: 'I can see him', she narrates, '[t]he old smile, back again' (95). But, as they climb out of the water, her connection to the past is endangered by the physical reality of Lou's age and illness. Jocelyn at once feels that his hand is 'not the same hand as before; it is bulbous and dry and heavy', and yet she narrates, 'We're there, the three of us, like before. We're back to the beginning' (95). The precariousness of this momentary connection, Jocelyn's struggle to contact the past and retain some temporal longevity, surfaces again in the final words of the chapter, Lou pleading for '[a]nother minute [...] One more. Like this' (96).

In 'Pure Language', Alex similarly imagines an avatar, this time of himself, left behind in Sasha's apartment following their Internet date, an episode that comprises *Goon Squad*'s first chapter. The disjunction between his current, final-chapter subject position, willing to compromise his morals for money, and this idealistic past self is expressed in Alex's inability to recall details from his encounter with Sasha. Indeed, in the first chapter, Sasha anticipates his struggle, predicting that she would become 'a glint in the hazy memories that Alex would struggle to organize a year or two from now' (14). When Bennie reveals that Sasha had been a thief, providing information vital to solving their date's central mystery, Alex cannot reconstruct that episode: 'A connection was trying to form in Alex's mind, but he couldn't complete it' (346). Alex appears to have

conflated the episode of the lost wallet, which Sasha had stolen and returned unbeknownst to him, and her theft of a scrap of paper from his own wallet: he remembers 'something about a *wallet*, of all things, but had it been lost? Found? Stolen? The girl's wallet, or his own?' (318). As Alex and Bennie walk by Sasha's old apartment, he begins to remember its particulars, including the bathtub in the kitchen that had been so evocative during their date. As these details resurface, Alex bifurcates, his present state contrasted with his previously open prospects: he 'imagined walking into her apartment and finding himself still there—his young self, full of schemes and high standards, with nothing decided yet' (348). Alex occupies a position akin to Jocelyn and Steph, sensing that he has sacrificed a youthful ability to live with the future's indeterminacy and longing to return to that state. Alex, however, dismisses this fantasy as a 'crazy pantomime', his present condition incompatible with that previous self, time having rendered them irreconcilable (348).

In the language of Jules's model of the subject, the ghostly traces of Lou and Alex correspond to the sandwich's bottom bun, their old, historical selves that are felt to be genuine. When rendered discretely, however, these visions emerge as strangers, distinct and even antithetical to the present-day Lou and Alex, the sandwich dissembled into scraps. Bennie attributes Alex's self-estrangement to the same temporal goon that withered Lou: 'You grew up,' he explains (348). While in Jules's model, people are meant to approximate their historical manners, Alex finds that, almost unaware, he has been driven so far from that previous life that he can no longer mimic its behaviours. Not just failures of memory, these moments articulate the fracturing of time into pieces that withhold narrative coherence. Yet, it is when they register the vagaries of their pasts that these characters lose the ability to embrace the future's inscrutability, the characteristic that Bauman deems necessary to thrive in Liquid Life. This temporal fracturing repeats in the novel's structure, but before engaging with these formal qualities, I first turn to the novel's treatment of intimacy and home as another site of subjective fragmentation in the digital space of *Goon Squad*'s final, futuristic chapter.

Space and Intimacy in a Digitised Culture

The digital turn, in Egan's work, brings with it a reorganisation of space, levelling the home in favour of a connectivity that overrides proximity. Bauman's account of Liquid Modernity identifies a 'new irrelevance of space', which is constitutive of the scattered temporality I discussed in the previous section.[495] For Bauman, with the 'no time' of exchanges on digital platforms, 'the difference between "far away" and "down here" is cancelled.'[496] By vexing the significance of the nearby, digital technology redefines the meanings of home and intimacy. In the ubiquitous term 'connectedness', Bauman identifies an attempt to safely mediate between 'loneliness and commitment, the scourge of exclusion and the iron grip of bonds too tight'.[497] Digital technology facilitates the renegotiation of social bonds, complicating the stability of presence and absence and producing a 'blurring of intimacy and solitude', as Sherry Turkle writes in her aptly titled *Alone Together*.[498] While Turkle worries that the meaning of intimacy has been recast by flimsy digital connections, Paul Virilio identifies a concurrent reaction against the nearby: he writes, 'getting closer to the "distant" takes you away proportionally from the "near" (and dear)—the friend, the relative, the neighbour—thus making strangers, if not actual enemies, of all who are close at hand'.[499] These theorists, thus, implicate technology in the eradication of a traditional sense of home based on proximity, replaced instead by relationships mediated by the digital screen.

In this environment of fast-paced information exchange, Anthony Elliott and John Urry suggest, the self is structured around portable technologies—or 'miniaturized mobilities'—that store and make accessible materials charged with affect.[500] *Goon Squad* tracks the development of miniaturized mobilities, its chronologically earliest 'Africa' chapter featuring the portable music player and its futuristic final chapter witnessing the

---

[495] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 117.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 34.
[498] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p. 12.
[499] Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. by Julie Rose (London and New York: Verso, 2008 [1997]), p. 20.
[500] Anthony Elliott and John Urry, *Mobile Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 21.

omnipresence of handheld T devices. Via the work of Paul du Gay *et al*, Elliott and Urry correlate the Walkman with making commonplace the experience of 'being in two different places at once,' Danny's definition of home.[501] More specifically, du Gay *et al* accuse the Walkman of unsettling the public/private division by allowing the previously domestic pleasure of private music listening to be taken into public, headphones creating a transportable but permeable isolation.[502] This is precisely the uncanny privacy that Mindy attributes to the music player, in a scene I have already related to the technological basis for archive fever in the text. In her feeling of public isolation while listening to the music player, we find early rumblings of the demise of domesticity and the emergence of digitised familiarity that reach their fullest pitch in 'Pure Language'.

In this future, Alex's tiny apartment with his wife, Rebecca, and their child is unsellable, because the neighbouring high-rise, still in construction, threatens to 'seal off their air and light', to leave the home 'dark and airless' (321, 324). As Alex messages to Lulu in T-speak, they are '*stuk*' (335). The ever-presence of stringent war measures security, as well as hints of environment crisis, further stresses the austerity of this future space. Not only is Alex's New York threatened by rising tides, but the text's other future chapter is set in the inhospitable desert, where solar panels are 'mending the Earth' (299). As the stability of the home-space diminishes, intimacy moves onto the handheld device. When Alex plans to reveal to his wife the unsavoury details of his job with Bennie, his impulse is to 'T Rebecca' even though she is walking alongside him. He 'even found himself mentally composing the message: *Nu job in th wrks. big $ pos. pls kEp opn mind*' (333). The crawl screen becomes a confessional space. It is through her T device, for instance, that Lulu reveals that her father '*Dyd b4 I ws brn*' (329). When Alex vocally expresses sympathy, 'his voice seemed too loud—a course intrusion', and he reverts to T-messaging, '*Sad*' (330). T communication becomes the principle mode of personal revelation, the location where relationships are brokered, because, in Lulu's words, the devices are 'pure—no philosophy, no metaphors, no judgments' (329).

---

[501] Ibid., p. 29.
[502] Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, and others, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 113.

The reorganisation of relationships and of space in the digital age is specifically connected to a restructuring of sight. When Alex and Rebecca are separated at the concert, he overcomes his desire to be with her through his handheld T. After his T locates Rebecca's approximate position, its zoom function allows Alex to spot her in the throng; after sending her a message, he watches as she receives it on his magnified screen (345). Here the T increases the domain of the visible, permitting Alex voyeuristically to overcome his pangs of longing. The digital's swelling of the visible, enabled by the instantaneity of transmission across long distances, is for Virilio a matter of horizon: the decisiveness of 'the *line* of the visible horizon'—its border on the visible—stabilises the notion of reality.[503] The newfound impotence of the horizon to divide the visible from the hidden, short-circuited by the faculties of the digital screen, 'caus[es] confusion of near and far, of inside and outside, disorders in common perception that will gravely affect the way we think.'[504] *Goon Squad* literalises the demise of the horizon in its future New York, a 'water wall', built to combat rising tides, concealing the sunset and obscuring the horizon from view (331).

The implications of Virilio's theory of the demise of the horizon are present in *Goon Squad* most immediately in the character of Lulu. While earlier we witness a nine-year-old Lulu 'doing homework on her laptop and IMing her friends' (154), by the final chapter she has matured into 'a living embodiment of the new "handset employee": paperless, deskless, commuteless, and theoretically omnipresent' (325). Emphasised in this description is the erosion of space: Lulu's authority can be asserted from anywhere, to anywhere, proximity having become irrelevant. This is just how Alex relates to her, a being perpetually present, someone 'who lived in his pocket, whom he'd ascribed her own special vibration' (335). Yet, the T generation also operates with a new zone of secrecy, which complicates a simplistic theory of the magnification of the visible in the digital age. In her article on the online lives of gay teenagers, Egan argues that, while the Internet facilitates forming connections over large distances, 'in the end, you're never

---

[503] Virilio, *Open*, p. 26.
[504] Ibid.

specifically at odds with the long-distance digital communication Danny simultaneously craves.[512]

Hidden behind a cell phone, Danny's ability to meet the gaze of the person on the end of the line disintegrates. When Danny calls his lover on Mick's mobile phone, the experience feels 'dreamlike', his separation from digital devices making the phone appear 'alien, unfamiliar.'[513] Over the course of their conversation, both lose confidence in the veracity of the other's identity: Danny wonders, 'How could he tell where the voice was coming from?'[514] Since he cannot verify Martha's presence with certainty, he does not trust that it is really her on the line. The opacity of the technology erupts in paranoia, and Danny neurotically worries that 'the voice could be coming from inside [the castle]'.[515] By allowing users to communicate while out of sight, the cell phone disables the potential for an experience of 'alto', for registering information contained in materiality and in the returned gaze. Rather it fosters what Danny refers to as 'the worm'—feelings of doubt, uncertainty—in this instance, nourishing an anxiety that Howie is secretly spying on him. Digital communication in *The Keep* relies on the habituated faith that we know who we are speaking to or messaging with, even if we cannot see them, a certainty always on the brink of collapse.

'Pure Language' similarly explores, within its dystopic future setting, the disquiet engendered by the simultaneous expansion of the visual field and the complication of traditional optics. Alex is given the task to compile a 'blind team' for Bennie, and the ability to operate using T devices enables participants to act in secret: Alex provides the list of possible 'parrots' to Lulu, who contacts them individually on their Ts, meaning that no actors are aware of Alex's place on top of the pyramid nor can they identify any of the other participants. The murkiness of this system breeds an internal crisis of authenticity, by hiding misdemeanors in the digital sphere while preserving the appearance of morality. Alex keeps his role a secret, and is comforted that, even if Scotty is a disappointing performer, no one will know that he was

---

[512] Ibid., p. 6.
[513] Ibid., p. 167.
[514] Ibid., p. 168.
[515] Ibid.

responsible for leading them there: he thinks, '*no 1 nOs abt me. Im invysbl*' (338). That this thought appears as a 'brain-T' suggests that the message's '*me*', its sender, is not strictly the same Alex who receives it. Rather, Alex appears divided between the guilt of betraying his ethical tenets and the internal thrill of pulling off the advertising coup. Indeed, the ability to carry out this type of mass deceit while hidden from view is, Alex notes, psychologically appeasing, structurally designed to 'reduce the shame and guilt of parrothood by assembling a team that doesn't know it's a team' (326).

If Jules's model of the self indicates a desire for temporal constancy, the digital platform provokes an easy surrender of a subjectivity confirmed by history. When compiling the 'blind team', Alex notes, 'What he needed was to find fifty more people like him, who had stopped being themselves without realising it' (324). The digital initiates, facilitates, and exposes an overriding sense of self-alienation, of the loss of the authentic self that Jules envisions people perpetually striving to maintain. The practice of purchasing opinions is, we learn, widespread in this future world. The text alludes to the 'Bloggescandals', in which politicians purchased the public advocacy of commentators, resulting in a cultural 'suspicion that people's opinions weren't really their own' (322). When Alex and Rebecca encounter the 'parrot' Zeus on the day of the concert, his face bears no 'visible sign of parrothood' but appears 'the same right down to his soul patch,' a mark of authenticity: 'he'd kept [it] all these years since they'd gone out of fashion' (337). Yet, there remains a latent aura of suspicion that undermines the intimacy of personal relationships. Not only is Natasha, Zeus's girlfriend, unaware of his involvement in the scheme, she knows that people have been paid to advertise the concert; she neither fully knows her partner nor can she trust those around her. The same is true of Rebecca, who says of the parrots, 'But these are people I know,' while standing beside her partner, who, without her knowledge, orchestrated the plot (337).

There thus emerges out of the digital platform and its particular secrecy an anxiety over authenticity. This crisis is experienced both as alienation from the familiar and from the self. By offering a platform over which to act deviously but out of sight, the T devices—like many digital technologies—yields a bifurcated subject, split between its real-world self and its digital behaviours. As such, it allows Alex to separate

his unflappably moralistic self in the physical world from the one enacting the illicit plot in the digital sphere. Yet, the distinction between the two antithetical selves always threatens to give way. When Rebecca questions his reasons for allowing their daughter access to his T, breaking their long-established rule, Alex worries that she deduced his participation in the 'blind team'. Although compartmentalised into separate spheres, Alex worries that his digital indiscretions will imprint themselves in the real world: '*What* does she know?', he nervously wonders, suspecting that his wife is aware of his nefarious scheme (333). Indeed, as I argued above, by the chapter's end, Alex finally severs himself from his chimerical ideals. He is no longer the ethical and open person he was with Sasha, even if his misdemeanours are lodged behind the screen of his T device. His unlawful actions serve to expose and to solidify the gap between his current and his previous self.

In this section, I suggested that by eliminating the distinction between distant and nearby, digital devices in Egan's fiction create a new but precarious sense of home. As the domestic space erodes in *Goon Squad*, intimacy is transferred to the digital T devices, and yet these technologies serve to generate a culture of suspicion where anyone could be profiting from unethical behaviour, falsely espousing opinions for the sake of income. Opening up a domain of secrecy, the T devices create a general uncertainty about the self that undermines the possibilities of intimacy. Not only are characters in this digital future unable to trust—to know with confidence—those around them, neither can they understand themselves as coherent and stable. If in the previous section I noted a fragmented temporality in which subjects are divided across time, here I revealed the digital's insistence on a self divided in the moment into seemingly autonomous, antagonistic entities. This extension of the subject's dispersal, from fragmentation across time to fragmentation at the same time, is the subject of the next section.

Parallel Personhood and the Representation of Simultaneity

Between the publications of Fredric Jameson's 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984) and Brian Rotman's *Becoming Beside Ourselves*

(2008), digital technology changed the possibilities of signification, altering the subject and its relationship to time. Jameson theorises postmodernity in terms evocative both of Bauman's Liquid Modernity and the challenge, in *Goon Squad*, of discovering narrative development within a lifetime of changes. He explains postmodern temporality through the schizophrenic breakdown of the sentence into isolated parts, time chopped up into a series of unmoored presents, the distinctiveness of which elides any causal or narrative connections.[516] Ursula Heise implicates computer technology in fostering this fragmented temporality, because it drives users to focus their attention 'on the present understood as a narrowly defined time period unhinged from past causes and future extensions or effects.'[517] Jameson's literary example of this schizophrenic mode is the poem 'China' by Bob Perelman, composed of a series of captions written for postcards unavailable to the reader. Generating a 'new mode of relationship through difference', this collage-like postmodern art, Jameson suggests, makes 'the proposition that "difference relates".'[518] As a result, reading postmodern works become an exercise in 'thinking relationships' anew, which, for Jameson, means approaching every fragment of the collage image or text simultaneously.[519] Writing on Nam June Pak, who distributes televisions throughout his art installations, he asserts that the viewer 'is called upon to do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference'.[520] This call to experience every part of the distributed artwork requires the viewer to splinter its vision across several narratives or objects that make up the collage, to witness it simultaneously rather than linearly along a narrative path.

The possibilities and the norms of the collage image, however, shift with new technological developments, moving from a fragmented to a pristine visual ecology. Lev Manovich observes that computer culture in the 1980s and '90s provokes a change from

---

[516] Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 73. See Chapter One for a more detailed account of postmodern time, the speed of fashion and of immediate obsolescence.

[517] Ursula K. Heise, *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 26.

[518] Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 75.

[519] Ibid.

[520] Ibid., p. 76.

the visual dissonance of montage to 'the aesthetics of continuity.'[521] This move is typified by the digital composite, 'in which different spaces are combined into a single seamless virtual space,' eliminating the discordant breaks between collage elements of which Jameson insists the art viewer must take stock.[522] Thus, digital technology allows, through compositing and layering, the creation of a collaged, many-sourced image whose dissonance hides itself. Brian Rotman writes similarly about the increasing flexibility of the digital image: 'an image can overlap another, be added to, combined, composited with, juxtaposed, superimposed, interpenetrated, and merged with any other image to form just another image.'[523] Not a collage, these '*imaged images*,' he insist, 'have become a default contemporary visual paradigm which, by presenting many images simultaneously within a single optical act, calls for a visual self engaged in a mode of parallel rather than serial seeing.'[524] Thus, we find in digital representation the possibilities of spectatorship changed, the 'visual polyphony' that was an impossible dream in Jameson's theory emerging as a standard paradigm.[525]

This new mode of a parallel vision and representation promotes, for Rotman, a 'psychic restructuring' in the subject, a move from a self premised on alphabetic seriality to digital simultaneity.[526] Rotman argues that the dominant mode of representation contours the self, and thus the ubiquity of the *imaged image* promotes a parallelised subject, 'a post-literate self [...] patterned not on the word—stable, integral, fixed, discrete, enclosing a unique, interior meaning, ordered, sequential—but on the fluid and unordered multiplicities of the visual image.'[527] Whereas the lettered self is serial and contained, subject to and defined by the linear requirements of writing and reading, Rotman describes a digital 'para-self' that functions across various platforms concurrently: 'In short, a self becoming beside itself, plural, trans-alphabetic, derived

---

[521] Manovich, p. 143.

[522] Ibid., p. 144.

[523] Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 97.

[524] Ibid., pp. 97-8.

[525] Ibid., p. 98.

[526] Ibid., p. 83.

[527] Ibid., pp. 94-5.

from and spread over multiple sites of agency, a self going parallel'.[528] If Rotman's 'para-self' develops in response to the seamless layering accommodated by digital imaging, Sherry Turkle formulates a similar notion of the digital self 'as a multiple, distributed system' through the metaphor of the computer window.[529] She notes that when users work on their computers, they tend to operate in various windows, representing different settings and contexts, simultaneously. The computer window, she thus decides, promotes an experience of the self that is not fractured across time, entering into several distinct roles over the course of the day, but one 'that exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time.'[530]

Goon Squad's digitised future is described in the same terms Turkle and Rotman use to define digital subjectivity. Lulu suggests that the temporality of information exchange has exceeded linear models of 'connect[ion]' and 'transmi[ssion]' (324). Evoking 'particle physics', she notes that 'reach', or influence, 'isn't describable in terms of cause and effect anymore: it's simultaneous' (325). Rebecca's academic research similarly indicates that the terms 'story' and 'change' have been 'shucked of their meanings', the immediacy of digital communication outrunning the capacities of narrative development (331). Elsewhere, Egan has reflected on the difficulty in communicating simultaneity in fiction:

> Writing is very different from, let's say, filmmaking, because simultaneity is so difficult to achieve. [...] There is always a tension that a writer grapples with: you are trying to make a number of things seem to happen at once, but you can only proceed word by word. With writing it's such an essential problem, and I think it's one reason people are drawn to other artistic forms: they feel more liberated from the limitations of chronology.[531]

Here, Egan is articulating a dissonance between the linearity of writing and the lived reality of simultaneity, experiences of which are fundamental to Rotman's and Turkle's, as well as Lulu's and Rebecca's, understandings of the digital present. In this interview, Egan points to the penultimate scene of *Look at Me* as one attempt to render simultaneity

---

[528] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[529] Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 14.

[530] Ibid. In her article on gay youth Internet culture, Egan cites Turkle's work and observes that this many-windowed style of Web browsing is typical of adolescents. See Egan, 'Lonely'.

[531] Jennifer Egan, 'An Interview with Jennifer Egan', interviewed by Charlie Reilly, *Contemporary Literature*, 50.3 (2009), 438-460 (p. 453).

in writing. Here, Egan interweaves several narrative threads, moving between moments from three stories and creating a narrative collage, such that readers must keep in mind all three strands at once. In *The Keep* and *Goon Squad*, I suggest, Egan similarly employs techniques of fragmentation and gathering in order to convey simultaneity, seeking recourse specifically in archival modes of representation. While in *The Keep* Egan explores listing as a means of rendering simultaneity, *Goon Squad* takes on a more complex variation of this form: the database.

In a blog post published in anticipation of her Twitter short story 'Black Box', Egan articulated a long-standing interest in 'fiction that takes the form of lists'.[532] 'Black Box', a succession of brief directives, each conforming to Twitter's 140-character limit, and the short story 'To Do', a numbered itinerary of one woman's sinister daily chores, are the two most overt examples of this writerly interest.[533] *The Keep*, however, explores the list more obliquely, the amateur author Ray often relying on it to untangle fraught moments, ideas, and experiences. Francis Spufford reads the list of excess in Rabelais as a 'tower of words' that interrupts the 'march across the horizontal plains of narrative'.[534] Ray's lists, similarly, carve out a space where a loaded moment can be dissected into comprehensible parts. In its first chapter, Ray struggles to render in prose the instantaneity of young Howard's fall. He narrates, 'It happened faster than I'm making it sound: Howie looked at Danny and Danny shut his eyes and shoved him into the pool. But even that's too slow: Look. Shut. Shove. / Or just *shove*.'[535] Here, listed single words isolated by periods strive to convey a sense of immediacy. Similarly, when describing a rank smell, Ray narrates, 'If I knew how to give you that smell in words I wouldn't need a writing class. All I can do is name some stuff that's in it—cigarettes, germ killer, sweat, chow, piss—but the mix is so much worse than those smells combined could ever

---

[532] Jennifer Egan, 'Coming Soon: Jennifer Egan's "Black Box"', *New Yorker Blog*, 24 May 2012 <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/05/coming-soon-jennifer-egan-black-box.html> [accessed 11 November 2012].

[533] Jennifer Egan, 'Black Box', *New Yorker,* 4 July 2012 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/black-box-2> [accessed 13 August 2014] and 'To Do', *Guardian*, 22 July 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jul/22/jennifer-egan-short-story> [accessed 12 May 2012].

[534] Francis Spufford, *The Chatto Book of Cabbages and Kings: Lists in Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 11.

[535] Egan, *Keep*, p. 14.

be'.[536] The list unravels complexity into representable parts that, sitting alongside each other on the page, strive to invoke synchrony. Such is the case when Ray attempts to narrate the 'riot inside Danny's head', writing it 'piece by piece like a conversation' even though '[i]t was a knot, a confusion, a chaos'.[537] Similarly, when Danny feels 'a mess of reactions [...] that he couldn't separate out', Ray narrates these emotions in a numbered list.[538]

The list, thus, operates as a symbolic tool that allows Ray to convey overlapping moments or overlaid meanings. Frequently, as we have seen, Ray utilises the list when his untrained writing cannot capture complexity in narrative language. Yet, as Patti White has noted of lists in general, the muddled-quality of the data they attempt to order threatens lists with 'conceptual breakdown at every moment'.[539] It is for this reason that when Ray attempts to respond to a list of three questions, he answers the third within his response to the second because, he says, 'that's where it fits'.[540] Their distinction, Ray's reply suggests, is artificial, the list's order dissolving against the complexities of reality. Thus, *The Keep*, makes use of the list as a precarious mechanism to dissect moments of simultaneity into representable parts. *Goon Squad*, I argue, similarly employs a list, or database, structure in order to gesture towards and to present simultaneity, the key temporality of digital culture.

In 2001's *The Language of New Media*, Manovich instigated the analysis of the database as a symbolic form that, he argues, typifies the logic of digital devices and is antithetical to traditional narrative. He writes, 'As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a *list* of items, and it refuses to order this *list*. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies.'[541] Adhering to the structure of the

---

[536] Ibid., pp. 134-35. Here, Ray articulates Umberto Eco's suggestion that lists become necessary when a definitive word does not exist. See Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. by Alastair McEwen (London: Quercus, 2009), p. 15.

[537] Egan, *Keep*, p. 153.

[538] Ibid., p. 110.

[539] Patti White, *Gatsby's Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1992), p. 110.

[540] Egan, *Keep*, p. 157.

[541] Manovich, p. 225. My emphasis.

list, the database form supplies a means of expressing the simultaneity that Turkle and Rotman see as indicative of the subjective experience of the present digital era and Lulu and Rebecca view as the dominant paradigm of digital culture in 'Pure Language'. Kristin Veel elucidates this quality of database narrative by rethinking Manovich's definition in temporal terms: 'in the database we find that a narrative conception of time as a sequence of causally connected events is replaced by a notion that everything is potentially present at the same time—linearity is replaced by simultaneity.'[542] Reading a database where parts can be reordered, she suggests, produces a sense that pieces of the text are not mired in a causal trajectory but run concurrently. Timothy Barker, in his discussion of digital art, similarly, writes:

> the duration of the database contains other multiple durations of a smaller scale. These durations are not arranged in a line or series, as we traditionally experience them in the everyday. Rather these multiple durations are organized in a hierarchical structure, which places multifarious events in simultaneity and results in multi-temporality.[543]

Thus, I suggest, the database works towards representing the simultaneity of the para-self and the simultaneity that Lulu attributes to digitised life. In this sense, I am reading the novel's form through 'Pure Language', which, in calling attention to simultaneity in its dystopic image of the digitised future, encourages us to think through its implications within the entire novel.

In *Goon Squad*, moments of simultaneity are always underwritten by a logic of subjection. In the chapter 'Ask Me if I Care', set in the 1970s, a character uncannily like Jameson's many-eyed art spectator appears in the form of a drugged-up teenager: after taking a hit of cocaine, Rhea narrates, 'I've got eyes blinking all over my head, seeing everything in the restaurant at once' (52). This vision not only results from an abnegation of self-control to a narcotic, but it is experienced as terrifying overstimulation when the band's concert turns violent and Rhea witnesses an aggressive sexual encounter that her many eyes cannot stop seeing. Jules's portrayal of Kitty's effect on the surrounding social atmosphere more explicitly links simultaneity to power. He describes the instantaneous awareness of the celebrity's presence throughout the

---

[542] Kristin Veel, *Narrative Negotiations: Information Structures in Literary Fiction* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), p. 91.
[543] Timothy Barker, *Time and the Digital* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2012), p. 190.

restaurant in terms of 'a simultaneity that can only be explained using principles of quantum mechanics, specifically, the properties of so-called entangled particles' (177). Here, Jules turns to the same 'particle physics' metaphor that Lulu employs in the final chapter. The patrons are 'entangled particles,' registering at the same time the proximity of an influential actress, which in turn flattens their individuality. Jules explains, 'so indistinguishable are we from every other non-Kitty Jackson in our vicinity that when one of us sees her, the rest simultaneously react' (177 n 1). This moment, in which Kitty's presence diminishes all around to mere non-Kittys, reflects Scotty's remark about power: 'Power is like that; everyone feels it at once' (109).

The affiliation of simultaneity with authority and control repeats in my analyses of the database as a textual form and as a platform for the self. In both cases, the database seems to control characters, to seize hold of their self-determination. In the following two sections, I scrutinise the database characteristics of *Goon Squad*'s structure, applying the writings of Norman M. Klein on his own computerised database novels to Egan's material text. Klein emphasises the importance of gaps to the practice of database literature, gaps that *Goon Squad* materialises in the deep disjunctions between its diverse chapters. I contextualise Klein's writing within Wolfgang Iser's work on reader-response theory, situating *Goon Squad*'s database gaps in a new era of literary indeterminacy. Iser asserts 'that since the eighteenth century, indeterminacy in literature—or at least an awareness of it—has tended to increase.'[544] Veel situates database art's 'rel[iance] on gemmating plot structures and the shuffling of fragments' within 'a long cultural tradition of fragmentation, excess and the challenge to linearity'.[545] I suggest similarly that, in the database novel, the depth of the gap has intensified to the point that events become unmoored, allowing the reader to tessellate them according to various organisational schemes. I insist that, in *Goon Squad*, the database structure removes both the author's authority over the text and the character's semblance of agency. Like Alex, whose information is owned by the database, the fates

---

[544] Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 15.
[545] Veel, 'Information', p. 310.

of *Goon Squad*'s characters are tightly sealed within the simultaneity of the database novel.

Database Gaps

Like the experience of its subjects, *Goon Squad*'s form is episodic. Its chapters are short vignettes taken from the lives of its characters—Sasha and Alex's blind date, Lou's trip to Africa—punctuated by gaps and elisions. In interviews Egan frequently indicates three rules that governed *Goon Squad*'s composition: that (1) each story should take a different protagonist and (2) a different technical or narrative style, and that (3) each could be read in isolation from the collection.[546] While Sarah Churchwell suggests that the various interrelations between the characters create some continuity, Egan's compositional rules ensure a stark separation between chapters, caused by abrupt disjunctions in time, point of view, tone, and style.[547] In his theory of the computerised database novel, Klein focuses on apertures, bleeds, in-between spaces, and wormholes, suggesting that database literature should consciously institute gaps that are identifiable to the reader yet whose contents remain mysterious. For Klein, these narrative elisions must be engineered such that they are immersive for the reader, inviting them 'to guess,' to fill-in the missing content 'through the research provided.'[548] Such a text would lay bare its economy of textual indeterminacy, displaying those indefinite moments when, in Iser's reader-response theory, the reader is compelled to help compose the literary work.[549]

Goon Squad materially reflects Iser's and Klein's models, requiring that the reader imagine beyond the limited confines of each chapter to devise connections between characters and storylines. As Iser's theory dictates, the variability of *Goon*

---

[546] Jennifer Egan, interviewed by Deborah Treisman, *National Book Award Author Events Podcast*, 20 May 2011 <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/national-book-awards-author/id215209600> [accessed 11 November 2012].

[547] Sarah Churchwell, 'A Visit from the Goon Squad—review', *Observer*, 13 March 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/13/jennifer-egan-visit-goon-squad> [accessed 20 May 2012].

[548] Norman M. Klein, 'Space Between: Travelling through Bleeds, Apertures, and Wormholes Inside the Database Novel', in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, ed. by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), pp. 137-152 (p. 141).

[549] Iser, p. 10.

Squad's chapters embed blank spaces through 'the abrupt introduction of new characters or even new threads of the plot, so that the question arises as to the connections between the story revealed so far and the new, unforeseen situations.'[550] If attending to gaps occurs in every literary reading, *Goon Squad* manifests these conditions for interpretation in the untold linkages it leaves between storylines and between chapters, breaks ensured by the rules under which Egan composed the text. Yet, as I will argue, Egan's writing also notes a scarcity of silence in the digital age that impedes the possibilities of imaginative reflection and an awareness of the surrounding environment. In adopting the digital database form, *Goon Squad* paradoxically institutes the necessary spaces for its readers' imaginative reflection.

While in Iser's model literary engagement requires attention to gaps and indeterminacy, in *Goon Squad* the introduction of new media makes silence more rare and less distinctive. Music industry tycoon Bennie, in *Goon Squad*, laments the loss of 'muddiness' in digital recordings, 'the sense of actual musicians playing actual instruments in an actual room. Nowadays that quality (if it existed at all) was usually an effect of analogue signaling rather than bona fide tape' (23). New digital technologies, even in media other than audio, eliminate gaps. He complains: 'Too clear, too clean. The problem was precision, perfection; the problem was *digitization*, which sucked the life out of everything that got smeared through its microscopic mesh. Film, photography, music: dead. *An aesthetic holocaust!*' (24, emphasis in original). The discrepancy between the complexity of the real world and the unspoiled sheen of the digital is similarly expressed by Jocelyn, who sees in Lou's 'new, flat and long' television 'a nervous sharpness that makes the room and even us look smudged' (91). Here, Bennie and Jocelyn echo an observation made by Jacques Derrida who notes a shift in the palpability of deletions from writing to word processing. While in traditional writing erasures and insertions take physical and mental shape, leaving 'a sort of scar on the paper or a visible image in the memory', on the computer screen 'everything negative is

---

[550] Ibid., p. 11.

drowned, deleted; it evaporates immediately, sometimes from one instant to the next.'[551]

Muddiness in the digital text, as in Bennie's account of digital music, photography, and film, does not exist, eliminated by the purity of the computer screen.[552]

Bennie condemns digitisation for effacing the imperfections of reality, and it does so at the expense of information that is accessible only in the very moments of silence that it suppresses. *The Keep*, for instance, meditates on the dearth of silence in the digital age and, as in Iser's reader-response model, positions such moments as preconditions for creative engagement. Against Danny's addiction to the hum of connection, to the dial tone, Howard casts his hotel as a silent haven premised on the elimination of technology. Unlike the digitally-minded Danny, who professes indifference to his imagination, Howard is interested in the capacity of his castle's 'thick' silence to revitalise personal creativity.[553] Divorced from technological devices at the gates, he envisions his guests reclaiming their imaginative faculties through an immersion in silence, replicating medieval times when '*imaginations* were more active [and] inner lives were rich and weird.'[554] In the meta-narrative, this judgment seems accurate, the stillness and isolation of the jail turning its prisoners into *bricoleurs,* who creatively turn objects at hand into needed or wanted gadgets.[555] Inside the jail, 'A broken pen is a tattoo gun. A plastic comb is a shank, meaning a knife. A couple of plums and a piece of bread are next week's hooch.'[556] It is, likewise, in the silence of his sham radio, made of bits of dust and other bric-a-brac, that Davis divines the voices of the dead.[557] Here, the jailhouse silence instigates creative engagement, the imagination thriving undistracted by the digital and metropolitan noises that typically entrance Danny.

---

[551] Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 24.

[552] This purity recalls my previous discussion of the 'imaged image' in Rotman's discussion of the para-self.

[553] Egan, *Keep*, p. 43.

[554] Ibid., p. 44. Emphasis in original.

[555] Claude Levi-Strauss describes the *bricoleur* against the engineer. Whereas the *bricoleur* flexibly 'make[s] do with "whatever is at hand",' the engineer acquires materials specifically 'for the purpose of the project.' See Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 17.

[556] Egan, *Keep*, p. 54.

[557] Ibid., pp. 98-100.

There is always something lingering behind a silence waiting to be revealed, a relationship with the surrounding space that, I have indicated, is threatened in the horizon-less digital space. Yet, it is just these silences, Egan suggests, that are imperilled in the digital era. In his futuristic chapter, the sounds of 'choppers, church bells, a distant drill' make Alex unable to concentrate on Scotty's analogue music (321). Giving voice to Howie's worry that the digital present lacks quiet, surveillance helicopters in *Goon Squad*'s final chapter are inescapable in the urban environment. It is only during 'the dead of night', '[w]ithout the rant of construction and omnipresent choppers' that 'hidden portals of sound opened themselves to [Alex's] ears', distributing an awareness of the environment (322). If, as I have suggested, in 'Pure Language' the T handset undermines engagement with the physical environment by siphoning attention onto the digital screen, these moments of silence facilitate a reengagement with the human scaffolding of the surrounding space. Through the gaps it institutes between its chapters, which offer an opportunity for re-engagement, I suggest that *Goon Squad* compensates for its anxiety over the dearth of silence and the difficulty of reflection in the contemporary, digitised context.

Nowhere does the text more overtly consider the nature of the pause than in its infamous PowerPoint chapter, 'Great Rock and Roll Pauses'. Mimicking the text's general structure, Alison's PowerPoint journal by necessity institutes spaces in between each slide, gaps that eliminate the possibility of a flowing story and associating it with a list-like structure.[558] Egan says of writing PowerPoint fiction that 'it breaks down a narrative into a sequence of moments that basically hang in the air, and then give up their place to the next moment.'[559] Indeed, even within her slides, Alison refuses linear expanses, conforming to the slogan, 'A word-wall is a long haul!' (262). The

---

[558] Egan, herself, has called the PowerPoint a 'microcosm' of the novel's more general formal concerns: 'I sensed that a slideshow would allow me to kind of lay bare what in a way was the whole strategy of the book, which consists of moments with a lot of time and space between them.' In the same interview, Egan notes that the PowerPoint form can deal only in isolated moments, there being none of the 'connective tissue' between slides that is necessary for traditional narrative. I develop these ideas further in this section and the next. See Egan, *National Book*.

[559] Jennifer Egan qtd. in Doug Kim, '10 tips for great storytelling from a PowerPoint novelist', *Microsoft Office Show*, 18 August 2010 <http://blogs.office.com/b/office-show/archive/2010/08/18/10-tips-for-great-storytelling-from-a-powerpoint-novelist.aspx> [accessed 13 August 2012].

presentation, thus, exposes the process of literary meaning-making, requiring that the reader devise the connective thread that is traditionally provided by the text itself. That it is the reader's job to perform this linking task within the text's gaps is hinted at by the chapter's connoisseur of silence. Alison's brother, who fastidiously records and plays the silences in rock-and-roll songs, is telling named Linc.[560] This correspondence between Linc/link and aesthetic silences implies that in the gaps between PowerPoint slides and between the text's chapters are, in the words of Iser's reader-response model, moments when 'the different segments and patterns of the text are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so.'[561]

Alison pursues this process of engaging with silences within her journal. One slide, 'Lincoln Wants to Say/Ends Up Saying', attempts to decipher the shadow linkages underlying his autistic thought pattern, presented as blocked sentences causally joined by arrows. Alison speculates on the notes, lost to silence, that connect Lincoln's unexpressed sentiment, 'I love you, Dad', to the comment he actually makes about the Steve Miller Band (255). When applied to the text at-large, this slide suggests that, in the gaps between its chapters, readers can attempt to unfurl its discreet connections. This analysis is confirmed when Sasha suggests: 'The pause makes you think the song will end. And then the song isn't really over, so you're relieved. But then the song *does* actually end, because every song ends, obviously, and **THAT. TIME. THE. END. IS. FOR. REAL.**' (289). To consider the silence as a possible end, or as an end until the music or the story picks up again, labels it as a space where the audience confers order and meaning on the preceding text. Frank Kermode, for instance, suggests that '[w]e project ourselves [...] past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle.'[562] If the end is a time of necessary reflection where the past becomes available to interpretation, Sasha's pronouncement of gaps as pseudo-ends further implies that they are times to consider textual patterns.

In *Goon Squad*, pauses and silences are endangered by a digital world in which

---

[560] I owe this decoding of Lincoln's name to Stephen Burn's keynote lecture at the *Invisible Circus* conference at Birkbeck, University of London, 22 March 2014.

[561] Iser, p. 34.

[562] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 8.

the muddiness of analogue music is cleaned up and the daytime hours of the metropolis are ceaselessly haunted by the din of surveillance helicopters. Yet, as one of Alison's slides pronounces, Egan's texts also demonstrate 'Proof of the Necessity of Pauses' (314). Blank spaces and moments of silence emerge as necessary provisions for reflection, instituted into the text to flout the increasing fluidity of the digital writing surface. Where the digital troubles the integrity of the home-space, silences are havens that re-inscribe intimacy with the nearby. *Goon Squad*, then, can be read as an insurrection against a digital space where silence and blanks are eliminated, instituting these scarce substances into the fabric of the text. Klein identifies a similar cultural and aesthetic trouble with 'locat[ing] "moments of being," silences.'[563] Rather than engaging with and making use of pauses in our schedules, he suggests that we fall into digressions between deadlines. As such, he suggests, 'Data then can be an honest accounting of what we fail to do, or how we hide', laying bare those blank spaces that in everyday life we do not register.[564] *Goon Squad* manifests Klein's hypothesis that data narratives might knowingly employ gaps and silences in order to oppose the digital's glossing over of indeterminacy and blank spaces. In doing so, it implements the logic of Klein's computerised database novels in the traditional, bound book.

Database Recombination

Although it is confined to the requirements of the bound codex and of linear language, *Goon Squad* also embraces the recombinant quality that Manovich uses to describe the database and oppose it to conventional narrative. Reviews of the novel frequently contemplate *Goon Squad*'s form, expressing uncertainty as to whether it is a novel, a collection of interconnected stories, or something else entirely.[565] This ambiguity

---

[563] Norman M. Klein, 'Waiting for the World to Explode: How Data Convert into a Novel', in *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overflow*, ed. by Victoria Vesna (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 89-94 (p. 92).

[564] Ibid.

[565] Janet Maslin expresses uncertainty as to 'whether this tough, uncategorizable work of fiction is a novel, a collection of carefully arranged interlocking stories or simply a display of Ms. Egan's extreme virtuosity'. Maslin, 'Time, Thrashing to its Own Rock Beat', *New York Times,* 20 June 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/21/books/21book.html> [accessed 2 May 2012]. Churchwell similarly

arises from the relationship between its chapters: When serialised, do they form a continuous narrative? Could they be reordered? Is their present orientation authoritative? These questions are fundamental to understanding the text in terms of Manovich's definitions of narrative and of database. *Goon Squad* mediates between these two poles, co-opting the database's list form yet presenting that list as an ordered itinerary of chapters, albeit one that does not reflect what Manovich calls narrative's typical 'cause-and-effect trajectory'.[566]

In its two futuristic chapters, *Goon Squad* points to the demise of traditional narrative and its antagonistic relationship with digitalism. I previously noted the rise of 'simultaneity' and the demise of 'story' and 'change' in 'Pure Language'. Alison's PowerPoint journal enacts this transition, its laconic and fragmented structure eliminating the fluidity necessary to narrative development. In the previous section I suggested that Alison's journal requires that the reader supply the unarticulated junctions between slides. Here, I note that when the slides are analysed within themselves, they betray a more confused temporal logic. Egan has noted the efficacy of employing multi-linear PowerPoint slides, with configurations that support various reading trajectories, to capture complicated moments textually.[567] Alison's slides frequently animate this writerly advice, bearing no stable chronology or order, demanding, like Manovich's database, to be approached in various ways.[568] The slide 'What is going on in here?', for instance, can be read column by column, to illuminate the connections between Sasha's bedtime routine and the thoughts it provokes for her daughter; it might also be read primarily along the connecting lines of Alison's thoughts, at the expense of Sasha's contextual comments (272). Similarly, the layout of 'Rob Was Mom's Best Friend' might be read from left to right, according to its colour-coding, or by some other arrangement (281). The slideshow's unusual formats, its use of diagrams, blocks, and

---

writes, 'It is neither a novel nor a collection of short stories, but something in between'. Churchwell, 'A Visit'.

[566] Manovich, p. 225.

[567] Kim.

[568] Egan has said of writing her PowerPoint chapter: 'One of the fun parts was that I could create slides... that could be read many ways... Again, extremely hard, I mean, impossible in conventional fiction to do that.' See Egan, *National Book*.

charts, resist any definitive order, requiring that readers investigate the slides in various formations to register the full scope of their information.

By evading stable arrangement, Alison's slides boast the unordered quality that Manovich attaches to the database. *Goon Squad* as a whole, however, manifests the undoing of both 'change' and 'story' through a recombinant structure that lacks narrative conclusion. Moving from item to item, layer to layer, Klein's database projects eschew typical linear trajectories that Manovich links to narrative. Klein supposes, 'Data cannot "conclude" a story; they cannot deliver a "suspense" ending, like a murder mystery—not in the traditional way'.[569] Each item in a database narrative appears to complicate rather than resolve the preoccupations of the previous items. They do not demonstrate progress or development but are, in Manovich's account, 'collections of individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other.'[570] While considering similar themes and following a network of interrelated characters, *Goon Squad*'s sequenced chapters do not follow an arc of narrative development. It is for this reason that Will Blyth struggles to summarise the novel comprehensively in his review. Egan, he decides, has written a text with as 'wide a circumference' as possible 'while still maintaining any sort of coherence and momentum.'[571] As such, *Goon Squad* appears akin to database novels that, Klein writes, are '*without* an arc that requires a dramatic ending. Instead, they proceed by insinuation, by involution—toward a *beginning*, toward an *aporia*'.[572] Indeed, *Goon Squad* concludes with such a beginning, Bennie and Alex searching the night for Sasha but finding instead 'another girl, young and new to the city, fiddling with her keys' (349). The novel, this final scene indicates, could continue indefinitely, introducing a yet unexplored character into its fold. Egan has even suggested that 'Black Box' could be considered a fourteenth chapter of the

---

[569] Klein, 'Waiting', p. 91. Kinder similarly notes of Buñuel's database cinema, 'we are rarely concerned with how the story begins or ends, a choice which always seems rather arbitrary'. Kinder, 'Hot Spots, Avatar, and Narrative Fields Forever—Buñuel's Legacy for New Digital Media and Interactive Database Narrative', *Film Quarterly*, 55.4 (2002), 2-15 (p. 12).

[570] Manovich, p. 218.

[571] Will Blyth, 'To Their Own Beat', *New York Times Book Review*, 8 July 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/11/books/review/Blythe-t.html?_r=1> [accessed 5 March 2012].

[572] Klein, 'Waiting', p. 91.

book, fulfilling as it does her three compositional criteria by placing Lulu at its centre and embracing the Twitter form.[573]

Bound in a codex book, *Goon Squad* sacrifices the flexibility of the digital mode that in Klein's computerised work allows his readers to determine their own narrative trajectories. While Klein insists that, in database narratives, the reader becomes author by imaginatively filling in its gaps, Alan Kirby identifies a new 'cultural dominant' in which Klein's theory is intensified, whereby the audience tangibly creates the text.[574] Whereas postmodernism 'fetishised [...] the author, even when the author chose to indict or pretended to abolish him or herself', Kirby's digimodernism sees the author's final elimination in cultural products, such as *Wikipedia* and *Big Brother*, whose content is generated by their audiences.[575] Reflecting the development of the reader-as-author, Manovich notes that databases are fluid and unordered—that is, users can order them according to various principles.[576] In this sense, database literature is a form of what Epsen Aarseth terms 'ergodic literature', related but not confined to computerised writing, in which 'nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text.'[577] Kirby and Aarseth both view as a precursor to their respective paradigms B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, which invites readers to shuffle its chapters. Bound in place, *Goon Squad* enumerates its chapters in a stable and authorised arrangement. Can it still be considered in the realm of the ergodic, the digimodern, and the database? As I have already indicated, *Goon Squad* was composed such that each story could stand on its own, meaning that in theory its chapters can be jumbled without losing its already loose coherence. *Goon Squad* thus possesses the qualities necessary for a database novel,

---

[573] Jennifer Egan, interviewed by Deborah Treisman, *New Yorker Blog*, 28 May 2012 <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/05/this-week-in-fiction-jennifer-egan.html> [accessed 28 June 2012].

[574] Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009), p. 2.

[575] Alan Kirby, 'The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond', *Philosophy Now* (Nov/Dec 2006), 34-7 (p. 35). Mark Poster similarly sees the marginalisation of the author figure in a digital moment where edits can be made without textual fracture, word-processed documents exchanging hands and changing content, melding the voices of many writers into one seamless page. Poster, *What's the Matter with the Internet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 91.

[576] Manovich, p. 219.

[577] Epsen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 1.

although it does not materially permit its reordering nor does it call its readers to treat it as an unarranged entity.

The tension between its presented order and its possible reordering is expressed by the book's resemblance to an analogue record, featuring an A- and a B-side. By aligning itself with this analogue medium, *Goon Squad* suggests that it ought to be consumed linearly, from beginning to end, like a traditional record.[578] However, by presenting each of its chapters as tracks, as isolated songs, it allows readers to imagine them in the digital context of the Compact Disc or an iPod, which imitates the record's form but corrupts its ordering mechanism. Whereas records, like traditional books, are consumed from beginning to end, Joseph Conte notes, 'One is able to skip instantaneously from one location to another and shuffle the order of play in digitally recorded media'.[579] Wolfgang Funk hints at the impulse, when reading *Goon Squad*, to reorder the chapters, to skip from song to song. Funk suggests that by having to discover the various interrelations between characters and moments, readers receive the text 'without an ordering, authoritative instance to guide [them] through the incongruity of this mortal coil.'[580] The desire to rearrange *Goon Squad*'s chapters, which remains a latent possibility in the physical text, finds expression in its iPod/iPad application. Released by Egan's UK publisher, Constable & Robinson, this version provides three ordering schemes under which the chapters can be presented: Egan's original, the chronological, or a random arrangement. Although it presents this option to readers only after they have perused the text once in Egan's intended order, the iPod/iPad version nevertheless undermines the stability of *Goon Squad*'s material text, rendering it one of many possible versions. The profound gaps between *Goon Squad*'s chapters leave them

---

[578] Rick Moody's 'Wilkie Fahnstock, *The Boxed Set*' is another text that presents itself in a musical form, this time the cassette boxed set and its liner notes. Like *Goon Squad*, the narrative takes on the temporality of the musical technology after which it is styled. The biographical story told by the liner notes slides insistently forward through time, mimicking the cassette tape's linear progression, its structural incapacity to jump forwards or backwards. Moody, *Demonology* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), pp. 227-38.
[579] Conte, p. 209.
[580] Wolfgang Funk, 'Found Objects: Narrative (as) Reconstruction in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*', in *The Aesthetics of Authenticity: Medial Constructions of the Real*, ed. by Wolfgang Funk, Florian Gross, and Irmtraud Huber (Verlag, Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), pp. 41-61 (p. 50).

unmoored, new combinations and new narratives lying dormant and unformed in the material text.

This database quality represents a new stage of Iser's indeterminacy, a new intensity of textual gaps that leave readers not only to fill in their contents but to curate the events they separate. In a *PMLA* roundtable, Hayles asserts that, rather than Manovich's 'natural enemies', narrative and database are 'natural symbionts': 'If narrative often dissolves into database, [...] database catalyzes and indeed demands narrative's reappearance as soon as meaning and interpretation are required.'[581] *Goon Squad* is illustrative of this theory, its gaps forming sanctuaries of reflection where discrete chapters can be integrated into a congruent network. Each orientation of its chapters demands that the reader devise correspondences, conjuring relations and meaning out of the blank spaces between stories. But, of course, these arrangements are always provisional, the iPod/iPad application summoning up alternative and hidden schemas that elicit new correspondences. Yet, I want to suggest that the possibility of rearranging the novel's chapters haunts any reading of the text, even outside of its app context.

By undermining the authorised order of the material text in its app context, *Goon Squad* stages the final death of the author that accompanies digitisation, eliminating the writer's control over the appearance of his or her text.[582] Indeed, despite its firm order, by approximating the database form, the material text engrains in its structure the very possibility of this undoing. While *Goon Squad*'s material text does not explicitly invite readers to shuffle its chapters, the possibilities of recombination continue to shadow it,

---

[581] N. Katherine Hayles, 'Narrative and Database: Natural Symbionts', *PMLA*, 122.5 (2007), 1603-08 (p. 1603). Hayles is responding to Ed Folsom's suggestion that while the archive 'demands narrative as an antidote,' this relationship is supplanted in the database, where information, because it is more portable and more easily stored, multiplies beyond narrative's ability to contain it. Folsom, 'Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives', *PMLA*, 122.5 (2007), 1571-79 (p. 1577).

[582] Egan insisted that, before users could randomise *Goon Squad*'s order on the app, they would have to read it first in her chosen form: 'I was adamant that the reader has to read it once my way and then they can shuffle it, but I really know having struggled so much with this issue that there is actually a best way to read it, which is my way and I want to maintain that control.' Here we see directly the conflict between authorship and the possibilities of reorganisation in database fiction. Jennifer Egan, interviewed by Rana Mitter, *Night Waves*, BBC Radio 3, 24 March 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00zm50w/Night_Waves_Julian_Baggini_Jennifer_Egan_Donny_George_Obituary_UK_Census/> [accessed 11 November 2012].

the novel's roving chronology compromising the appearance of agency amongst its characters. If, as Barthes writes, 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author', the reader's creative awakening in database novel strips not just the author of his or her jurisdiction over the text but the characters of their own self-determination.[583] Of *Goon Squad*'s structure, Pankaj Mishra writes: it 'leaves us with a disturbing sense of their (and our) state of unfreedom: it shows us the full arc of their choiceless lives'.[584] The scattered revelation of episodes, the reader's awareness of conclusions before introductions, Mishra suggests, highlights the absence of real agency in Egan's text. This feeling, I argue, is enhanced by a database structure where episodes and events can be rearranged. Such a text, where beginnings, middles, and ends can arrive at random, declares that all events have always already occurred, that no freedom exists amongst its inhabitants. Even if it remains unexpressed in the material book, the recombinant database structure that underlies *Goon Squad*'s composition nevertheless emphasises the sense of predetermination described by Mishra. Thus, we see in the database novel, the invigoration of the reader to create order and analyse indeterminacy at the expense of the author's control and the characters' freedom.[585]

Like Rotman, whose para-self is modelled after the flexible dynamics of digital writing, Hayles has suggested that with digital signification there arises a new subject-formation that reflects the 'the physics of virtual writing'.[586] For Hayles and Rotman, the norms of signification are reflected in the architecture of the subjects that use them. If the 'physics' of the novel's structure, the database's symbolic form, strips subjects of their freedom, I argue in the next section that this too is reflected in the narrative's content, where subjects forfeit self-ownership by transcribing themselves in corporate and government databases. Alex, who traces his self-alienation back to the database,

---

[583] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-48 (p. 148).

[584] Pankaj Mishra, 'Modernity's Undoing', *London Review of Books*, 31 March 2011 <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n07/pankaj-mishra/modernitys-undoing> [accessed 12 August 2014].

[585] Davies in her account of computerised data narrative similarly suggests that by letting readers determine their course through the text, they become curators and the author merely game architect. Davies, p. 54.

[586] N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Condition of Virtuality', *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*, ed. by Peter Lunenfeld (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 68-94 (p. 91).

embodies the pinnacle of this theme in *Goon Squad*, but a similar trajectory is contained in Egan's *Look at Me*. Here, as in the novel's structure, power is transmitted from those delineated within the database to those who oversee its arrangement and its analysis. Sean Cubitt has asked whether a new form of freedom might be found in the flexibility of digital databases, facilitating 'a new, statistical and distributed self, a deconstructed, fully textual, rewritable file.'[587] *Goon Squad* repositions this argument negatively: Egan's database subjects do, in the end, rewrite themselves, but always in response to a loss of self and its information.

Databases and the Superpanopticon

In 2003, considering the cultural implications of online dating, Jennifer Egan imagined the future of social networking websites as:

> a virtual clearinghouse where potential lovers, friends, business associates, audience members and devotees of all forms of culture—invisible to one another in the shadowy cracks of cities around the world—are registered, profiled and findable. An alternate dimension where the randomness and confusion of urban life are at last sorted out.[588]

Emphasised in Egan's article is the Internet's ability to collect and to archive users' data, the chaos of social life made navigable by search engine. In the Internet's early days, *Goon Squad*'s Bix similarly dreams of a future where everyone is findable: he states, 'I picture it like Judgment Day [...] We'll rise up out of our bodies and find each other again in spirit form. We'll meet in that new place, all of us together, and first it'll seem strange, and pretty soon it'll seem strange that you could ever lose someone, or get lost' (209). This characterisation of technological advancement echoes Cathleen Schine's review of the novel, in which she identifies the characters' temporal disorientation in terms of being lost: she writes, 'The question of the novel, the question every character asks, is: How did I get lost? How did I get from there to here?'[589] Schine explicitly recognises Jocelyn as one such figure, who sees her junkie past as 'lost time' in which

---

[587] Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 20.

[588] Jennifer Egan, 'Love in the Time of No Time', *New York Times Magazine*, 23 November 2004 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/23/magazine/23ONLINE.html> [accessed 19 April 2014].

[589] Cathleen Schine, 'Cruel and Benevolent', *New York Review of Books*, 11 Nov 2010 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/11/cruel-and-benevolent/> [accessed 3 March 2012].

'[e]verthing went past, without me' (90). Alongside Jocelyn, we can position Sasha who optimistically differentiates herself and her suicidal friend Rob from the kids she knew in Italy 'who were just lost. You knew they were never going to get back to what they'd been, or have a normal life' (206). Again, Ted distances his sons from the teenaged Sasha, wild and irresponsible, because '[s]he was lost' (221).

Against these bleak portraits of heedlessness, Bix's premonition of a networked future of constant visibility appears, on the surface, to be nurturing and inclusive. I have already argued, however, that in *Goon Squad* lost and unseen moments form silences necessary for creative reflection. This oppression of vision is hinted at elsewhere in the novel: Sasha's therapist speaks of the 'burden of eye contact', for instance, while the chapter 'Goodbye, My Love' reflects on the Orpheus myth, in which her lover's gaze damns Eurydice to the underworld (4). Considered in the context of digital technologies, the near impossibility of disappearing becomes a sacrifice of freedom, Bix's sentiments inverted into troubling and pervasive surveillance measures. The incidental mentions of Google and Facebook appear to support the efficacy of the Internet for reconnection. While Facebook is credited with Drew and Sasha's reunion after years of separation, so too do reconnections on the Web lead to the marriage of two safari-goers (241, 75). When Lou is dying, Bennie tracks down Rhea and Jocelyn to say their final goodbyes. Jocelyn narrates: 'It seems you can find almost anyone on a computer. He found Rhea all the way in Seattle, with a different last name' (88). Just about everybody, excluding Scotty, is traceable by the Internet, but this capability to search and discover is darker than Bix's utopianism initially suggests. His association of the Internet with the Last Judgement indicates a more disturbing side to his optimistic prediction, his posters of the biblical scene portraying 'naked babyish humans getting separated into good and bad, the good ones rising into green fields and golden light, the bad ones vanishing into mouths of monsters' (193).

If, in her 2004 essay, Egan saw dating websites as clarifying the disorganisation of the real world, this online stratification becomes a means of surveillance in *Goon Squad*, one which challenges the workings of typical models of power. While I have already identified a novel zone of personal secrecy that is opened up when people live

different lives on and offline, *Goon Squad* also twins digital technology with the expansion of the visible. I attribute this paradox to a shift in surveillance, moving from a Panopticon model premised on vision to what Mark Poster terms the Superpanopticon, which functions through the database. By allowing its users to veil their identities, a possibility that facilitates Alex's 'blind team', the Internet dismays Michel Foucault's Panopticon system of surveillance in which '[v]isibility is a trap.'[590] Jeremy Benthem devised the Panopticon as a prison blueprint, which places convicts under the unwavering gaze of a central watchtower into which they cannot see. Prisoners live with the sense of being ceaselessly monitored without being able to tell when they are actually being observed and when the tower is empty. The result is a style of surveillance in which the prisoner self-monitors, internalising authority and exercising it on him or herself. Foucault extrapolates from this architectural design a more general theory of social conditioning. Foucault suggests that, 'He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; [...] he becomes the principle of his own subjection.'[591] Foucault further explains that in modernity the principles of the Panopticon telescope out beyond the walls of the prison, functioning as 'a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men.'[592] It is a model for the coercive conditioning of subjects to monitor and normalise themselves.

The relevance of the Panopticon as a metaphor for discipline in the digitised world remains contested territory. Whereas David Lyons lists various scholars who apply facets of Panopticism to contemporary modes of surveillance, Bauman characterises the digital moment as '*post-Panoptical*', signalling '*the end of the era of mutual engagement*.'[593] Allan Sekula has suggested that '[g]iven the central optical metaphor in Foucault's work,' systems of surveillance must be considered in relation to

[590] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 200.

[591] Ibid., pp. 202-203.

[592] Ibid., p. 205.

[593] David Lyons, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 67-71; Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 11. Emphasis in the original.

the rise of photography.[594] The same can be said for digital technologies, which have both complicated the terrain of optics and, as a result, necessitate a reconsideration of surveillance. Sekula's emphasis on the archive's historical role in discipline, in diagramming the deviant's body and developing an organised system for tracing convicts, is repeated in Mark Poster's consideration of the database in the acceleration of Panopticism in the digital era. Poster's work witnesses the transition from surveillance based on optics to what Richard Clarke calls 'dataveillance', employing data systems to monitor individuals or group.[595] Gilles Deleuze views this shift as a move from 'disciplinary societies' to '*societies of control*' in which control is articulated by numerical code, 'a *password*,' which determines access to information.[596]

Poster argues that the digital age is pervaded by a logic of the Superpanopticon, manifest in digital databases. By making transactions online, by allowing personal details to enter computer databases, he argues, people have become 'participants in the disciplining and surveillance of themselves as consumers.'[597] As a collection of information, the database forms the locus for self-definition in the digital era. The database, he writes, stages 'the constitution of an additional self, one that may be acted upon to the detriment of the "real" self without that "real" self ever being aware of what is happening.'[598] Much of this damage Poster attributes to the reductive dialect of data, what he terms its 'impoverished, limited language,' articulating the self through a 'non-ambiguous grammatical structure' composed of 'information in rigidly defined categories or fields.'[599] Poster charges the database with fabricating a version of the subject out of the simple language of data, reducing the complexity of the self by rendering information its definitive substance. The database enables its owners to play with and move around data, to reconstruct the subject according to its own parameters. Poster writes, 'the structure or grammar of the database *creates* relationships among

---

[594] Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 (Winter 1986), 3-64 (p. 9 n 13).
[595] Richard Clarke, 'Information Technology and Dataveillance', *Communications from the ACM*, 31.5 (1988), 498-512 (p. 499).
[596] Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', *October*, 59 (1992), 3-7 (p. 4, 5).
[597] Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 93.
[598] Poster, *Mode*, pp. 97-8.
[599] Ibid., p. 95, 96, 96.

pieces of information that do not exist in those relationships outside of the database.'[600] Thus Poster indicts the database as a technology of surveillance and subjection, for instituting the basic vocabulary of data into the process of self-fashioning and for helping institutions to manipulate personal information for their own purposes.

Egan's scrutiny of the database emerges in her earlier novel *Look at Me*, mimicking the content and the language of Poster's critique. In it, Moose, an academic, constructs a cultural history of vision, beginning with the invention of glass and the attendant development of windows, mirrors, eyeglasses, telescopes, and microscopes that made perceptible the previously inscrutable domains of the private, the distant, and the minuscule. This narrative of vision mirrors the movement Virilio sees from 'the *passive optics* of the space of matter (glass, water, air) which, in the end, only covers man's immediate proximity', to an active, electronic visuality, whose speed disqualifies the notion of the horizon.[601] For Moose, the extension of the possibilities of the visual together have created 'a world constructed and lived from the outside', experienced by Charlotte as a vigorous and insistent self-consciousness that manifests itself as she archives her life online.[602] This post-industrial information age, according to Moose, spawns 'quicksilver' subjects self-consciously 'assembled for the eye from prototypes'.[603] Charlotte's foray into the burgeoning online world confirms that Moose's suspicions are only intensified on the Internet, where Charlotte knowingly fashions herself for display as a consumer brand.

After a life-altering and image-transforming car accident, Charlotte is invited to be an early participant on ExtraOrdinary People, a website on which selected individuals are paid to diarise their experiences. It is significant that, when entrepreneur Thomas first describes the website, he specifies, 'It's not a magazine—it's a database'.[604] ExtraOrdinaryPeople, while not strictly limiting the grammar with which Charlotte describes her history, does structure the categories through which she conceptualises and

---

[600] Ibid., p. 96.
[601] Virilio, *Open*, p. 35.
[602] Egan, *Look*, p. 484.
[603] Ibid., p. 483.
[604] Ibid., p. 245.

displays it—categories which include, 'Childhood Memories. Dreams. Diary Entries [...] Future Plans/Fantasies. Regrets/Missed Opportunities.'[605] Just after her initial meeting with Thomas, Charlotte begins thinking of her life through these key terms: she narrates, 'the mercenary part of me was already pacing the confines of my life, taking measurements, briskly surveying the furniture, formatting my thoughts to Thomas Keene's specifications and calculating their price.'[606] This moment elucidates the database's insidious framework, pushing Charlotte to reformat her memory to the archive's schema in a bid to maximise her financial profits. Indeed, as Charlotte's web presence becomes more popular, and Thomas dedicates more resources to its display, he attempts to recreate and tape the car accident that scarred her. In doing so, he refashions history for the sake of a consumer audience hungry for entertainment.

By the end of the novel, Charlotte's past has become so wrenched from her own control and reformatted for its audience that she sells her identity to Thomas for a distinctly Panoptic reason: 'Life can't be sustained under the pressure of so many eyes.'[607] In this moment of overexposure, the next stage of Moose's clear sight, the dictates of the Panopticon still resonate, the self consciously constructed for public display, for a manicured visibility. Charlotte's creation of a database identity is ultimately self-destructive, confirming Poster's assertion that though the database arranges a separate delineation of self its repercussions are still felt in the real world. Charlotte, abnegating her information to the database, can only reinvent herself, changing her hair colour and taking on a new name. The database, though a seemingly a technology of preservation, is thus paradoxically implicated in a mercurial postmodern temporality of stark change and subjective renovation. The danger of self-curation is the threat of losing control of the archive and thus over oneself and one's own past.

---

[605] Ibid.
[606] Ibid., p. 258.
[607] Ibid., p. 514.

*Goon Squad***: Panoptic to Superpanoptic Surveillance**

In its peregrinations among decades between the 1970s and the near future, *Goon Squad* measures the augmentation of surveillance from the terrain of optics—from watching, observing, spying—to the database. At the terminus of this development, we find the possibilities of visualisation expanded and the social landscape comprehensively mapped, just as a new form of online secrecy has taken hold. In the chronologically earliest chapters, the gaze is the primary mode of security and self-scrutiny, sight being a dominant metaphor for and mode of surveillance. In the final chapter, the work of surveillance is augmented by the database, which obscures characters from themselves when, like Charlotte Swenson, their identities are stolen by the corporate system.

As in the Panopticon, *Goon Squad* portrays subjects whose behaviours are conditioned by the gazes of others. In 'Safari', the bird-watchers Mildred and Fiona covertly monitor the social happenings around them, young Rolph realising in its final line: 'I don't think those ladies were ever watching birds' (87). The presence of the policing eye, however, is more effective for Sasha, in 'Out of Body', who derives comfort when abroad from imagining that her lost father is tracking her, 'making sure I was okay' (233). When she begins university, she tells Rob that her stepfather has 'hir[ed] a detective to make sure she "toed the line" on her own in New York' (198). The detective, though likely fictitious, serves to regulate Sasha against her darker impulses. While Sasha attempts to streamline her behaviour through the projection of a make-believe observer, Rob, in the same chapter, internalises the Panoptic gaze, bifurcating into a person who acts in the world and a self-surveying critic who judges his illicit desires. The second-person narrative voice suggests that Rob is telling the story to himself, and this sense of division is confirmed when he notes in the chapter's final scene, 'your mind pulls away as it does so easily, so often, without your even noticing sometimes' (213). This separation between the self that acts and the self that watches permits Rob simultaneously to carry out and to condemn his repressed desires. After revealing to Sasha his previous sexual encounter with a man, Rob narrates: 'It wasn't you in the car with James. You were somewhere else, looking down, thinking, That fag is fooling around with another guy. How can he do that? How can he want it? How can

he live with himself?' (200). Rob's duality signals his incorporation of social stigma, registering in the visual terms of surveillance the subject monitoring and chastening its own yearnings.

Developing on Sasha's and Rob's strategies for self-regulation, Dolly's chapter demonstrates the hyperbolic affect of the Internet on the Panoptic mode of surveillance. Hired to reform the image of B, a murderous dictator, Dolly manipulates the public's perspective by having him photographed wearing a fuzzy hat and accompanied by the fallen celebrity Kitty Jackson. When the actress is taken hostage, Dolly emails 'pictures of General B. nuzzling Kitty Jackson' to newspapers, which leads to them 'being posted and traded on the Web' just hours later (172). This increased exposure ironically results in B's policing by newspaper photographers, who find him where assassins never could. The paparazzi are 'superb hiders, crouching like monkeys in the trees, burying themselves in shallow pits, camouflaging inside bunches of leaves' (173). Unable to escape their attentive lens, B must amend his violent activities and transition his country to democracy. Here, as in Sasha's case, the policing gaze is redemptive. The implication, nonetheless, remains that the watchful eyes of others result in the regulation of behaviour. In Dolly's case, however, this surveillance is interpenetrated by corporate press agencies and by the Internet, exponentially increasing its scale and speed: Dolly emails the photos '[m]inutes later', they are uploaded and exchanged online '[w]ithin a couple of hours', the international press begins contacting her '[b]y nightfall' (172), and photographers start canvassing the General after 'three or four days' (173).

With the rise of digital media, surveillance enters the purview of the database and its ability to categorise and to track subjects in ways that transcend typical observation. Jules Jones anticipates this shift in the fantasy surveillance system he recommends, tongue-in-cheek, for Central Park. In his dystopic vision, encoded checkpoints measure from a bank of records the trustworthiness of each person who wishes to gain entrance. These evaluations reduce individuals to a numbered ranking distilled from categories that include, 'marriage or lack thereof, children or lack thereof, professional success or lack thereof, healthy bank account or lack thereof, contact with childhood friends or lack thereof, ability to sleep peacefully at night or lack thereof [...]'

(189 n 4). Jules's forecast animates Poster's assertion that databases delimit their subjects through a symbolic system that 'contains no ambiguity', numerical grades being his primary example.[608] Such rankings, he suggests, show the database to be shaped by the political associations of its owners, who assign the reductive number grades and thereby constitute subjects according to their own ideology. This allocation of rankings, while carried out online, creates real-world effects: Jules's system, complemented by radar screens and security guards, regulates the movement of park-goers by ensuring that non-famous people do not bother those celebrities with higher profiles and, thus, higher rankings.

The database surveillance measures that Jules dreams up are just about realised by the novel's end. Alongside its elderly birdwatchers, 'Safari' reveals the future invention of 'a scanning device that becomes standard issue for crowd security' (65). This security apparatus, which echoes Jules's checkpoints, is seemingly in place by the final chapter, where Scotty's concert venue is outfitted with 'visual scanning devices affixed to cornices, lampposts, and trees' (339).[609] These security measures are not limited to checkpoints but include ubiquitous and noisy choppers whose 'sound Alex hadn't been able to bear in the early years—too loud, too loud—but over time he'd gotten used to it: the price of safety' (338-39). Security in this post-war landscape is immense, stressed by 'the density of police and security agents' at the concert, and T devices are integral to this newfound surveillance (339). Not only do police have special T handsets, but the possibilities of their telescopic vision and its search function are available more widely; recall that Alex employs his handset to locate Rebecca in the concert's crowd.

The topography of this social space has been almost wholly mapped through the widespread employment of digital devices. Scotty emerges as the antithesis of digitised

---

[608] Poster, *Mode*, p. 96.

[609] Data checkpoints similarly populate the New York City of Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, where street-level displays show the credit rankings of passersby, 'reducing everyone to a simple three-digit numeral'. These Credit Poles function within a larger culture of display, in which transparent jeans are fashionable and people constantly grade the attractiveness of those around them, but like *Goon Squad*'s checkpoints they are also implicated in surveillance. See Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story* (London: Granta, 2010), p. 53.

subjectivity due to his Luddite scepticism. He is the only member of the 'old gang' who cannot be located to visit Lou on his deathbed. Jocelyn notes, 'only Scotty has disappeared. No computer can find him' (89). Indeed, in the chapter that he narrates, Scotty expresses a fear of computers, because 'if you can find Them, then They can find you, and I didn't want to be found' (102). Scotty is unique amongst the characters of 'Pure Language' for dismaying the infallible search function that Bix presciently ascribes to the Internet. While others can be traced by police, their scanned handsets revealing their identities, Alex identifies Scotty as 'a man you knew just by looking had never had a page or a profile or a handle or a handset, who was part of no one's data, a guy who had lived in the cracks all these years, forgotten and full of rage, in a way that now registered as pure. Untouched' (344). Whereas database surveillance has rendered human geography mappable and burdened the population with constant visibility, tracking and monitoring individuals through their handheld devices, Scotty remains uncharted and hidden.

Alex is emblematic of the first generation of digitised subjects, who handed their information over to corporate institutions almost without realising it, and for this reason he sets the database at the core of his self-estrangement. Alex ascribes his willingness to abandon his own idea of himself and organise the illegal 'blind team' advertising scheme to the institutional database:

> he never could quite forget that every byte of information he'd posted online (favorite color, vegetable, sexual position) was stored in the databases of multinationals who swore they would never, ever use it—that he was *owned*, in other words, having sold himself unthinkingly at the point in his life when he'd felt most subversive[.] (324, emphasis in original)

Whereas Scotty escapes surveillance because he has never surrendered his information, Alex—representative of his peers—cannot retrieve his data and, thus, feels interminably possessed by institutions that hold it within their databanks. Alex's inability to repossess his information illustrates a turn in capitalism after digitisation. Hayles argues that unlike the capitalism of material objects, where ownership is characterised by possession, in the virtual world, where information is easily replicated, capitalism

becomes defined by access.[610] Unlike material objects, information cannot easily be reclaimed, stolen, or destroyed.

Alex's profound alienation arises from the knowledge that his information is not simply lost but that it can never be reclaimed, that institutions control his data and, while they guarantee it is not being analysed, he cannot be certain of what use to which it is being put. Daniel Solove diagnoses this disaffection borne of our culture of 'digital dossiers', which allows institutions to make decisions and evaluations about people without accountability. Solove contends that the 'bureaucratic ways of using our information have palpable effects on our lives because people use our dossiers to make important decisions about us to which we are not always privy.'[611] As Solove notes, Alex feels disconnected from himself because his data is being parsed for details and used to draw conclusions in nebulous and bureaucratic ways. Unable to repossess his data and unsure of how it is being marshalled, Alex orchestrates Benny's blind team to define himself against the picture of himself archived in the database, to render that information obsolete. Yet, in doing so, he becomes further enmeshed in corporate manipulation, gathering people who will sell their voice, their advocacy, and their opinion to advertise Scotty's upcoming concert. In reacting against his previous optimism, the information gathered by institutions, and producing the blind team, Alex only re-inscribes institutional power and exploitation.

More than detecting the contemporary anxiety rooted in the veiled information practices of surveillance institutions, 'Pure Language' interrogates the ideology that underpins the language of data. Like Poster, who argues that the database delineates subjects in a limiting, reductive, and manipulable discourse, *Goon Squad* critiques the language of data for producing a cultural belief in its own transparency, for seeing in data's clarity and the absence of ambiguity the revelation of unmediated truth. Alex's précis of his database estrangement hints at the simplistic parameters from which the database captures its subjects: 'favorite color, vegetable, sexual position'. The banality

---

[610] Hayles, 'The Condition', p. 78.
[611] Daniel Solove, *The Digital Person: Technology and Privacy in the Digital Age* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004), p. 9.

of these keywords echoes the chapter's more general critique of the language of information used on T devices and its effect on the younger generation. Walter Benjamin defines information as 'lay[ing] claim to prompt verifiability', suggesting that it assumes the appearance of being '"understandable in itself."'[612] It is just this quality of clarity that Lulu appreciates in the language of the T handset. Prototypical of the younger cohort, Lulu views the plain semiotics of the T as an aesthetic ideal, because for her, as stated earlier, it contains 'no philosophy, no metaphors, no judgments'—that is, nothing hidden. For Lulu and her business-major peers, terms like 'up front' and 'out in the open' cease to possess meaning because they refuse to lend significance to the concealed or the veiled reasons behind speech (327). It is for this reason that Lulu has no ethical problem with purchasing opinions for the blind team: she contends, 'if I believe, I believe. Who are you to judge my reasons?' (327). The veneration of a clean aesthetic, of discourse rid of complexity, bodies cleaned of 'piercings, tattoos or scarifications', and vocabularies wiped of profanities, reveals a disregard for what is secreted behind representation (325). Like the social terrain, whose blank spaces seem to have been mapped, Lulu's fully digitised generation seeks a symbolic system without indeterminacy in which all significance is immediately visible. Lulu believes they have discovered this clean symbolism in digital communication, which avoids interpretative intricacy and assumes its own certainty.

While Lulu believes in the stability and the clarity of the discourse of data, 'Pure Langauge' frequently criticises this idiom for the simplicity of its symbolism. Alex complicates Lulu's sponsorship of this language when he notes 'how easily baby talk fitted itself into the crawl space of a T' (335). Like Poster, then, Alex critiques the non-ambiguous patois of the data as a platform for communication and for delineating the self. This language, denuded of complexity, fails to capture the nuances or particularities of the individual, facilitating only juvenile communication. The chapter, furthermore, undermines the seeming clarity of data. Despite its assumed ability to illuminate wholly and quantify accurately, there remains meaningful wavers of the indistinct and

---

[612] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Arendt, trans. by Zohn, pp. 83-109 (p. 89).

unquantifiable that confound data's language. Alex, for instance, receives a message from Lulu that he reads as 'nice', an uncharacteristically sarcastic reply to his lamentations of the dwindling supply of air and light in his apartment—that is, until he understands that, though 'nyc' can be read as 'nice', what Lulu really means is New York City (335). A similar volatility in the reductive language of data emerges in Jules's dream security system. Jules acerbically pleads that his own infamy for attacking Kitty be treated akin to other forms of fame, such that he will be rewarded a high ranking and afforded additional privilege. The numbered ranking system of dataveillance, Jules notes, contains its own kind of slippery indeterminacy where various types of notoriety collapse into each other.

While Lulu's generation reaches out for a language that—like the space they occupy—is resistant to the hidden or the undisclosed, these moments insist on an undertow to data signification that transcends its surface simplicity. What is condemned in this chapter is not just the reductive discourse of the database but also the belief that this sparse language could achieve comprehensive transparency. Data becomes, then, a language that occludes its representational frailties by assuming the capacity to capture truth simplistically. The chapter thus reprimands the database for reducing subjects to its meagre language while naturalising its idiom as a transparent and clear discourse for analysing the world and the subject. Revealing the complexity elided by the language of information, the novel affiliates data with the aesthetic of the digital screen, the cleaned up version of reality that Bennie decries in digital music and art. This critique of data, then, is part of a larger dialectic sketched out by the novel, revolving around two conceptions of purity manifest in Scotty and in Lulu.

Scotty's anti-technology stance and his acoustic music affiliate him with a purity of the natural world, of analogue muddiness. Both Bennie and Alex call Scotty's music 'pure' and 'untouched' (321, 344). Alex describes Scotty's music in terms of its 'mournful vibrato; the jangly quaver of slide guitar', emphasising modulation and irregularity (320). Scotty is more generally linked with a purity of indeterminacy, his vision marked by 'permanent gray smudges' that he considers 'a visual enhancement' (48). Lulu, on the other hand, represents a purity of the digital screen, defined by

uniformity and the elimination of dissonance. Refusing to acknowledge what is hidden behind representation, Lulu embraces data language—the 'pure language' of the chapter's title—for its abdication of metaphor. Contrarily, we find in Scotty's music 'double meanings and hidden layers' (343).

Avery Gordon argues that, 'In a culture seemingly ruled by technologies of hypervisibility, we are led to believe not only that everything can be seen, but also that everything is available and accessible for our consumption.'[613] The language of information and the surveillance of the database work to shore up this belief in hypervisibility, to obscure those moments and meanings hidden outside of their systems of representation. While Lulu and her generation adhere to this meaning of purity, Scotty, hiding in the gaps, gestures back towards a previous notion of purity that rejects the aesthetic of the screen. Scotty advocates a return to a pre-digital notion of a purity based on aesthetic muddiness and real-world uncertainty, on gaps in representation and on the social map. We thus see in Scotty's 'pure' aesthetic a mirror of the literary indeterminacy that the text structurally embraces in order to counteract the uniformity manufactured by the digital and revered by Lulu. In the final section, I extend the novel's advocacy for the purity of symbolic uncertainty to the material collection.

Return to the Material Archive

Against the visions of the digital archive, *Goon Squad* juxtaposes Sasha who consistently constructs material archives. An impulse to collect appears to track her history, first emerging as an obsession with shoplifting as an adolescent. When we encounter Sasha in Ted's chapter, in her late teens and living in destitution in Naples, she relies on theft to remain financially afloat. In the first chapter, Sasha suffers a relapse of kleptomania, and her therapist attempts to link her condition with the disappearance of her father at age six. This suggested causation, which the text does not confirm, places the impulse to collect within the realm of family trauma. However, the text also implies that collecting is built into Sasha physically, a natural impulse. When Ted

---

[613] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 16.

encounters her in Naples, he describes her in archival terms: her adolescence was a 'catalog of woes', her appearance now an 'inventory of breasts and hips and gently indented waist' (220, 224). Sasha's archival affiliation is, in this chapter, strengthened by her remarkable recall: she says, 'I remember everything' (224). The novel discovers in the material collection two answers to the problematic functioning of the database. The first chapter, 'Found Objects', construes the material collection as an ultimately inscrutable form of biography, in comparison to the terse legibility and assumed transparency of the digital language of the database. In 'Great Rock and Roll Pauses', Sasha's domestic sculptures and collages deteriorate over time, ensuring that the personal information they contain cannot be preserved in institutional databases.

In her reflections on the digitisation of the Le Corbusier archive, Susan Yee stresses the compromise of working with computer rather than material collections: she writes, 'It allowed me to do things that I could not do before. I could search it, manipulate it, copy it, save it, share it. But what did it do to me? It made the drawings feel anonymous and it made me feel anonymous. I felt no connection to the digital drawings on the screen, no sense of the architect who drew it.'[614] The database, because it eschews physical space for digital memory, is able to contain more information and make those details more easily accessible. Yet, Yee views the increased ability to manipulate the digital archive as a detriment to its analysis, forming a barrier against a material intimacy with the collected objects. Yee's worry, Turkle suggests, expresses a more general 'anxiety that digital objects will take us away from the body and its ways of understanding.'[615] The historian Carolyn Steedman similarly wonders about the 'epistemological status' of the digital archive and analyses of it.[616] If the ability to scan and, thus, to magnify documents allows Steedman to decipher words and names that would otherwise remain unintelligible, is she any longer reading history as it was written, as it would have been understood at the time? Steedman reasons, 'I am reading

---

[614] Susan Yee, 'The Archive', in *Evocative Objects*, ed. by Sherry Turkle (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 30-36 (pp. 34-5).

[615] Sherry Turkle, 'What Makes an Object Evocative?', in *Evocative Objects*, ed. by Turkle, pp. 307-26 (p. 325).

[616] Carolyn Steedman, 'After the Archive', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), pp. 321-40 (p. 328).

words that were never there in the first place, for they were never written *as I read them*.'[617] The historical status of the archived object is thus thrown into crisis by its digitisation.

In these accounts, the digital archive paradoxically compromises readerly interpretation by making its contents more readable. *Goon Squad*, I want to suggest, mirrors these critiques by presenting the material archive in terms of intimacy and inscrutability. I have argued that the digital revolution in *Goon Squad* threatens the cultivation of intimacy specifically by processing interactions through the T device. Whereas the self is threatened by the language of the database and the cultural belief in its accuracy, the material archive witnesses eruptions of intimacy—of sexuality or romance—because it withholds its meaning. Here, materiality and inconclusiveness renews the intimacy that was compromised by digital technology and database certainty. Jean Baudrillard, as I have previously noted, argues that, alienated from social discourse, collectors found a personal language through their objects.[618] Whereas Baudrillard condemns the collection because its signification can never communicate beyond the collector, *Goon Squad* celebrates this very impenetrability. We might consider *Goon Squad* alongside Susan Sontag's 'Against Interpretation'. Rather than probing the text's hidden meaning, to force an interpretation it, Sontag advises a turn to 'an erotics of art.'[619] Likewise, the impossibility of outsiders fixing the material archive, of reading it definitively, provokes outbursts of temporary intimacy.[620]

In the introductory chapter, Sasha visits a therapist, Coz, in an attempt to cure her kleptomania. The objects she steals, always taken from people, never from stores, are collected on a table in Sasha's apartment, isolated from her other possessions and never put to use. Coz analyses her desire to steal as 'a way for Sasha to assert her toughness,

---

[617] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

[618] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 114.

[619] Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 3-14 (p. 14).

[620] William Davies King discovers a kind of erotics in the collection. He compares acquiring a new object to a kiss, which answers a desire but also creates a new desire: 'Always there is one more possibly graspable object of still higher longing. A kiss answers a desire, but it also stirs a desire, for another and another, until the mythical ultimate kiss. For most, the kiss is selective. For hoarders, it is everything. For me, the kiss is of nothing.' William Davies King, *Collections of Nothing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 28.

her individuality' (4), and she later acknowledges the biographical nature of the archive: 'It contained years of her life compressed' (15). Unlike her online dating profiles, where Sasha lies about her age, the archive of stolen objects contains 'the raw, warped core of her life' (16). During their date, she anxiously observes Alex examine her archive: 'Watching Alex move his eyes over the pile of objects stirred something in Sasha' (16). At this intense moment, she pulls him to the carpet to sleep with him, resisting his attempt to lead her to the bedroom and away from the collection. Alex has not deciphered her secret, the biographical content encoded into the archive. As she previously noted, though the collection is 'clearly not random' it remains 'illegible' (15). Alex's stare excavates no meaning from the archive but allows him to locate a packet of bath salts in the mess, to address the collection as useful objects rather than ones endowed with biographical meaning. Rather, Sasha's arousal results from showcasing her biography with the knowledge that it cannot be interpreted, even by herself.

Whereas Alex felt owned by corporations, who databased his details in easily readable language, material and written collections provide a mechanism for displaying the self that vexes interpretation. The text locates a sensual power in displaying biography in a way that evades successful interpretation. In the next chapter, Sasha misinterprets the meanings of two of Bennie's collections. On their car ride back into Manhattan, Bennie plays a series of songs that, for him, narrates the descent of music into the 'lifeless and cold' tracks of the digital era (38). Sasha, however, fails to notice its dormant diatribe, although her remark about the absent World Trade Centre seems to double as an apt commentary on his track list. Throughout the chapter, Bennie also compiles a list of personal events fraught with shame, denoted by keywords. When Sasha reads this list—'Kissing Mother Superior, incompetent, hairball, poppy seeds, on the can'—she mistakes it for a compilation of potential song titles (39). By transgressing on his biographical archive and misinterpreting it, Sasha unknowingly causes Bennie to reconsider his past. After she recites it aloud, Bennie's list of shameful events 'sounded like titles to him, too. He felt peaceful, cleansed' (39). Though the past is 'neutralized' by Sasha's 'scratchy voice', her misreading fails to awaken Bennie sexually, his lost libido a primary concern throughout the story (39). Instead of lust, 'What he felt for

Sasha was love,' readerly misapprehension again erupting in a form of momentary romance (39).

In her review of the text, Schine writes of Sasha's collection and Bennie's list as two archives of 'shame': she notes, 'Instead of stolen wallets, he is weighted down with moments of humiliation from the past that he scribbles on scraps of paper when he recalls them.' Yet, in both cases, the power with which the archives are imbued evaporates with the frisson of misinterpretation. While Sasha 'take[s] a symbolic step' by allowing Alex to use one of her previously safeguarded objects, Bennie feels purified by Sasha's misapprehension (17). Although both of these misreadings manifest in erotic or romantic feelings, these emotions are markedly temporary: Sasha's interest in Alex quickly wanes after their sexual encounter, and Sasha does not return Bennie's expressions of love. These flickers of romance, however, also presage recollections of deeper but lost intimacies. The scent of the bath salts recalls for Sasha 'the smell of Lizzie's bathroom,' provoking memories of the friend from whom she stole the salts and with whom she is no longer in contact (17). Likewise, Bennie's feelings of love quickly turn into memories of his marriage to Stephanie, 'before he'd let her down so many times that she couldn't stop being mad' (39-40). Thus, we witness in these archival misreadings not just fleeting flickers of romance but also evocations of powerful relationships of close friends and spouses. As such, they seemingly oppose the digital condition, which threatens to undermine intimate relationships, by tapping into recollections of deep bonds.

Whereas Alex loses his information by giving up access to it, his information reduced to simple database language, the material archive articulates itself in a personal code unavailable to spectators. Unlike the limiting digital language, these material collections operate through a mysterious discourse that disables the ability to decode their personal content and, as a result, produces ecstatic responses. The emphasis on the material archive is similarly the focus of Sasha's final appearance in the novel, in her daughter's PowerPoint journal. The setting of 'Great Rock and Roll Pauses' forms a fundamental contrast to Alex's future, digitised chapter. Unlike the New York of 'Pure Language', which materialises Virilio's argument that the digital destroys the horizon,

Sasha's desert environment is almost pure horizon. Indeed, Virilio writes that the horizon line '*is the ideal symbol of the desert*.'[621] Despite this contrast, for Virilio the desert is still evocative of the digital condition, because its empty and flat landscape removes all distinction between physical distance. Since there are no clear markers in the desert, everything is always familiar, always nearby, and the idea of journey, narrative, and change lose significance. With images and information from around the globe immediately accessible online, Virilio thus views in the current digitised moment 'the "zero threshold" in which all distances cancel each other out, [...] *the desertification of the dwarfing of the world*.'[622] Both desert and digital are, in his account, panoramas of sameness.

Whereas Virilio collapses the desert into the digital, *Goon Squad* maintains their distinction, based on the desert's deep silence. Jean Baudrillard locates the American desert as 'a natural extension of the inner silence of the body', opposing it to technology, language, and humanity's other 'constructive faculties'.[623] Alison's journal likewise aligns the desert with silence and, more specifically, with the musical pauses over which her brother obsesses. In the concentric circles of her slide 'Sounds', Alison positions her sentiment, 'The whole desert is a pause' in the outermost ring: the desert's pause contains, the image implies, 'a hum like the pause in "Closing Time" by Semisonic' and 'faint clicks like the scratchy pause in "Bernadette"' (295). As a zone of silence, enclosing a landscape of aesthetic pauses, the desert appears as the embodiment of the text's gaps. These textual silences, like Baudrillard's silent desert, function as an antidote for the dearth of silence in the digital era, the desert landscape similarly emerging as the antithesis to the noisiness of the digital space embodied by Alex's clamourous New York.

It is in this desert setting that Sasha fashions her final archive. Sasha makes sculptures out of the jetsam of her family's everyday life that, she says, are 'precious because they're casual and meaningless' (273). Like her kleptomania collection, this

[621] Paul Virilio, 'The Twilight of the Grounds', in *The Desert*, ed. by Wilfred Thesiger and others (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), pp. 102-118 (p. 105).
[622] Ibid.*,* p. 106.
[623] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1988), p. 68.

archive is biographical, revealing 'the whole story if you really look' (273). Rather than preserving these archives, however, her collages and sculptures are designed so that they degrade and disappear into the desert. When Alison and her father return from their stroll, they see one sculpture 'fading into the dust' (294). This is, writes Alison quoting her mother, 'part of the process' (250). Sasha's desert sculptures elude Alex's primary anxieties over the database through their materiality and their short lifespan. In contrast to data's endless reproducibility, Sasha's collages are meant to self-destruct, embracing the death drive that Derrida locates at the heart of the archive. Whereas Alex worried about how his databased information was being used, Sasha's collages ensure that her biography cannot be interred indefinitely. By implanting her subjectivity in material designed to disintegrate, Sasha refuses to portray herself in a form that might be stolen from her. Whereas Alex can never change or, indeed, see the details that form his database identity, the material decay of the sculpture ensures that no one else can claim ownership over it. The comparison between Alex's database and Sasha's sculptures reveals an ultimate antagonism between the self and its archivisation. It is his knowledge that a database of his information exists that provokes Alex to act against his ethics, to reconfigure himself fundamentally. Sasha, on the other hand, consciously builds archives that will finally fade away, leaving no trace in the desert sands. This comparison suggests that Sasha's self-destructive sculptures are precisely what allow her to survive, to escape the archive's tyranny, which ultimately forces Alex to define himself against what feels authentic and true.

The corruptibility of the material collection, then, as well as its impenetrable form, signals a strategy for evading the increasingly insistent sprawl of the database. The desert sands, like the novel's textual gaps, provide a destructive but necessary silence in a digital space suffused with noise. Against the tracking mechanisms of the database, its pervasive surveillance, the novel holds up the material archive as an inscrutable and evanescent option that holds the self's contents while maintaining their secrecy. The database novel, though controlling its characters, implements gaps in contrast to the sheen of the digital screen, unmarked by textual indeterminacy. *Goon Squad* through its formal and thematic qualities celebrates the 'pure' muddiness of

reality and condemns the digital screen's aesthetic of purity: simple, forthcoming, definite. Demonstrating the fallacy of this reading, the novel excavates precisely what the screen ignores and, in the process, finds new forms of resistance in a return to the material world and archive.

Conclusion: The Personal Archive and the Death Drive

This dissertation has argued that the contemporary American novel persistently presents and contemplates the archive as a mechanism through which the self comes into being. In focusing on the personal archive, these novels address a cultural transformation in the ways people understand and fashion themselves as subjects. The widespread vogue for collecting and documenting in the late-twentieth century has coalesced, in recent years, around digital technologies and applications, which augment the amount of self-knowledge available for collection and the appearance that it takes. Baudrillard, alongside several others, has suggested that the latent content of the collection is always the subjectivity of the collector him or herself. Thus, we might position both the material and digital archives that abound in contemporary personal life within a related ecology of self-archivisation and as the flowering of an older tradition. Andreas Huyssen ensconces this accelerated culture of 'self-musealization' within a memory culture vital since the late 1970s.[624] Personal digital technology is, in part, responsible for the growing possibilities of entwining the self around an archival network, the culture of social networking being a prime example. As danah boyd and Kate Crawford note, 'Personal computing and the Internet have made it possible for a wider range of people—including scholars, marketers, governmental agencies, educational institutions, and motivated individuals—to produce, share, interact with, and organize data.'[625] Acts of archiving have thereby become an accessible and common means for the subject to manage, enact, and ponder itself in contemporary American life, by curating material and digital objects into meaningful and expressive displays. Contemporary novels of the archive track this cultural shift towards archival self-fashioning through their overlapping concern with memory monumentalised in the material forms of goods and photographs and in the digital forms of network profiles and computer storage.

This dissertation has pointed to several opportunities and perils that contemporary novels locate within self-curation. While they frequently see the archive

---

[624] Huyssen, *Twilight*, p. 14.
[625] danah boyd and Kate Crawford, 'Critical Questions for Big Data: Provocations for a Cultural, Technological, and Scholarly Phenomenon', *Information, Communication & Society*, 15.5 (2012), 662-79 (p. 664).

engaged in stabilising psychoanalytically a humanist, integrated subjectivity, the novels also posit several dangers incited on the self through its archivisation. Though curation might buttress the subject, the archive, depending on the form it takes, also threatens to overwhelm systems of meaning or to jettison personal information to surveillance institutions. The archive, then, offers the subject a system through which to seek coherence while, simultaneously, threatening it with erasure. Though the novels warn of archival threats, they also answer these critiques with alternative forms of curation that neuter the very dangers they expose. As such, these novels do not advise the wholesale abandonment of the personal archive so much as the critical application of it to private and social life. The novels also demonstrate that there is far from a single archival subject: the subject that emerges—or fails to emerge—from the archive is contoured and conditioned by the form of curation it employs. In this sense, the novels reformulate the proposition made by Jacques Derrida that 'the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future.'[626] If the content of the personal archive is the archivist's own subjectivity, than, as these novels contend, the archive's structure imprints itself on the subject it enacts.

There are many threads that weave through the preceding chapters, two of which I outlined in the Introduction. To review: all four novels, in their own ways, entangle the personal archive within systems of vision and domesticity. Consistently the novels envision the archive as compensating for a deficiency in visual knowledge: clarifying a past whose trauma has rendered it invisible (Auster), or illuminating a panoramic view of the subject in its entirety (Hustvedt). In doing so, the novels point to the frailty of visual knowledge, insisting that the archive can provide a perspective inaccessible to the eyes. It is precisely for this reason that Doctorow advocates the 'blind' form of narrative against an archival method that would seek to establish the terrain of history with certainty and singularity. In narrating without visual knowledge, Doctorow suggests that the past can be made accessible in its radical unknowability and contradiction. Egan, similarly, critiques the impulse to see and to seize the subject in its archivisation. Egan

---

[626] Derrida, 'Archive', p. 17.

charges the digital database with promoting and adhering to a cultural belief in the transparency of its information, adjoining the archive with the speculating lens of surveillance. Like Doctorow, Egan warns against archives that strive to see with too much precision, but she also finds, in a return to materiality, a counter-force that productively obscures the self. Thus these novels, in linking the work of archives with sight, simultaneously take note of the visual enhancements granted by curation and the shortcomings of visual knowledge.

The novels also conceive of their personal archives in relationship to the home, as either consolidating or destroying the domestic space. For Paul Auster, the personal archive forms a temporary anchor for the subject when the home's stability, during the recent housing crisis, can no longer be taken for granted. Whereas Auster finds a stand-in for domestic order within the archive, Hustvedt imbues personal artefacts, arranged inside the desk drawer, with the propensity to stamp their organisation on the house and the subject itself. Doctorow's novel meanwhile portrays an unruly archive that terminates the brothers' lives by overtaking and dismantling the home. This antagonism to the home repeats in the digital condition, which, in Egan's novel, complicates traditional notions of familiarity and intimacy. Whereas the digital moment muddles relationships and the digital database alienates subjects, the material archive re-inscribes romance and self-ownership. For the most part, these novels situate the archive in contexts where the notion of the home or the house finds itself under threat by globalisation, financial collapse, urbanisation, and technological innovation. The archive, they suggest, might compensate for or participate in the hostility these transformations inflict upon the home.

Shadowing the home's instability is the possible demolition of the archive and the archivist, nodding towards the Freudian death drive which Derrida instates within the archive. One of the goals of this dissertation has been to investigate how novels animate the sometimes-nebulous proposals articulated by theoretical writings. That is, I have attempted to employ archival novels as a threshold between conceptual writing and lived experience, pointing to the ways in which theory can inform and supplement the now-popular activities of self-curation. In service to this aim, I turn towards the death drive,

which Derrida also calls the '*anarchivic*' and '*archiviolithic*' force, noting its presence in each of my analyses.[627]

Derrida, as I demonstrated at length in the third chapter, hard-wires the archive's destruction into its very formation, linking structural repetition with a principle of violence. Of the archiviolithic force, he writes, 'It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation.'[628] Robert Rowland Smith, however, argues that Derrida deliberately misreads his source material, eliding certain of Freud's hints and suggestions in order to strengthen his claims for the archive's self-destructiveness.[629] Smith notes that this does not suggest that Derrida's interpretation of the archive is invalid but rather that he is marshalling and transforming Freud's ideas for his larger argument. One of the possibilities that Derrida ignores is, Smith observes, that the death drive can reroute itself as external violence: 'For the death-drive, as Freud has said, can divert itself outwards as aggression, in which case it has done nothing if not preserve itself, even if in an alternative mode, and even if, as we have seen, some of its destructive power may have been tempered.'[630] I note this other possible trajectory for the death drive, to enact external pressure instead of internal destruction, in order to gesture towards a critical danger that the novels address in several ways: that the archiviolithic force menaces not just the archive itself but the archivist who presides over it. The novels demonstrate that violence, stagnation, and collapse persistently stalk the archive, and that this violence can similarly imperil the archivist. Yet, the novels also propose ways that the subject might productively circumvent, channel, or even embrace this danger.

In the first two chapters, I suggested that the archive provides a means of re-establishing a form of humanist subjectivity, re-instating equilibrium after a disorientating trauma. In Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*, the archive provides an approach for working-through the traumatic past that can itself only provisionally withstand the

---

[627] Ibid., p. 14.
[628] Ibid.
[629] Robert Rowland Smith, *Death-Drive: Freudian Hauntings in Literature and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 95-6.
[630] Ibid., p. 96.

tumultuous outside world. The novel, by taking the archive's eventual degradation as a given, highlights archiving as a process of re-establishing a vital and coherent humanist subjectivity. As an alternative mode of contending with the harsh shifts of contemporary capitalism, the novel also speculates about subjects becoming archive-like, weathering shock and change by emulating the archive's resourcefulness. While *Sunset Park* accepts the archive's destruction and repositions archiving as an activity focused on the present moment, Hustvedt's *What I Loved* permits the personal collection to sidestep the death drive through an investment in play. The death drive is present most literally in Mark's repetitive game, an iteration of the Fort-Da game that Freud initially used to outline the repetition compulsion. The novel contrasts Leo's collection against this icon of the death drive for its economy of play, dodging repetition through its transformation of curation into a revealing game of self-analysis.

Whereas Auster and Hustvedt discover in the archive the possibility of erecting, at least provisionally, a coherent subjectivity, E.L. Doctorow and Jennifer Egan note various threats that archiving presents to the subject. Doctorow's *Homer and Langley*, bearing out Derrida's archiviolithic force, condemns the archive to collapse when it attempts to submit the past to a strict law and final categorisation. This logic overlaps with a contemporary anxiety over information overload, the wealth of historical materials overflowing any archival scheme that seeks to nail them down in an infallible and constant configuration. In *Homer and Langley*, then, Doctorow presents the threat of the death drive as a destructive force attendant to styles of archivisation that aim to provide a comprehensive and factual account of the past from a singular perspective. Here, though, the death drive condemns not just the archive but gets channeled on to the brothers, who perish as it collapses. To ward off this deadly fate, the novel advocates Homer's 'blind' style of diarising that, by refusing to fix history with a final definition, permits addendum and addition, and thus enables a complicated and contradictory ecology of historical knowledge.

Whereas *Homer and Langley* views the death drive as a hazard to be evaded through free and imaginative forms of composition, Jennifer Egan posits the archive's destruction as a balm for the danger of surveillance in the digital environment. In the

physical archive, *Goon Squad* locates material to invest with subjective meaning that refuses to be integrated into corporate databases and interpreted by surveillance institutions. By fashioning personal archives that are meant to melt back into the surrounding environment and whose mysterious discourse cannot be interpreted by outsiders, Sasha ensures that her information cannot be co-opted by corporate or state institutions. Sasha's situation inverts Alex's alienation. Knowing that his information has been claimed by the surveillance apparatus, Alex must re-constitute and re-invent himself against this archival portrait, the database's sustenance energising and forcing his own transformation. Whereas the database steals Alex's subjectivity, Sasha's self-conception can possess temporal longevity by ensuring that the archive's meaning cannot be parsed. Whereas in *Homer and Langley*, the breakdown of the archive is coeval with the deaths of the brothers, *Goon Squad* imagines repurposing the destruction drive in such a way that permits the subject to remain in possession of themselves.

These four novels, thus, posit various interrelations between subjectivity, the archive, and the death drive. In the Introduction, I argued that the personal archive operates across a continuum of unity and fragmentation, permitting subjects to transition from posthumanist fragmentation to a neo-humanist form of integration. I also argued that the archive can threaten to overload the subject, eliminating the possibility of coherence and stability. Whereas *Homer and Langley* conceives of this overload as lethal, and reveals a form of curational that can balance its multiplicity, I want to conclude this dissertation by turning towards a novel that sees the death drive enabling a form of radical posthumanist freedom. Dana Spiotta's *Stone Arabia*, like *Goon Squad*, posits a competitive relationship between the subject and its archive. In *Stone Arabia*, however, it is the personal collection that survives at the expense of the archivist himself.

The novels that I have thus far investigated, for the most past, invest the personal archive in the temporary or provisional assembly of a style of subjective stability and coherence. *Stone Arabia*, however, sees the endgame of self-curation not in the humanist terms of unity but in a posthumanist ambiguity and inconsistency. Early in the novel,

Denise relays her brother Nik's moniker: 'Self-curate or disappear'.[631] By the novel's conclusion, the logic of this assertion flips, Nik disappearing precisely because of his obsessive archival work. Nik's personal archive takes the form of his Chronicles, the meticulous rendering of his unlived rock-'n'-roll stardom complete with recorded music, forged interviews, and fictional reviews. So comprehensive is its internal world that, Nik says, 'If the Chronicles are dug up two hundred years from now, the readers would find them entirely plausible' (206). When Nik vanishes the morning after his fiftieth birthday, Denise sets down her own Counter-Chronicles that adhere strictly to 'reality and memory and ordinary facts' (27). The novel Spiotta provides is largely composed of the Counter-Chronicles, Denise's attempt to understand her sibling's desertion through her own archival pursuit. Her narration links and contrasts Nik's archive with her daughter Ada's blog entries and an Amish philosophy of technological scepticism.

Meditating on the significance of the unlived-life to the constitution of the self, the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips proposes that 'we may need to think of ourselves as always living a double life, the one that we wish for and the one that we practice; the one that never happens and the one that keeps happening.'[632] The Chronicles unite this duplicity into a single document that merges biographical truth and flights of fancy. Denise narrates:

> Nik's Chronicles adhered to the facts and then didn't. When Nik's dog died in real life, his dog died in the Chronicles. But in the Chronicles he got a big funeral and a tribute album. Fans sent thousands of condolence cards. But it wasn't always clear what was conjured. The music for the tribute album for the dog actually exists, as does the cover art for it[.] [...] But the fan letters didn't exist. In this way Nik chronicled his years in minute but twisted detail. (37)

Rather than erecting a barrier between the real and the fantastic, Nik's archive functions as a space of comingling, of creativity, and of play—notably of wordplay. Denise notes that Nik fills the Chronicles with puns and with allusions that even she cannot always understand. Earlier, Denise points out the role that word games and rhymes play in cultivating memory: 'giving your brain little games of association to help it organize its input' (32). Unlike more literal mnemonic representations—such as photography—

---

[631] Dana Spiotta, *Stone Arabia* (New York: Scribner, 2011), p. 2. Further references to this source are provided after quotations within the text.
[632] Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), p. xvii.

which Denise charges with flattening memory, the Chronicles' re-imagination of the facts of the past might, then, account for Nik's particularly sharp recall.

The novel frequently considers the distinction between memory in the form of bodily gestures and memory fabricated into narratives and objects. In doing so, it echoes Jean-François Lyotard's writing on the domus and the megalopolis. Lyotard contrasts the domus, where memory passes on through gestures and stories, with the violent mega-city, which relies on a public archive that subdivides space and corrupts the family idyll.[633] In *Stone Arabia*, the titular Amish community, encountered by Denise on the news, represents a kind of domus. Denise notes the Amish and Mennonite suspicion of technological progress and, particularly, their belief that 'photographs encourage vanity' (118). Denise echoes this Amish conviction, deriding photography for destroying memory: 'Every time we take a photograph, we forget to embed things in our minds, in our actual brain cells. The taking of the photograph gets us off the hook, in a way, from trying to remember' (52). Denise observes the discrepancy between photos, which facilitate memories of the photographs themselves rather than the events they signify, and the deep memory contained within the body. While she requires a picture to conjure up a memory of her father's face, she experiences a spontaneous surge of recall when she catches something familiar in the body and mannerisms of a stranger: 'A deep, intimate body memory came over me; I could see him—somewhat—but I could feel him, or recall feeling him, completely. [...] [I]t made me remember my father in ways a picture never could' (188-9). Similarly, Denise observes that, when her mother's recall deteriorates, the two of them rediscover their somatic memories: 'We lost the memories, and so the past collapsed and disappeared. We were back to the intimacy of our two bodies' (187).

While Denise critiques photography as a mode of memorialisation, the culture around her, and specifically digital culture, appears enmeshed in its logic of display. Denise notes of her daughter Ada: 'it is almost as if she believes the internet will be her memory. I want to warn her: I've been through this with photographs, it just isn't the same as actually remembering' (55-6). When Ada wishes Denise happy birthday, she

---

[633] Lyotard, 'Domus', pp. 103-4.

does so on her public blog: 'Not "happy birthday, mom" but "to my mom" because it was really reportage to some audience beyond me. It wasn't a personal message to me but a public announcement about me' (44). The Internet, here, turns even familial correspondence into public event. Technologies like the television and the computer frequently position Denise in the role of an ineffectual spectator: she narrates, 'I felt myself an observer of events more than a participant. But that isn't accurate. I was an absorber of events' (38). Witnessing distant events from her living room, Denise seemingly possesses no power to affect their outcomes but only monitor their progress. Whereas Nik obsessively documents, Denise fixates on stories of real-life tragedy, betraying the traumatic attention of what Geoffrey Hartman has termed 'impotent involuntary spectators'.[634] Indeed, much of her emotional life, Denise realises, is played out through viewing these news stories and tracking down information about them online: real life misfortune fashioned as image and information. Not only do these 'external events' dominate her memory, but it is through them that her 'deepest emotional moments happened vicariously' (108, 112).

While Denise attributes to the culture an obsession with display and spectatorship, Nik appears to undermine this system by refusing a broad viewership for his work. Part of what sustains Nik's ethos of creativity is his disavowal of an audience—there are no fans to send in letters, except perhaps Denise and Ada. Like Baudrillard, who, as I have recalled frequently in this dissertation, sees in the collection a self-enclosed language that cannot communicate beyond the collector him or herself, Denise calls Nik's Chronicles 'a private joke that he doesn't want to explain to anyone' (71). The insularity of Nik's archival world resembles Denise's description of the punk scene of her youth: 'we just had this very contextual, specific aesthetic that was precious because it was only readable to those in the know' (163). Nik's Chronicles takes on another characteristic of the punk ethos in its negation of an audience. Denise describes the Sex Pistols' aggression to their fans: 'they insulted their audience, told their audience

---

[634] Geoffrey Hartman, 'Memory.com: Tele-Suffering and Testimony in the Dot Com Era', *Raritan*, 19.3 (2000), 1-18 (p. 12).

they were being ripped off' (161). The novel presents Nik's absorption of this punk stance, his refusal of a viewership beyond his family, as a means for radical creativity.

Denise thinks of this move as a kind of purity, and when Ada confronts her uncle about it he responds in kind:

> I grew to like not having an audience. Imagine being freed from sense and only having to pursue pure sound. Imagine letting go of explanations, of misinterpretations, of commerce and receptions. Imagine doing whatever you want with everything that went before you. [...] Imagine total freedom. (211)

For Nik, the artistic freedom of no audience is a freedom of creativity and of play, to reference without fear of being termed derivative and to court obscurity without fear of upsetting expectation. It is a freedom from the demands of the archive, from one's own past work and from the work of others. It is precisely the freedom missing from the public music industry, manager Lee Lux advising Nik during his early attempt at mainstream success: 'If you want to be successful, you have to get things to work in many, many ways to many, many people' (171). Nik chooses to appease himself rather than defer to a diverse popular audience, gesturing towards a kind of asceticism made all the more appropriate considering his habitation on the outskirts of the desert. Asceticism, however, quickly slides into narcissism. With no audience, Nik really is his own biggest fan, pursuing an obsession with himself. While, in the Chronicles, Nik appears to have carved out a personal creative space, I suggest that the archive's repetitive system ultimately undoes this imaginative freedom.

Denise notes that the temporality of the news cycle is one of intense repetition, a flare of the same images and videos, followed quickly by amnesia: 'Over and over, but then it would fade to the next thing. Not fade, it really was all and then nothing' (122). It is a fixation that plays itself out too quickly to satisfy her desire for knowledge and closure. This cycle of repetition and exhaustion recurs in the novel. Repetition, Denise suggests, creates a more intimate bond between viewer and object: 'as it seeps deeper into familiarity, it begins to make a permanent claim on your sensibility, your aesthetic history' (66). Yet the charm of the repetitive drive, we learn later, is doomed to failure. Her project of watching James Mason movies sours, because 'in praxis, such obsessions grow increasingly tedious. The experience does not increase in meaning by its devotion

to thematic repetition, or mere accumulation. [...] Instead it increases one's intolerance and irritation' (132). Similarly, when Denise searches online for a diagnosis that matches ailing Nik's bodily symptoms, she becomes overwhelmed by the repetition of information: 'It exhausted you because you got lost in the flow of endless data, and it exhausted you because you never stopped trying to find your way in it, to apply some little spit of personal agency to it' (103).

This trajectory of repetition, from familiarity to collapse, recalls the Freudian death drive and underpins the logic of archival memory. Within the novel, the notorious Abu Ghraib photographs sit at the apex of the perverse and narcissistic drive to take pictures and to document: 'It wasn't just the smile on her face that unnerved, it was the repetition and the need to photograph and the easy indifference' (179). If the Abu Ghraib incident demonstrates the desire, latent in all photography, for an event to recur, Nik's own form of material memory is, I demonstrate, similarly implicated in this impulse to repeat and, eventually, to forget. Denise reacts to the cultural system of intense interest and sudden burnout at work in the news cycle by leapfrogging the screen. Travelling across the country to Stone Arabia, site of a news event that has preoccupied her, Denise offers assistance to the Amish woman whose child was abducted. In doing so, Denise refuses to follow the news cycle to the next story of tragedy, to forget about the lost child once the initial blaze of interest has burnt out. Denise's trip occurs just after Nik's disappearance, her rejoinder to the death drive seemingly inspired by her brother's acceptance of it.

Nik's archive, like the repetition of James Mason films and of the news telecast, is doomed to expend itself, but it also seems structurally to embrace this future. Baudrillard contends that collections are meant to remain incomplete: obtaining the final object in a series annihilates the hunt for the next item and thus enacts a kind of death.[635] Nik's Chronicles is seemingly coded consciously to expire by embarking on a series of records with a fixed endpoint, a planned twenty-album compilation. And, indeed, not only does Nik vanish after rounding out this series (they are enumerated in descending order as if to countdown to his departure) but their album covers tessellate to form a

---

[635] Baudrillard, *System*, p. 99.

portrait of the artist that is completed with this final submission. Once that facsimile of the self comes into focus, Nik kills off his fictional rock-star doppelganger within the Chronicles and vanishes into the desert landscape. By embracing the death drive, Nik implicitly reformulates his previous moniker 'self-curate or disappear' as 'self-curate AND disappear'. With the real Nik gone and the fictional Nik dead, only the Chronicles are permitted an afterlife, Derrida's destruction drive transplanted from the archive and onto the subject itself.

Although founded to skirt the demands of history and the expectations of an audience, both of these qualities renew themselves and, in doing so, they portend the Chronicles' completion and Nik's flight. While Nik refuses an audience in order to free himself of the demands of public expectation and of artistic influence, the Chronicles accrues its own genealogy and style. Through its logic of repetition, Nik's dedicated and continual production of his archive, the Chronicles develop an aesthetic and a past to which they become tethered. Denise note: 'I knew his solipsism had become his work [...] but at some point there is the unyielding, the concentration, and the accumulation that becomes a body of work' (97). Generating its own form of internal expectation, consistency, and rhythm, the Chronicles no longer provide an empty bastion of free play and creativity, even without the burden of appeasing an audience.

But the Chronicles do develop an audience, and the repetition compulsion is again responsible for this change. Ada's ambition to produce a documentary about Nik threatens to establish a viewership, causing Denise to worry about the 'alchemical potential of filmic attention' (144). Denise, however, has already transformed into an audience member in a much more subtle way. Within the novel, we are reminded that, as Nik says, Denise 'doesn't count as my audience because she feels like an extension of me' (210). Denise apparently concurs: 'It is just... knowing someone your whole life—no first impressions, no seductions, no getting to know each other. It is all *know*, at times too much *know*' (224). Here, the family is figured as an embodied archive, a domus-like configuration where intimacy is built into the relationship rather than articulated. This status of familial fluency, however, makes Denise's final misrecognition a telling mistake. Before Nik disappears, she reads his odd behaviour as auguring a suicide

attempt. It is not, however, the real Nik who commits suicide but the fictional Nik of the archive. As the record cases flesh out a portrait of the artist, the fictional Nik reaches a fullness through which he, in a hyperreal turn, replaces the real subject even for his most familiar follower. Denise narrates: 'I had misread him, and that was hard to take' (200). Thus, we see the familial apparatus overpowered by the archive, the real Nik obscured to Denise, whose intimate acquaintance now rests with his curated and fabricated persona.

In many ways, then, the novel repeats the critique of material and archival memory offered by Lyotard. While the Chronicles obscures Nik to his sister, the instances of spontaneous memory and somatic familiarity that I have already noted uphold the family domus by re-establishing Denise's intimacy with her mother and with her dead father. The novel concludes with another such eruption of recall. Walking around their childhood home, Denise remembers an adolescent scene that predicts Nik's desire to be photographed, a narcissistic instinct that he injects into the Chronicles. Yet, this scene also summons up the childhood freedom that Denise experienced within the Los Angeles punk scene: 'It's fun because we are made up—not just in makeup, but we are made-up, imaginary people. We are liberated because not only do we know we can pull it off (whatever it is) but we know everyone else is a fake, too' (230). This revelation gestures towards the kind of freedom courted by Nik, the creativity borne of misrepresenting oneself and deflating any model or expectation of behaviour. When Nik leaves, Denise thinks of his desertion as a way of re-invoking this freedom: 'He wanted to be rid of all of it. Maybe he wanted the freedom to be whatever he wanted to be now, and that required jettisoning all his past work, all his past. He wanted what it was like when he began, before all of it had piled up into a long life' (225). Spiotta thus observes a strange potential within the archive to invoke a radical freedom that overturns all models of behaviour, the archivist tricking its intimates with an almost-true self-portrait in, to recall Denise's formulation, 'minute but twisted detail.' Dismantling his real-world self by perfecting a fictional substitute, Nik harnesses archival repetition and the death drive in order to embrace posthumanist indeterminacy and fluidity. Disappearing into the desert night and beyond the confines of representation, Nik's story reveals a means

of engaging the death drive in emancipation from the past and from the ideal of a humanist subjectivity.

In this dissertation, I have suggested that the personal archive operates on a continuum from posthumanist fragmentation to humanist integration. The tension between these two extremes expresses itself variously within the novels under investigation: in *What I Loved*'s notion of artistic 'plethora', the excess of archival signification that demands to be cohered in narrative; in *Homer and Langley*'s treatment of information overload, which exhausts the archive that attempts too strictly to implement categories and control the past; and in *Goon Squad*'s database form, its unmoored chapters creating a shape-shifting novel that, in trying to represent simultaneity, disables the conventional development of story. The novels engage the archive in the project of self-formation in alternative ways: while Auster and Hustvedt see the potential for provisionally re-fashioning an integrated subject from archival activities, Doctorow and Egan both warn against engaging the archive to rigidly fix the past and the self. Spiotta's novel accelerates this critique, locating in the archive that is convincing but counterfactual an opportunity to escape humanist models of coherence and, instead, realise discontinuity and embrace indeterminacy.

Contemporary novels of the archive, when taken as commentaries on contemporary life, reveal a rich assortment of pulls, motivations, possibilities, and risks that converge in the culture of personal archivisation and display. They endow the archive with the propensity to interact with our psychological structures, to elucidate the past and rehabilitate our traumas. They see archiving as a process geared at self-knowledge and subjective vitality, discovering in personal artefacts the symbolism and the metonymies through which to compose a life story. Yet, they also counsel against believing naively in the lucidity of the archive, of calcifying the past too neatly or the self too clearly. The archive, they declare, presents the chance to integrate the self or to productively overhaul it, to envision the past ethically or to ensure protectively that our history cannot be stolen. Yet, the personal archive, though it proliferates today in homes and on digital platforms, when drained of creativity and fixated on certainty, can equally spell the subject's ruin.

Works Cited

Aarseth, Epsen, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997)

Alexis, André, 'Capturing the moment beautifully', *The Globe and Mail*, 12 November 2010 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/books/sunset-park-by-paul-auster/article1796347/> [accessed 5 February 2011]

Alford, Steven, 'Chance in Contemporary Narrative: The Example of Paul Auster', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 11.1 (July 2000), 59-82

— 'Spaced-Out: Signification and Space in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*', *Contemporary Literature*, 36.4 (1995), 613-32

Appadurai, Arjun, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

Arnold, Marilyn, 'History As Fate in E.L. Doctorow's Tale of a Western Town', in *E.L. Doctorow: Essays and Conversations*, ed. by Richard Trenner (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 1983), pp. 207-16

Atwood, Margaret, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2008)

Auster, Paul, *The Brooklyn Follies* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)

— 'The Invention of Solitude', in *Collected Prose: Autobiographical Writings, True Stories, Critical Essays, Prefaces and Collaborations with Artists* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), pp. 1-150

— interviewed by Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, in *Conversations with Paul Auster*, ed. by James M. Hutchisson (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2013), pp. 13-39

— *Oracle Night* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004)

— *Sunset Park* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010)

— *Travels in the Scriptorium* (New York: Picador, 2006)

Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by John R. Stilgoe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)

Badmington, Neil, 'Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism', in *Posthumanism*, ed. by Badmington (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), pp. 1-10

— 'Theorising Posthumanism', *Cultural Critique*, 53 (2003), 10-27

Bal, Mieke, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion, 1994), pp. 97-115

Banita, Georgiana, *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012)

Barglow, Raymond, *The Crisis of the Self in the Age of Information: Computers, Dolphins, and Dreams* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994)

Barker, Timothy, *Time and the Digital* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2012)

Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text'*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-48

— 'The Eiffel Tower', in *Barthes: Selected Writings*, ed. by Susan Sontag (London: Fontana, 1982), pp. 236-51

— 'The Plates of the *Encyclopedia*', in *New Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 23-39

Baudrillard, Jean, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1988)

— *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: SAGE, 1998)

— *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 2005 [1968])

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005)

— *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003)

— *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000)

Baxter, Charles, 'The Bureau of Missing Persons: Notes on Paul Auster's Fiction', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 14.1 (Spring 1994), 40-43

Beaumont, Matthew, 'Introduction: Reclaiming Realism', in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. by Beaumont (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 1-12

Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973)

— 'The Collector', in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 203-11

— 'One-Way Street', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London and New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 45-104

— 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1939)', in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 14-26

— 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007 [1955]), pp. 83-109

— 'Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007 [1955]), pp. 59-67

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972)

Bersani, Leo, 'Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject', *Critical Inquiry*, 32.2 (2006), 161-74

Blom, Philipp, *To Have and To Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (London: Penguin, 2003)

Blyth, Will, 'To Their Own Beat', *New York Times Book Review*, 8 July 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/11/books/review/Blythe-t.html?_r=1> [accessed 5 March 2012]

Bollas, Christopher, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 1993)

— *The Evocative Object World* (Hove: Routledge, 2009)

— *Forces of Destiny: Psychoanalysis and Human Idiom* (London: Free Association Books, 1991)

Boulter, Jonathan, *Melancholy and the Archive: Trauma, History and Memory in the Contemporary Novel* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011)

Bowie, Malcolm, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991)

Boxall, Peter, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

boyd, danah, and Kate Crawford, 'Critical Questions for Big Data: Provocations for a Cultural, Technological, and Scholarly Phenomenon', *Information, Communication & Society*, 15.5 (2012), 662-79

Boym, Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001)

Braddock, Jeremy, *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012)

Breakell, Sue, 'Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive', *Tate Papers*, 9 (2008) <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7288> [accessed 13 July 2014]

Brooks, Peter, *Realist Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005)

Brown, Bill, 'Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny', *Critical Inquiry* 32.2 (2006), 175-207

— *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003)

— 'Thing Theory,' *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 1-22

Brown, Mark, *Paul Auster* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007)

Bryant, Levi, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, 'Towards a Speculative Realism', in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. by Bryant, Srnicek and Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), pp. 1-18

Burn, Stephen J., *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008)

Burton, Antoinette, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

— 'Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories', in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. by Burton (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 1-24

Busby, Mark, 'E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* and the Dialectics of Change', in *Critical Essays on E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Ben Siegel (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 2000), pp. 177-182

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007 [1990])

Carr, Nicholas, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010)

Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

Chiang, Sing-chen Lydia, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005)

Churchwell, Sarah, 'Homer and Langley by EL Doctorow', *Observer*, 24 January 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/24/homer-langley-doctorow-book-review> [accessed 28 April 2014]

— 'A Visit from the Goon Squad — review', *Observer,* 13 March 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/13/jennifer-egan-visit-goon-squad> [accessed 20 May 2012]

Cixous, Hélène, 'Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey', in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 139-52

Clarke, Richard, 'Information Technology and Dataveillance', *Communications from the ACM*, 31.5 (1988), 498-512

Clayton, Jay, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterthought of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Clayton, John, 'Radical Jewish Humanism: The Vision of E.L. Doctorow', in *Critical Essays on E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Ben Siegel (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 2000), pp. 184-92

Clifford, James, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988)

Codebò, Marco, *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010)

Conte, Joseph M., *Design and Debris: A Chaotics of Postmodern American Fiction* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2002)

Cooper, Stephen, 'Cutting Both Ways: E.L. Doctorow's Critique of the Left', *South Atlantic Review*, 58.2 (1993), 111-25

'Counting Every Moment', *Economist*, 3 March 2012 <http://www.economist.com/node/21548493> [accessed 23 June 2014]

Crosthwaite, Paul, 'Is a Financial Crisis a Trauma?', *Cultural Critique*, 82 (2012), 34-67

Crown, Sarah, 'EL Doctorow: "I don't have a style, but the books do"', *Guardian*, 23 January 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/23/el-doctorow-homer-and-lamgley> [accessed 21 Jan 2013]

Cubitt, Sean, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: SAGE, 1998)

Cunningham, Michael, *By Nightfall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010)

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

— *The Invention of Deconstruction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

— *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998)

— *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013)

Cvetkovich, Ann, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003)

Davies, Rosamund, 'Narrating the Archive and Archiving Narrative: The Electronic Book and the Logic of the Index', *International Journal of the Book*, 5.3 (2008), 45-56

de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988)

DeLanda, Manuel, 'The Archive Before and After Foucault', in *Information is Alive*, ed. by Joke Brouwer, Arjen Mulder, and Susan Charlton (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003), pp. 8-13

Deleuze, Gilles, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', *October*, 59 (1992), 3-7

DeLillo, Don, *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2007)

— *Point Omega* (New York: Scribner, 2010)

Derrida, Jacques, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', trans. by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), 9-63

— *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1990])

— *Paper Machine*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005)

— *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994)

Dilworth, Leah, 'Introduction', in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. by Dilworth (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 3-15

Dimovitz, Scott, 'Portraits in Absentia: Repetition Compulsion and the Postmodern Uncanny in Paul Auster's *Leviathan*', *Studies in the Novel*, 40.4 (Winter 2008), 447-64

Dinnen, Zara, 'In the Mix: The Potential Convergence of Literature and New Media in Jonathan Lethem's "The Ecstasy of Influence"', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 42.2 (2012), 212-230

Doctorow, E.L., 'A Multiplicity of Witness: E.L. Doctorow at Heidelberg', interviewed by Herwig Friedl and Dieter Schulz, in *Conversations with E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Christopher D. Morris (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 112-128

— *Andrew's Brain* (New York: Random House, 2014)

— 'The Art of Fiction No. 94', interviewed by George Plimpton, *Paris Review*, Vol. 101 (Winter 1986) <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2718/the-art-of-fiction-no-94-e-l-doctorow> [accessed 3 Feb 2014]

— *Big As Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966)

— *Billy Bathgate* (London: Picador, 1992 [1989])

— *Book of Daniel* (London: Macmillan, 1971)

— 'E.L. Doctorow: I Saw a Sign', interviewed by Victor Navasky, *New York Times Book Review*, 28 September 1980, 44-45, reprinted in *Conversations with E.L. Doctorow*, ed. by Christopher D. Morris (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 59-63

— 'Einstein: Seeing the Unseen', in *Creationists: Selected Essays, 1993-2006* (New York: Random House, 2007), pp. 151-63

— 'False Documents', in *Poets and Presidents, Selected Essays, 1977-1992* (New York: Random House, 1993), pp. 149-164

— *Homer and Langley* (London: Little, Brown, 2009)

— 'Introduction', in *Creationists: Selected Essays, 1993-2006* (New York: Random House, 2007), pp. ix-xiii

— 'Living in the House of Fiction', *The Nation*, 23 Apr 1978, 459-62

— 'Narrative C', *Dædalus*, 141.1 (2012), 118-25

— *Ragtime* (London: Picador, 1985 [1975])

— *The Waterworks* (New York: Random House, 1994)

— *Welcome To Hard Times* (New York: Random House, 2007 [1960]),

— *World's Fair* (New York: Random House, 2007 [1985])

Doss, Erika, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010)

du Gay, Paul, Stuart Hall, and others, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage, 1997)

Eco, Umberto, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. by Alastair McEwen (London: Quercus, 2009)

Edelman, Lee, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004)

Edensor, Tim, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005)

Egan, Jennifer, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (London: Corsair, 2010)

— 'Black Box', *New Yorker,* 4 July 2012 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/black-box-2> [accessed 13 August 2014]

— 'Coming Soon: Jennifer Egan's "Black Box",' *New Yorker Blog*, 24 May 2012 <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/05/coming-soon-jennifer-egan-black-box.html> [accessed 11 November 2012]

— interviewed by Charlie Reilly, *Contemporary Literature*, 50.3 (2009), 438-460

— interviewed by Deborah Treisman, *National Book Award Author Events Podcast*, 20 May 2011 <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/national-book-awards-author/id215209600> [accessed 11 November 2012]

— interviewed by Deborah Treisman, *New Yorker Blog*, 28 May 2012 <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/05/this-week-in-fiction-jennifer-egan.html> [accessed 28 June 2012]

— interviewed by Rana Mitter, *Night Waves*, BBC Radio 3, 24 March 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00zm50w/Night_Waves_Julian_Baggini_Jennifer_Egan_Donny_George_Obituary_UK_Census/> [accessed 11 November 2012]

— *The Keep* (London: Corsair, 2006)

— 'Lonely Gay Teen Seeking Same,' *New York Times Magazine* 10 December 2000 <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20001210mag-online.html> [accessed 13 May 2012]

— *Look at Me* (London: Corsair, 2001)

— 'Love in the Time of No Time', *New York Times Magazine*, 23 November 2004 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/23/magazine/23ONLINE.html> [accessed 19 April 2014]

— 'To Do', *Guardian*, 22 July 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jul/22/jennifer-egan-short-story> [accessed 12 May 2012]

Eggers, Dave, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (London: Picador, 2000)

Elkins, James, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1996)

Elliott, Anthony, and John Urry, *Mobile Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010)

Ellison, Katherine E., *Fatal News: Reading and Information Overload in Early Eighteenth Century Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006)

Ermarth, Elizabeth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983)

— *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Eugenides, Jeffrey, *The Virgin Suicides* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993)

Featherstone, Mike, 'Archive Cultures', *British Journal of Sociology*, 51.1 (2000), 161-84

Felman, Shoshana, 'Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching', in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-56

Felski, Rita, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000)

Folsom, Ed, 'Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives', *PMLA*, 122.5 (2007), 1571-79

Foster, Hal, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 (2004), 3-22

Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972)

— *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977)

— *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978)

— 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27

— *Technologies of the Self*, ed. by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988)

Franzen, Jonathan, *Strong Motion* (New York: Picador, 1992)

Freud, Sigmund, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick (London and New York: Penguin, 2003), pp. 43-102

— *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003)

— *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010)

— 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 31-42

Garber, Marjorie, *Symptoms of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998)

Garde-Hansen, Joanne, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)

Gilloch, Graeme, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996)

Goldsmith, Kenneth, 'Archiving is the New Folk Art', *Poetry Foundation*, 19 April 2011 <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2011/04/archiving-is-the-new-folk-art/> [accessed 29 July 2014]

Goodman, Allegra, *The Cookbook Collector* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010)

Gordon, Avery, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

Green, Jeremy, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

Grønstad, Asbjørn, 'Ehphrasis Refigured: Writing Seeing in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*', *Mosaic*, 45.3 (2012), 33-48

Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994)

Hägglund, Martin, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008)

Hall, Donald E., *Subjectivity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004)

Haraway, Donna, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in *The Haraway Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 7-45

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt, 'E.L. Doctorow and the Technology of Narrative, *PMLA*, 100.1 (1985), 81-95

Hartman, Geoffrey, 'Memory.com: Tele-Suffering and Testimony in the Dot Com Era', *Raritan*, 19.3 (2000), 1-18

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Social Change* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1989)

Hayles, N. Katherine, 'The Condition of Virtuality', *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*, ed. by Peter Lunenfeld (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 68-94

— *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

— *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005)

— 'Narrative and Database: Natural Symbionts', *PMLA*, 122.5 (2007), 1603-08

Heise, Ursula K., *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Henstra, Sarah, *The Counter-Memorial Impulse in Twentieth-Century English Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Hepburn, Allan, *Enchanted Objects: Visual Art in Contemporary Fiction* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2010)

Highmore, Ben, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002)

Hiller, Susan, 'Working Through Objects', in *Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller*, ed. by Barbara Einzig (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 226-41

Hustvedt, Siri, 'A Plea for Eros', in *A Plea for Eros* (London: Sceptre, 2006), pp. 45-60

— *The Blindfold* (New York: Picador, 1992)

— 'Charles Dickens and the Morbid Fragment', in *A Plea for Eros* (London: Sceptre, 2006), pp. 153-93

— 'Embodied Visions: What Does It Mean to Look at a Work of Art?', in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (London: Sceptre, 2012), pp. 336-54

— 'Freud's Playground', in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (London: Sceptre, 2012), pp. 196-219

— *Mysteries of the Rectangle* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005)

— 'Notes on Seeing', in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (London: Sceptre, 2012), pp. 223-31

— 'Playing, Wild Thoughts, and a Novel's Underground', in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (London: Sceptre, 2012), pp. 37-40

— *The Sorrows of an American* (New York: Picador, 2008)

— *The Summer Without Men* (London: Sceptre, 2011)

— *What I Loved* (London: Sceptre, 2003)

— 'Yonder', in *A Plea for Eros* (London: Sceptre, 2006), pp. 1-43

Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1988)

— *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989)

Hutchinson, Ben, and Shane Weller, 'Archive Time', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 133-53

Huyssen, Andreas, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsest and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)

— *Twilight Memories: Making Time is a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995)

Irigaray, Luce, 'Woman-mothers, the silent substratum of the social order', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford, trans by. David Macey (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwells, 1991), pp. 47-52

Iser, Wolfgang, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)

Jameson, Alise, 'Pleasure and Peril: Dynamic Forces of Power and Desire in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*', *Studies in the Novel*, 42.4 (2010), 421-42

Jameson, Fredric, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981)

— 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 (1984), 53-92

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

Johnston, John, *Information Multiplicity: American Fiction in the Age of Media Saturation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)

Juan-Navarro, Santiago, *Archival Reflections: Postmodern Fiction of the Americas (Self-Reflexivity, Historical Revisionism, Utopia)* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000)

Karl, Alissa G., '*Casino Royale*, Financial Aesthetics, and National Narrative Form', in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*, ed. by Paul Crosthwaite (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 161-77

Kavanagh, Gaynor, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000)

Keen, Suzanne, 'Magical Values in Recent Romances of the Archive', in *Libraries, Literatures, and Archives*, ed. by Sas Mays (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 115-129

— *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2001)

Kelly, Adam, *American Fiction in Transition: Observer-Hero Narrative, the 1990s, and Postmodernism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Kelly, Alison, 'Abandoned objects: Paul Auster's new squatters', *Time Literary Supplement*, 5 November 2010, p. 19

Kermode, Frank, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967)

Kim, Doug, '10 tips for great storytelling from a PowerPoint novelist', *Microsoft Office Show*, 18 August 2010 <http://blogs.office.com/b/office-show/archive/2010/08/18/10-tips-for-great-storytelling-from-a-powerpoint-novelist.aspx> [accessed 13 August 2012]

Kinder, Marsha, 'Designing a Database Cinema', in *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*, ed. by Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 346-53

— 'Hot Spots, Avatar, and Narrative Fields Forever—Buñuel's Legacy for New Digital Media and Interactive Database Narrative', *Film Quarterly*, 55.4 (2002), 2-15

King, William Davies, *Collections of Nothing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008)

Kirby, Alan, 'The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond', *Philosophy Now* (Nov/Dec 2006), 34-7

— *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009)

Kirschenbaum, Matthew, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008)

Klein, Norman M., 'Space Between: Travelling through Bleeds, Apertures, and Wormholes Inside the Database Novel', in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, ed. by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), pp. 137-152

— 'Waiting for the World to Explode: How Data Convert into a Novel', in *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overflow*, ed. by Victoria Vesna (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 89-94

Koselleck, Reinhart, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004)

Krauss, Nicole, *The Great House* (London: Viking, 2010)

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

Lacan, Jacques, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 1-7

LaCapra, Dominick, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994)

— 'Trauma, Absence, Loss', *Critical Inquiry*, 25.4 (1999), 696-727

Lawson, Andrew, 'Foreclosure Stories: Neoliberal Suffering in the Great Recession', *Journal of American Studies*, 47.1 (2013), 49-68

LeClair, Tom, *The Art of Excess: Mastery in Contemporary American Fiction* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989)

Lee, Christopher A., 'Introduction', in *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era*, ed. by Lee (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011), pp. 1-26

Leslie, Esther, 'Telescoping the Microscopic Object: Benjamin the Collector', in *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Alex Coles (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), pp. 58-91

Lethem, Jonathan, 'The Afterlife of "Ecstasy"', in *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, Etc.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), pp. 121-24

— 'Ecstasy of Influence', in *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, Etc.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), pp. 93-120

— interviewed by Peter Andrey Smith, *Believer*, May 2012 <http://www.believermag.com/issues/201205/?read=interview_lethem> [accessed 28 June 2014]

Levi-Strauss, Claude, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966)

Levin, David Michael, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988)

Levine, Paul, *E.L. Doctorow* (London: Methuen, 1985)

Long, J.J., *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007)

Lorentzen, Christian, 'Fictitious Values: Boom and Bust in Twenty-First Century Lit', *Bookforum*, June/July/August 2012 <http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/019_02/9453> [accessed 13 April 2014]

Lowenthal, David, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Lukács, George, *Studies in European Realism*, trans. by Edith Bone (London: Hillway Publishing, 1950)

Lyons, David, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)

Lyotard, Jean-François, '*Domus* and the Megalopolis', in *The Inhuman*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 191-204

— *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)

Maleuvre, Didier, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

Manoff, Marlene, 'Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines', *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 4.1 (2004), 9-25

Manovich, Lev, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001)

Mansfield, Nick, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000)

Markovitz, Benjamin, 'You can't get there from here', *London Review of Books*, 19 June 2003, pp. 37-8

Marks, Christine, 'Hysteria, Doctor-Patient Relationships, and Identity Boundaries in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*', *Gender Forum*, 25 (2009), <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/literature-and-medicine-i/hysteria-doctor-patient-relationships-and-identity-boundaries-in-siri-hustvedts-what-i-loved/> [accessed 10 June 2013]

Martin, Brendan, *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 2008)

Maslin, Janet, 'Time, Thrashing to its Own Rock Beat', *New York Times*, 20 June 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/21/books/21book.html> [accessed 2 May 2012]

Mattingly, Daniel, 'Crash Fiction: American Literary Novels of the Global Financial Crisis', in *The Great Recession in Fiction, Film and Television: Twenty-First-Century Bust Culture*, ed. by Kirk Boyle and Daniel Mrozowski (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013), pp. 95-112

Mavor, Carol, 'Collecting Loss', *Cultural Studies*, 11.1 (1997), 111-137

McGill, Meredith L., 'Remediating Whitman', *PMLA*, 122.5 (2007), 1592-1596

McGowan, Todd, '"In This Way He Lost Everything": The Cost of Satisfaction in E.L. Doctorow's *World's Fair*', *Critique*, 42.2 (2001), 233-40

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 'Cézanne's Doubt', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 9-25

Micale, Mark S., *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Miller, Daniel, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008)

Miller, Laura, 'How novels came to terms with the internet', *Guardian*, 15 Jan 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/15/novels-internet-laura-miller> [accessed 18 Apr 2012]

Mishra, Pankaj, 'Modernity's Undoing', *London Review of Books*, 31 March 2011 <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n07/pankaj-mishra/modernitys-undoing> [accessed 12 August 2014]

Moody, Rick, 'Wilkie Fahnstock, *The Boxed Set*', in *Demonology* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), pp. 227-38

Morgenstern, Naomi, 'The Primal Scene in the Public Domain: E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*', *Studies in the Novel*, 35.1 (2003), 68-88

Morris, Christopher D., *Models of Misrepresentation: On the Fiction of E.L. Doctorow* (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1991)

— 'The Models of Misrepresentation in E.L. Doctorow's *World's Fair*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 26.4 (1990), 522-38

Muensterberger, Werner, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994)

Mulder, Arjen, and Joke Brouwer, 'Information is Alive', in *Information is Alive*, ed. by Brouwer, Mulder, and Susan Charlton (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003), pp. 4-7

Nochlin, Linda, *Realism* (London: Penguin, 1971)

Nora, Pierre, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', trans. by Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7-24

Nun Halloran, Vivian, *Exhibiting Slavery: The Caribbean Postmodern Novel as Museum* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009)

O'Driscoll, Michael, and Edward Bishop, 'Archiving "Archiving"', *English Studies in Canada*, 30.1 (2004), 1-16 (p. 3)

Oates, Joyce Carol, 'Love and Squalor', *New Yorker*, 7 September 2009, pp. 80-81

Pallasmaa, Juhani, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: Wiley, 2005)

Parks, John G., *E.L. Doctorow* (New York: Continuum, 1991)

— 'The Politics of Polyphony: The Fiction of E.L. Doctorow', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 37.4 (1991), 454-63

Pascoe, Judith, *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006)

Patteson, Richard, 'The Teller's Tale: Text and Paratext in Paul Auster's *Oracle Night*', *Critique*, 49.2 (2008), 115-28

Pearce, Susan, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (London: SAGE, 1998)

Pearce, Susan, and Paul Martin, 'Introduction', in *The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*, Vol. 4 Contemporary Voices, ed. by Pearce and Martin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. xii-xxii

Phillips, Adam, 'Clutter: A Case History', in *Promises, Promises* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp. 59-71

— *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012)

— *Winnicott* (London: Fontana, 1988)

Pomian, Krzysztof, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, trans. by Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990)

Poster, Mark, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990)

— *What's the Matter with the Internet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001)

Prewitt-Brown, Julia, *The Bourgeois Interior* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008)

Rachman, Tom, *The Imperfectionists* (London: Quercus, 2011)

Rapaport, Herman, *Later Derrida: Reading the Recent Work* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003)

Reyes, Paul, 'Bleak Houses: Digging Through the Ruins of the Mortgage Crisis', *Harper's Magazine*, October 2008, pp. 31-45

Reynolds, Matthew, 'The Taste of Peapods', *London Review of Books*, 11 Feb 2010, pp. 22-3

Reynolds, Simon, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011)

Robbe-Gillet, Alain, 'A Future for the Novel', in *For a New Novel* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp. 15-24

Robert, Brian, 'Blackface Minstrelsy and Jewish Identity: Fleshing Out Ragtime as the Central Metaphor in E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*', *Critique*, 45.3 (2004), 247-59

Robinson, Marilynne, *Housekeeping* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980)

Rosenberg, Daniel, 'Early Modern Information Overload', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64.1 (2003), 1-9

Rosenthal, Caroline, *New York and Toronto Novels after Postmodernism: Explorations of the Urban* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011)

Rotman, Brian, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008)

Rowland Smith, Robert, *Death-Drive: Freudian Hauntings in Literature and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010)

Rubenstein, Roberta, 'Doubling, Intertextuality, and the Postmodern Uncanny: Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 9.3 (1998), 245-62

Russell, Karen, 'The Seagull Army Descends on Strong Beach, 1979', in *Vampires in the Lemon Grove* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), pp. 53-82

— *Swamplandia!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011)

Safran Foer, Jonathan, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

Sauerberg, Lars Ole, 'The Novel in Transition: Documentary Realism', *Orbis Litterarum*, 44.1 (1989), 80-92

Saunders, Max, 'Archive Fiction', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 169-88

Savvas, Theophilus, *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011)

Schillinger, Liesl, 'The Odd Couple', *New York Times Book Review*, 8 Sept. 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/books/review/Schillinger-t.html> [accessed 28 Nov. 2013]

Schine, Cathleen, 'Cruel and Benevolent', *New York Review of Books*, 11 Nov 2010 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/11/cruel-and-benevolent/> [accessed 3 March 2012]

Schneider, Rebecca, 'In the Meantime: Performance Remains', in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 87-110

Schor, Naomi, '"Cartes Postales": Representing Paris 1900', *Critical Inquiry*, 18.2 (1992), 188-244

Schulz, Kathryn, 'Trickster Makes the World', *New York Magazine*, 3 July 2011 <www.nymag.com/arts/books/reviews/stone-arabia-schulz-review-2011-7/> [accessed 3 July 2014]

— 'Outside the Interior', *English Studies in Canada*, 31.1 (2007), 1-9

Schwenger, Peter, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006)

Scull, Andrew, *Hysteria: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Sekula, Allan, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 (Winter 1986), 3-64

Shapton, Leanne, *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris: Including Books, Street Fashion and Jewelry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009)

Shostak, Debra, 'In the Country of Missing Persons: Paul Auster's Narratives of Trauma', *Studies in the Novel*, 41.1 (2009), 66-87

— 'Under the Sign of *Moon Palace*: Paul Auster and the Body in the Text', *Critique*, 49.2 (2008), 149-70

Showalter, Elaine, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)

Shteyngart, Gary, *Super Sad True Love Story* (London: Granta, 2010)

Simmons, Philip E., *Deep Surfaces: Mass Culture and History in Postmodern American Fiction* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997)

Slethaug, Gordon, *Beautiful Chaos: Chaos Theory and Metachoatic in Recent American Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000)

Smith, Zadie, 'Two Paths for the Novel', *New York Review of Books*, 20 Nov 2008 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/nov/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/> [accessed 3 Feb 2014]

Solove, Daniel, *The Digital Person: Technology and Privacy in the Digital Age* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004)

Sontag, Susan, 'Against Interpretation', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 3-14

— *On Photography* (New York and London: Anchor Books, 1989 [1977])

Spieker, Sven, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008)

Spiotta, Dana, *Stone Arabia* (New York: Scribner, 2011)

Spufford, Francis, *The Chatto Book of Cabbages and Kings: Lists in Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989)

Steedman, Carolyn, 'After the Archive', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), pp. 321-40

— *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)

Steinitz, Rebecca, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011)

Stewart, Susan, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993)

Stoler, Ann Laura, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009)

Swope, Richard, 'Supposing a Place: The Detecting Subject in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*', Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture, 2.3 (Summer 2002) <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/023/swope.htm> [accessed 22 March 2011]

Tanselle, G. Thomas, 'A Rationale for Collecting', *Raritan*, 19.1 (1999), 23-50

Taylor, Chloë, 'Hard, Dry Eyes and Eyes that Weep: Vision and Ethics in Levinas and Derrida', *Postmodern Culture*, 16.2 (2006) <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.106/16.2taylor.html> [accessed 12 Dec 2013]

Taylor, Diana, 'Acts of Transfer', in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 1-52

Terdiman, Richard, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithica, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993)

Thompson, Michael, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979)

Tokarczyk, Michelle M., *E.L. Doctorow's Skeptical Commitment* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000)

Torlasco, Domietta, 'Against House Arrest: Digital Memory and the Impossible Archive', *Camera Obscura*, 26.1 (2011), 38-63

Turkle, Sherry, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011)

— *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995)

— 'What Makes an Object Evocative?', in *Evocative Objects*, ed. by Turkle (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 307-26

Ugrešić, Dubravka, 'The Elusive Substance of the Archive', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 341-53

van Dijck, José, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007)

Van House, Nancy, and Elizabeth F. Churchill, 'Technologies of Memory: Key Issues and Critical Perspectives', *Memory Studies*, 1.3 (2008), 295-310

Veel, Kristin, 'Information Overload and Database Aesthetics', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8.2-3 (2011), 307-19

— *Narrative Negotiations: Information Structures in Literary Fiction* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009)

Vermeulen, Timotheus, and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 2 (2010), 1-14

Vesna, Victoria, 'Databases Are Us', *AI & Society*, 14 (2000), 157-175

Virilio, Paul, *Open Sky*, trans. by Julie Rose (London and New York: Verso, 2008 [1997])

— 'The Twilight of the Grounds', in *The Desert*, ed. by Wilfred Thesiger and others (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), pp. 102-119

Voss, Paul, and Marta Werner, 'Toward a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 32.1 (Spring 1999), i-viii

Watrous, Malena, 'Learned Lolita', *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, 10 December 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/books/review/Watrous-t.html?pagewanted=all> [accessed 5 February 2011]

Wendorf, Richard, 'The Literature of Collecting', in *The Literature of Collecting and Other Essays* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2008), pp. 5-70

White, Hayden, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 7.1 (1980), 5-27

White, Patti, *Gatsby's Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1992)

Whiteley, Gillian, *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011)

Williams, John, *Fiction as False Document: The Reception of E.L. Doctorow in the Postmodern Age* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996)

Winnicott, D.W., 'The Baby as Person', in *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 75-79

— 'The Concept of the False Self', *Home Is Where We Start From*, ed. by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 65-70

— 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self (1960)', in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1994), pp. 140-152

— *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971)

— 'Stealing and Telling Lies', in *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 161-66

— 'What Do We Mean by a Normal Child', in *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 124-30

Wutz, Michael, *Enduring Words: Literary Narrative in a Changing Media Ecology* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009)

Yee, Susan, 'The Archive', in *Evocative Objects*, ed. by Sherry Turkle (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 30-36

Zapf, Hubert, 'Narrative, Ethics, and Postmodern Art in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*', in *Ethics in Culture: The Dissemination of Values through Literature and Other Media*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes, and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 171-94

Žižek, Slavoj, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: Verso, 2009)

— *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1997)