

**Nationalism,
Neoliberalism,
and the Global City:
Paradoxes of Globalization**

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Abstract

The world has experienced rapid changes in the last twenty years concomitant of the Revolutions of 1989 (and the subsequent onrush of neoliberal economic policies) and the proliferation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), but has higher ed, and particularly, the study of English literature modified in accordance to the cultural, economic, social, and political circumstances of the period? This thesis explores the compelling question by illustrating the transition of contemporary literary fiction (written in English) from modernist aesthetics and one-sided national discourse into a culturally and politically driven postmodern form to parallel and reflect an increasingly global and globally aware 21st century. Through contemporary fiction's examination of neoliberal globalization – or perhaps what is also known as the postmodern condition and cultural logic of late capitalism – we come to understand a return of colonization in a world allegedly moving towards decolonization. What results is the Gramscian theory of hegemony, which gives rise to a Marxist theory of the transformation of social forces into forms of political power adequate to different class projects that depends on a very crucial factor - consensus.

在過去的二十年中，隨著 1989 年的革命（以及之後突進的新自由主義經濟政策），信息和通信技術（ICT）的擴散，世界經歷了急劇變化。但高等教育，尤其是英文文學研究有沒有根據這一時期的文化、經濟、社會和政治的情況來修正呢？本論文探討從現代主義美學和片面國家論述的小說（英文書寫的），過渡到一個文化和政治驅動並行的後現代形式，及反映一個日益全球化和全球意識的二十一世紀引人注目的問題。通過當代小說的新自由主義全球化的測試——或者也被稱為後現代的情況和晚期資本主義的文化邏輯——我們了解世界據稱走向非殖民化只不過掩飾另一種殖民方式，導致葛蘭西的霸權理論效果，使馬克思主義理論的社會力量轉變成促使不同階級的政治權力形式，取決於一個非常關鍵的因素- 共識。

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Introduction

“Globalization is always ethically ambiguous. Like all social practices, globalization is always structured as relations of power, and these relations of power – both structural and ideological – need to be analysed in the broadest possible way.” – Paul James

Globalization is undoubtedly the buzzword towards the end of the twentieth century, which witnessed the collapse of communism in 1989, and will definitely continue to carry much weight throughout the global twenty-first century. According to John Urry, “1989 was also the year when the discourse of ‘globalization’ really took off, when exponential growth in the analyses of the global began to suggest that there was a putative global reconstitution of economic, political and cultural relationships” (*DCGC* 62) mediated by the onrush of neoliberalism, which was perpetuated by the Reagan and Thatcher governments. Thus, globalization, as we are experiencing it, is in many respects, not only new, but also revolutionary; it is of course economic, but also political, technological, and cultural. Urry writes, “[i]n some writings, the globalization thesis is an attempted reassertion of a modernist meta-narrative involving the claim that global markets generate economic, political and cultural homogenization” (66), while moving the world collectively towards democracy and modernity, or development. However, does globalization, in praxis, actually have a homogenizing effect – and if so, in what way? More importantly, is globalization for the better or worse of humanity? To put this tantalizing question in postmodern terms, does globalization move us towards the end of history, or are we witnessing a reversal of history within its global processes?

According to the political scientist and economist, Francis Fukuyama, “the modern liberal democratic order represents the triumph of the principle of equal recognition over the relationship of lordship and bondage” (2012), such that people are recognized as equal human beings with dignity. David Harvey, however, explains

that “[t]he founding fathers of neoliberal thought [wisely] took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as ‘the central values of civilization’...for these are indeed compelling and seductive ideals” (*BHN* 5). These values, according to Harvey, were portrayed as basic rights “threatened not only by fascism, dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgments for those of individuals free to choose” (5). This notion of freedom, however, is an illusion to justify a hegemony in which neoliberalism is conceived as the most viable economic principle cum political ideology for safeguarding democracy. According to Antonio Gramsci, hegemony “presupposes a certain collaboration, that is, an active and voluntary (free) consent; in other words, a liberal-democratic regime” (*PN* 9) that emphasizes the exercise and protection of the individual’s rights and liberties. Liberal democracy, in essence, is far from reaching the level of equality Fukuyama associates it with; and quite the contrary, liberal democracy is an agent of neoliberalism that assists in masking its inequalities by *appearing* to provide all with equal access and opportunities. Thus, there is an inherent contradiction between democracy and neoliberalism. Harvey writes, “[g]overnance by majority rule is seen as a potential threat to individual rights and constitutional liberties,” therefore, neoliberals “tend to favour governance by experts and elites,” thereby concentrating power within a remarkably small number of people (*BHN* 66). In other words, neoliberalization has “succeeded remarkably well in restoring, or in some instances (as in Russia and China) creating, the power of an economic elite” (19). While there has been a wave of decolonization since World War II, domination evidently remains prevalent in our globalized postmodern epoch which has seen intense expansions and modulations of capital leading to a concentration of power within the economic elite. For many parts of the world, the “post” in

postcolonial has barely arrived, but when it finally has, the colonial dimensions are still going strong. Thus, as Simon Gikandi writes, globalization and postcoloniality are correlative phenomena that “are perhaps two of the most important terms in social and cultural theory today” (2001). “Since the 1980s,” Gikandi writes, “they have functioned as two of the dominant paradigms for explaining the transformation of political and economic relationships in a world that seems to become increasingly interdependent with the passing of time, with boundaries that once defined national cultures becoming fuzzy” (29).

While national claims seem increasingly insignificant and irrelevant in our globalized world where state intervention is undesirable, it is nevertheless necessary to have a government and a fabricated notion of nationhood to ensure the smooth running of a liberal democracy, or rather, neoliberalism. Harvey writes that “the neoliberal state needs nationalism of a certain sort to survive” because politically, it is “[f]orced to operate as a competitive agent in the world market and seek[s] to establish the best possible business climate” (85), and national traditions incidentally generate the common sense “constructed out of long-standing practices of cultural socialization” that “becomes ‘a button that elites can press to open the door to the masses’ to justify almost anything” (39). As such, the neoliberal state mobilizes nationalism to drive competition that “produces ephemeral winners and losers in the global struggle for position,” which, “in itself can be a source of national pride or of national soul-searching” (85). In short, neoliberalism needs nationalism to fuel people’s commitment and motivation to have a competitive edge in a world economy, and in turn, the prospect of being a winner in the global economy can be a source of pride which reflexively and perpetually drive people’s willing submission to competition, and by extension, a division of labor. There are two key sites that

valorize this neoliberal project: the global – or informational - city, and cyberspace. According to Saskia Sassen “[i]n the current phase of the world economy, it is precisely the combination of the global dispersal of economic activities *and* global integration – under conditions of continued concentration of economic ownership and control – that has contributed to a strategic role for certain major cities” (*CWE* 4), which she coins as global cities. Manuel Castells and John Mollenkopf also emphasize that the “postindustrial era is no exception of a dominant class (in this case, the managerial technocracy allied to the global financial elite) which has a distinct spatial logic” because “[t]he interests and organizational powers of the new dominant class arise within a space of flows; that is, networks that transmit and facilitate the analysis of economically and politically relevant information” (*DC* 415). Theoretically, Castells asserts, “advanced telecommunications systems could make possible their scattered location around the globe” but “there has been a spatial concentration of the upper tier of such activities in a few nodal centers” (*NS* 410). Global cities are not only financial centers of the world economy but also informational centers, thus rendering these metropolises as a dual city.

As Sassen, Castells, and Mollenkopf observe, global cities are strategic sites of global flows heavily dependent on (the speed of) advanced telecommunications systems that allow for the instantaneous and virtual dispersal of capital and information. While technology has a practical economic effect on the global economy, it also has a political one as cutting edge technological innovations are used to assess the competitive edge a nation has on the global stage. For instance, in a cry for America to reform its educational priorities, Norm Augustine explains:

In a global, knowledge-driven economy there is a direct correlation between engineering education and innovation. Our success or failure as a nation will be measured by how well we do with the innovation agenda, and by how well we can advance medical research, create game-changing devices and improve the world...“These nations and many others have rightly concluded that the way to win

in the world economy is by doing a better job of educating and innovating. And America? We're losing our edge. Innovation is something we've always been good at. Until now, we've been the undisputed leaders when it comes to finding new ideas through basic research, translating those ideas into products through world-class engineering, and getting to market first through aggressive entrepreneurship. (*Forbes*, Jan. 20, 2011)

Augustine's contention is clear, and not at all an uncommon one: innovation is the key to survival in an increasingly global economy, and falling behind in math and science education that encourages engineering necessitates a serious play of catch-up if a nation desires to wield power in the global economy. Augustine's proposal for an emphasis on math and science education, thus, marks the desire for education to have full entry into neoliberalism. And we have, undoubtedly, witnessed educational institutions and particularly, universities, "changing in the direction of academic capitalism in the form of entrepreneurial McUniversities" (Lorenz 607) in which "the societal relevance of the universities" is "turned on its head to have economic relevance to business and industry in the knowledge society" (Lorenz 600). As a result, the American university model is exported overseas¹ and online instruction is becoming an increasingly cost-efficient alternative to sitting in classrooms with a continuous worsening of the faculty/student ratio and temporary faculty. In a neoliberal state, according to Chris Lorenz, "[a]ll former state activities in the domains of education, social security, and health care can be privatized and commodified so that they can be made efficient and profitable" (602). In short, collective goods no longer exist, and the university – long considered the haven of academic freedom, intellectual curiosity, and the place where critical thinking skills and creativity are developed and refined – have fallen to neoliberal enterprises. Of course, transnationalism, innovation, and the idea of higher ed being easily and readily accessible through cloud computing all make our globalized economy and

¹ For instance, NYU in Abu Dhabi and Yale in Singapore alone have stirred up a lot of news and reaction both as a capitalist maneuver and for the uneven globalization of the American university

world phenomenal, but in fact, they simultaneously contribute to making the world a very disturbing place.

The global, knowledge-driven economy is a marketplace of perpetual competition for its actors to be economically and temporally ahead, and the university functions as an apparatus that produces individuals and/or groups of people who are subjects by playing the rules of this neoliberal game, or conversely, *subjected* by its uneven distributions. Paradoxically, it seems that only through time, is time conquered, but in a state's trajectory towards conquering time, the spatial is neglected. Perhaps, then, neoliberal globalization and the global movement towards liberal democracies is not the end of history, but a reversal of history masked as an illusion of the end. In an alarming and chilling prose, Jean Baudrillard declares that “[w]e are faced with a paradoxical process of reversal, a reversion effect of modernity which, having reached its speculative limit and extrapolated all its virtual developments, is disintegrating into its simple elements in a catastrophic process of recurrence and turbulence” (*IE* 10). While I agree with Baudrillard that we are experiencing a “reversion of history to infinity” (11), I believe there are redemptive acts and options that can, at the least, curb the indefinite reversion of history that *appears* to have a fairly ‘obvious’ future that is purportedly technologically advanced and securely democratic with a rising level of education and culture. According to Raymond Williams, “in deeper ways, that have perhaps not yet been articulated, this idea of a good society naturally unfolding itself may be exceptionally misleading,” and that “the first difficulty lies in the common habit of supposing our society to be governed by single patterns, arrived at by averaging the overall trends in familiar categories of economic activity, political behavior and cultural development” (*T2* 25). It is true that, in our globalized world, we have increasingly reduced to quantifiable

measures in determining aptitude, as seen through the increased emphasis on standardized tests in education and cost-efficient model analyses in all areas of society. These quantifications, needless to say, are very limited in what and how they are measured, and as such, “we need quite different forms of analysis, which would enable us to recognize the important contradictions within each of the patterns described, and, even more crucially, the contradictions between different parts of the general process of change” in our society (Williams 25). If the glamorous economic and scientific prosperities have veiled the spatial discrepancies, including the uneven distribution of “the good life” which renders many as subjects and not citizens, and even the university is now reduced to an apparatus with a failing liberal education, what might address these spatial issues? Might literary fiction produce a space that critically broaches the spatial discrepancies found in temporal (perhaps even quantum) leaps taken in neoliberal globalization?

The world has experienced rapid changes in the last twenty years concomitant of the Revolutions of 1989 (and the subsequent onrush of neoliberal economic policies) and the proliferation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), but has higher education, and particularly, the study of English literature modified in accordance with the cultural, economic, social, and political circumstances of the period? This thesis explores the compelling question by illustrating the transition of contemporary literary fiction (written in English) from modernist aesthetics and one-sided national discourse into a culturally and politically driven postmodern form to parallel and reflect an increasingly global and globally aware 21st century. Through contemporary fiction’s examination of neoliberal globalization – or perhaps what is also known as the postmodern condition and cultural logic of late capitalism – we come to understand a return of colonization in a world allegedly moving towards

decolonization. What results is the Gramscian theory of hegemony, which gives rise to a Marxist theory of the transformation of social forces into forms of political power adequate to different class projects that depends on a very crucial factor - consensus.

I have argued that higher ed has taken a neoliberal turn and failed as liberal education, but I have yet addressed the English department's contribution – despite the 'progressive' social and cultural leverages it claims to have in society – to the failing liberal education of universities. At a time when transnationalism is a buzz and the globe is collectively moving at a pace that can barely remember yesterday, many English departments across the world are still researching antediluvian cultural and social changes found in national literary texts and pedagogically reproducing cultural and social conventions of eras and nations that are now bygone, while largely ignoring the current conditions of our postmodern epoch. In doing so, I argue that these English departments are contributing to and reinforcing the cultural hegemony of national – namely British and American – literatures, and by extension the culture of these nations at large, that they primarily teach and research. In doing so, English departments preserve a certain timelessness to, thus privileging American and British cultural hegemonies, despite the shifts of power in geoeconomics, geoculture, and of course geopolitics. Immanuel Wallerstein pointedly asserts, “[o]ne of the basic structures of the capitalist world-economy is the cyclical rise and decline of ‘hegemonies’ within the world-system” (*GG* 3). So, as Gramsci asked, “[w]hy should England have a certain hegemony over a set of countries based on certain traditional conditions that favored its superiority, if the United States can be superior to England and absorb it, together with its empire, if possible?” (*PN* 43), or conversely, why should the United States have a certain hegemony if China's economy is about to surpass America's? According to Gramsci, “[t]here is no ‘rationality’ in these matters,

but only questions of power” (43). This thesis examines three texts of contemporary literary fiction – Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Remains of the Day*, Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*, and William Gibson’s *Spook Country* – all of which explores questions of power in a changing global economy.

In chapter one, I discuss *Remains of the Day*’s portrayal of English society through the perspective of Mr. Stevens, an English butler, as the British empire wanes. Through Mr. Stevens, I examine the myth of the nation and the enduring quality (and necessity) of nationalism in spite of shifting power dynamics and a concomitant reconfiguration of social hierarchy in accordance with the economic and political changes of the era. According to David Harvey, “‘class’ is not a stable social configuration,” and “neoliberalization has been accompanied by a reconfiguration of what constitutes an upper class” (*BHN* 31). Although Britain agreed to decolonization and shed much of the mantle of its direct imperial power, Britain continued to “project a neocolonial presence throughout much of what had been its empire” with “London as a centre of international finance” as the “most important residual of Britain’s imperial presence” (Harvey 56), rather than the English country which represents and embodies an older tradition of Englishness. The transition from imperial power largely concentrated amongst aristocrats in the English country to a neocolonial presence relayed by transnational entrepreneurs and professionals who largely flourish in metropolitan centers suggests a transition from one dominant class to another that has greater aptitude and is more germane to an increasingly globalized world and economy. Accordingly, “[a] social and moral economy (sometimes supported by a strong sense of national identity) was fostered through the activities of an interventionist state” in which the “state in effect became a force field that internalized class relations” (Harvey 11). The idea of an English ethnicity and

nationalism stemmed from Britain's imperial heritage, as revealed in Mr. Stevens' narrative, contributed to Britain's smooth internalizing of class relations. In light of Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee celebrations in June 2012, 'SofiaE3' mockingly tweets that Englishness is "pretending you live in a democracy then celebrating an old, unelected head of state's birthday with flag waving like fascists" (accessed on twitter.com on June 7, 2012). Indeed, politicians today, just as Mr. Stevens of *Remains of the Day* would rather talk about myths like Englishness than about the everyday life struggles of working class people in austerity because the ethnic/national myth ideologically interpellates citizens into becoming 'willing' subjects of a nationalist agenda (on the global front) and assenting to the hindrance of democracy.

An increasing number of neoliberal economic policies were implemented just as Ishiguro was writing and publishing *Remains of the Day*, which renders the question of nations and nationalism par for the course of discussing social changes not only during a transitional period in history, but also during two seemingly disparate epochs (modernity/imperialism and postmodernity/globalization). According to Tom Nairn and Paul James, "[n]eo-liberal preaching saw only the lowering of borders, and nation-states losing former powers and status" which "was another way of affirming the all-importance of economics, and its supposed human by-product, 'economic man' and 'woman'" (GM 12). "What emerges," according to Masao Miyoshi, "is an increasingly tightly woven network of multinational investments among EC, North American, and East Asian countries, gradually transforming the multinational corporations into transnational corporations" (GL 86), in which "academia, the institution that might play the principal role in investigating transnational corporatism and its implications for humanity, seems all too ready to cooperate rather than

deliberate” (96). In chapter two, I argue that Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission* functions as a social and literary tool that unravels the inequities of postmodernity, in which there is a purported “growing awareness of the limits of the claims of the project of modernity” (Featherstone 59). “Put simply,” Mike Featherstone argues, “postmodernism points to the problem of handling cultural complexity” and “entails a loss of confidence in the master-narratives of progress and enlightenment which have been central to Western modernity” while witnessing “a democratization and popularization of forms of knowledge and cultural production and dissemination which were previously monopolized or tightly controlled by established groups” (*GL* 59). Cyberspace has been popularized as the likely space where Featherstone’s utopian image of democratization occurs, as technology has proliferated the immediate transmission of information and knowledge. Everything is now a seamless web: change one detail and unexpected, sometimes monstrous transformations occur in other apparently unrelated zones of life, which is phenomenal, but also very disquieting at the same time.

As *Transmission* illustrates, modernity is a game of catch-up dependent on and empowered by a nation’s ability to develop technological innovations and infrastructure where the “dissociation of space from place is further accelerated” and “the notion of time is replaced by that of speed” (Yoshimoto 115). Despite the lowering of borders and the weakening power of nation-states, nations are nevertheless germane in global and postmodern discourse. As I have argued, the global economy is a marketplace of perpetual competition between nations to quantitatively be ahead; hence, the emphasis on science, math, engineering, technology, and finance capital. In other words, despite globalization’s alleged

flattening effect, who you are and where you come from still matters. As Nairn and James argue, “[n]ationalism was global from the start” (*GM* 14).

When Arjun Mehta, an IT specialist from India, fails to achieve social mobility in America, and correspondingly in India, both of which are now implicated in the global economy which is so densely networked according to the appropriations and needs of TNCs, he releases a far-reaching virus that entertains the possibility of turning the world upside down with the click of a mouse, suggesting the paradoxical dangers the Internet poses through its very advantages. In short, the temporal modernist agenda of development and progress has led to a postmodern flux of time-space compression, in which “[f]or the purpose of shortening turnover time, image and spectacle have emerged as ideal commodities, which can be consumed and disappear instantaneously” (Yoshimoto 115). Cyberspace, just as “[t]he economy or the material base is,” is “increasingly ephemeral: profit is believed to be just a matter of manipulating numbers on a video display terminal” (115). The bearings of our social formations thus constantly elude us, but literary fiction captures them at a standstill for us to analyze and critically examine.

In chapter three, I argue that while cyberspace is intangible and immaterial, it has a concrete manifestation in global cities, thereby reiterating the importance of location on multiple levels. *Spook Country*, through converging multiple narratives on an espionage plot, reveals the interconnectivity of our world, but also unveils and emphasizes the darker aspects of technocapitalism, as the current phase of late-capitalism. While it is an axiom that high-technology firms and/or TNCs depend on financial resources to go on with their endless drive toward innovation, productivity, and competitiveness, we have yet to entirely acknowledge the absorption of national governments into neoliberalism, and thus, the conflation of economic and political

realities. As I argue in chapter three, the increasing influence and power of TNCs privilege intangibles such as creativity and knowledge, which is largely supported and enforced by local governments that one, take a backseat in the market, and two, ideologically interpellate citizens into believing that the developments and services offered by the TNCs will inevitably glamorize their city/state/country. Unfortunately, it is a misconception that all citizens will benefit from these developments. According to Miyoshi,

It is not the nation as an integrated whole but certain classes, the privileged in it, that receive a major portion of benefits from the state performing these tasks. The state fails to satisfy most of its sectors and leaves most of its citizenry resentful. Thus, there is a palpable aversion to taxation among all segments of population, rich or poor, although everyone knows that tax is the glue that keeps the nation-state coherent. The nation-state, in this sense, no longer works; it is thoroughly appropriated by transnational corporations. (*GL* 92-3)

Miyoshi goes on to argue that TNCs, run by a superclass, continue colonialism, and with the help of technology and bureaucracy sidestepped, TNCs are able to “rationalize and execute the objectives of colonialism with greater efficiency and rationalism” (96) than western imperialist countries were.

In our postmodern condition, we are on the brink of a cultural, social, and political catastrophe without even fully realizing it because quantitative conceptions of globalization obscure our understandings along the illusion of progress. As I have broached in an earlier part of this introduction, literary fiction may offer an alternative understanding and approach to mainstream views of globalization. As F.R. Leavis has argued, “the trained frequentation of literature alone” can bring “insight into the relations between abstract and generalizing thought and the concrete human experience” and “thinking about political and social matters ought to be done by minds of some real literary education, and done in an intellectual climate informed by a vital literary culture” (11); in other words, literature can bring insight into the discursive social formations of our time that are not addressed, and perhaps are even

masked by the illusion of development and progress. *Remains of the Day*, *Transmission*, and *Spook Country* are contemporary works of fiction that address the problematic cultural logic of our postmodern epoch and the paradoxical social formations and conceptions of globalization. Karl Marx and Friederich Engels claimed in 1848, “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible,” and as a result “from the many national and local literatures, a world literature arises” (CM 59). Marx and Engels’ 1848 proclamation resonates ever more so in the global 21st century, and yet, English departments have been unresponsive or very slow to respond to the changing circumstances of our era. Duke University’s Literature department, led by Fredric Jameson, and its objectives are perhaps the model for what literary studies ought to look like in a global and technologically advanced 21st century:

The Literature Program seeks to rethink what comparison might mean in a world rapidly being altered by complex forces of economic and technological integration. Although a focus on language, literature, and aesthetics continues to ground our work, we have pioneered by drawing together philosophical and theoretical reflections on the status of “literature” and “culture” with work in history, political economy, the sociology of culture, anthropology, visual culture, and cinema studies, all of which seeks to make sense of the complex factors affecting the historically changing nature of the relationship between society and culture. Literature has, in short, employed philosophical critique to interrogate and mediate our relationship to the social sciences thereby modeling a new kind of program in global studies from the perspective of the humanities, a program that recognizes that literature and culture are always crucially important agents in the understanding, definition and alteration of social formations. (Duke Program in Literature website)

If literature and literary studies continue to have the cultural, social, and political value Leavis claimed in 1943, English departments ought to reform their curriculum and research to address the changes in society and meet the changing needs of our world by emphasizing world literature, or at least, literature that explores the cultural and social conditions of our time.

I

Nationalism, Identity, and the Decline of Empire in *Remains of the Day*

It would be too simplistic a notion to say that literature is purely aesthetic. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* (1989) is exemplary of how historical and political contexts matter in both the production and interpretation of a novel. Literature is historical because it is a cultural embodiment of the social and political. Although *Remains of the Day* takes place during the decline of the British Empire, politics of the empire and its past and the binary between the colonized and colonizer are undeniably prevalent and indispensable as ghostly, but problematized, elements in the identity construction of its narrator and protagonist, Mr. Stevens. Mr. Stevens' *idée fixe* of what it is to be a professional and dignified *English* butler profoundly affects how he understands himself as a whole. Ishiguro's narrative style, according to Rebecca Walkowitz, "evoke[s] national attributes, whose recognition among readers tends to situate his texts within particular cultural traditions," which is true of "the apparent Englishness" found in Mr. Stevens (*ELH* 109). Ranging from his love life (or lack thereof), to his treatment of his father when in time of need, to the most mundane aspects of his daily life, Stevens' unyielding professionalism, ethic of service, and personal reserve represent all that was best about the English butler in an English society that is bygone. Of course, we know that this defunct English society was a feudal one, which would have rendered Mr. Stevens as a powerless and voiceless subject already at birth, thereby problematizing the dialectic of the colonized and colonizer as a power relation not exclusively embedded as a geopolitical question of one nation colonizing another nation and/or region, but also as a question that emerges in local class distinctions.

Although Mr. Stevens is English himself, he is ultimately portrayed as an Other to his long-time employer, Lord Darlington, as well as Darlington's company. Mr. Stevens, however, is not conscious of the arbitrary constructs comprising his identity; as an interpellated subject whose knowledge and experiences remain entirely within the confines of Darlington Hall and the feudal, anti-Semitic landlords he serves, he thinks that being a part of the estate is already of the greatest honor. If Mr. Stevens' knowledge and world is limited to that of being a great butler in Darlington Hall, then it is beyond question that his notion of what it means to be English and perhaps even an individual is delimited to his professional identity. The irony, however, is that the dignity and respectability he associates with his professional identity is far removed from the reality of his social class. As dignified as he believes English butlers carry themselves out to be in their vocational roles, they are nevertheless of a subaltern class. This chapter examines *Remains of the Day* as a novel of manners, revealing identity as a product of historical processes of performativity and pedagogy, through which the novel form itself becomes performative, pedagogical, historical, thus political.

1989 and 1956: Historical Contexts

R.S. Crane argues that literary history is essentially part of "the general history of culture" (20). If literary history is part of cultural history, what is the significance of Ishiguro's publication of *Remains of the Day* in 1989? And why did Ishiguro write about a time period that seems so irrelevant to what was happening in the 1980s? As we all know, 1989 saw various events emblematic of communism's collapse, which led to an immediate onrush of neoliberal economic policies. However, Reaganomics and Thatcherism throughout the 80s were already revitalizing laissez-faire economic policies that increased privatization and allowed the period to see great social and

economic change as multinational corporations began moving their industries overseas. The spread of neoliberalism, thus, resulted in an increase of transnational flows – from finance and human capital, to information and knowledge – which has facilitated globalization and ipso facto contributed to the current phase of late capitalism. Globalization, in theory, weakens nationalism and nation-states and replaces them with cosmopolitanism and multinational corporations. In Tom Nairn and Paul James' words, “[n]eo-liberal preaching saw only the lowering of borders, and nation-states losing former powers and status” (*GM* 12). Furthermore, the fall of communism led to the balkanization of the Soviet Union, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, which also raises questions of nationalism and the role and division of empire and nation-states. It is vis-à-vis the alleged waning of nationalism and diminishing power of nation-states, and the decline of empire that renders the 1980s in which Ishiguro was writing *Remains of the Day* a parallel to the 1950s in which the novel is set.

Remains of the Day takes place during the war and up to 1956. This date provides a critical historical context to properly understand the novel: Egypt's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956 marked the symbolic end of the British empire and influence, as the canal was a strategic intersection which shortened the route between Asia and Europe for trade and military positioning, thus a sort of highway for the British empire. The struggles of Britain to wield power and control in the Suez Canal Crisis marked its fall as an African colonizer and also contributed to the emergence of the United States as a superpower, which had taken an isolationist foreign policy in the Middle East prior to the Suez Crisis.

Ishiguro's choice of this historical context is twofold: first and foremost, it emphasizes the obsolete cultural (and thus, national) context of Englishness in light of

the end of empire, which indicates that the greatness of Britain has passed. Therefore, the dismantling of Britain's colonial empire undoubtedly provides a determining historical context for the characters' attitudes and aspirations, for incidentally, it is during the time of the Suez Crisis that Mr. Stevens endeavors on an "expedition" (Ishiguro 3) to England's countryside as an attempt to see more of his country. He explains that it is under his new employer's recommendation to do so, as he recalls Mr. Farraday's inquiry: "You fellows [(butlers)], you're always locked up in these big houses helping out, how do you ever get to see around this beautiful country of yours?" (Ishiguro 4). As a butler of an estate as large as Darlington Hall's, Mr. Stevens is undoubtedly confined to the limits of the property with his extensive household duties. However, he claims, "although we did not see a great deal of the country in the sense of touring the countryside...[we] did actually 'see' more of England than most" (4), which oddly enough, is probably true.

Although Mr. Stevens is only a butler, which renders him an unlikely character with too insignificant of a role in English society to consider as a personification of Englishness (or English nationalism), as in the case of the 'Suez Crisis', there is a great deal that is 'in but not in', or 'in by not being in'. The historical event of the Suez Crisis has a powerful presence in the novel, in spite of its absence as a direct allusion, which shapes and impacts the characters and constrains the narrative within a specific historical context. So while Mr. Stevens may at best be only dimly aware of that which is outside his experience, even when referring to his own little corner of England – the experiences he encounters as a butler and his methodological performance of his role as a butler intimate a great deal about English society and culture, which qualifies significant aspects of the novel's reflection on England as comprehensive and legitimate. Although Mr. Stevens believes that "a butler's duty is

to provide good service” and “is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation” because “such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I” (Ishiguro 199), his position as a butler is significant to understanding the construct of English culture, nationalism and nationhood precisely through his willing subordination and subjection, and pantomimic performance of cultural practices necessitated by his trade. For instance, Mr. Stevens states, “those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what *is* within our realm” (199), thereby conceding a deficiency and gap of knowledge informed by his recognition of his inferiority and subordination, which he readily accepts. Yet, at the same time, he sees that being a servant can affect humanity at large by “devoting [his] attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies” (199). The assumption that these “great gentlemen” are the paragons of civilization deludes Mr. Stevens into believing that he, too, can play a role in contributing to human development and progress by subjecting himself to these men, when quite the contrary, his willing subjection merely reinforces a power dynamic that by all means, obstructs any notion of progress and enlightenment. Yet, to ostensibly digress and to return to the initial concern, what might a butler have to teach us about English culture and society?

The Myth of the Nation and Its Dissemination

In an interview, Kazuo Ishiguro explains, “for a long, long time Britain thought of itself as the center of a huge empire” which allowed the British to “write about the smallest details of English society,” which “was, by definition, of interest to people in the far corners of the world because English culture itself was something that was internationally important” (2000). In *Remains of the Day*, we see Mr. Stevens subscribing to this notion that England is at the center of the world through

his reflection on the most minute and mundane details of his servanthood. In reflecting and writing on these details, a certain degree of import is allocated to information that would otherwise be deemed as trivial. This allocation functions to emphasize the existence of a cultural hegemony – even such seemingly inconsequential and banal particulars should have an edge in global cultural production such that people around the world recognize the banalities of the English butler as quintessentially emblematic of Englishness, but ironically, idolize these very banalities. However, at the time Mr. Stevens embarks on his journey through the English country, England is no longer at the center of the world. Be that as it may, England nevertheless established compelling cultural norms and practices that were not easily and entirely jettisoned in light of changing (geo)political circumstances. These cultural norms and practices, thus, become historical *and* political by lingering like ghosts haunting a changing and different society (and world) from the one they emanated from. According to Ishiguro, “[t]he whole attitude to what ‘English’ means has undergone a huge change since I was a child in England” (2000). According to Ishiguro, the British began to realize that they are “not the center of the universe” and “that Britain wasn’t the heart of an Empire, but just a little -- albeit a powerful one, still -- just a little country” (2000). It is precisely this change – the decentering of England and its signifiers – that Mr. Stevens, struggles with. Throughout the novel, Mr. Stevens is fixed in old English ideals of professional code of conduct, dignity, and reserve that renders him as the perfect English subject; in this way, Mr. Stevens illustrates Englishness as a performative concept. But what exactly qualifies as English? In other words, who or what determines Englishness?

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that nations are created, or constructed, *culturally*. He writes, “nationality...nation-ness, as well as nationalism

are cultural artefacts” and in order to “understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being” (4). This is because national identity, as Robert Eaglestone explains, “affects how you behave, your expectations, your relations with others...how you understand the world and your place in it” (121). Mr. Stevens claims that the greatest butlers “wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit,” as if butlers were *actors* and being a good butler is something *performed* (43). He observes, “being a butler is like playing some pantomime role” and that “great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost” (42-3). Stevens is thoroughly subsumed *and* consumed by his professional identity as a butler, which is clearly performative. His ideas and behavior are arguably performances that construct his identity, as a professional English butler as well as an individual; and since his identity is performative, it is a cultural construct, which involves historical processes. In fact, his professional identity is arguably inseparable from his national identity. He boldly asserts, “Continentalers are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of,” which essentializes and thus, foregrounds issues of nation and national identification (43). Not only is Stevens’ context limited to Darlington Hall and imperial Britain, but his professional and national identity seem inseparable and indistinguishable. For Stevens, the characteristics, namely restraint - something that butlers from elsewhere apparently lack – a professional English butler exhibits invariably corresponds with the fact that he is English. That is to say, Mr. Stevens believes that being English alone inherently equips a person with certain traits and characteristics that renders him superior to those of other nationalities. As a professional English butler, then, Mr. Stevens regards himself as quintessentially English, and a part of what Homi Bhabha

refers to as “disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture” (NN 292). By regarding himself as quintessentially English, he becomes an embodiment of English culture, thus a cultural artifact of England as a country and nation.

Mr. Stevens is effectively a manifestation of a “complex rhetorical strategy” where “the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy” (NN 297). As someone who is shaped by the English culture through language, history, location, and even his profession (all of which were taught to and imposed upon him, and none of which were innate traits or knowledge), Mr. Stevens is undoubtedly an object of his nation and culture. Further, Bhabha contends, “the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification...in which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process” (NN 297). By being subjected to his national culture, Mr. Stevens also becomes a subject to the English culture by reproducing and performing the habits, traits, and knowledge he has been taught that delineates Englishness. By being a subject of his national culture, Mr. Stevens, once again, becomes a cultural object or embodiment that signifies the English nationality. As Bhabha elaborates, “the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture” (NN 297). In *Remains of the Day*, we undoubtedly encounter sundries of Mr. Stevens’ “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life” as an English butler, as if these particulars are significant more than they are trivial. The magnification of such mundane details of Mr. Stevens’ life is suggestive, as he is a servant, which positions him in a class, which by no means, is respectable or esteemed according to conventional social standards, of course, depending on whose conventions one is observing. Yet the entire novel is framed around Stevens’ life and self-respect as an English butler, and this certainly provides a fresh and crucial

context for understanding Englishness as a cultural construct; for it is not an accident that Ishiguro has limited Stevens' knowledge and thoughts within this context.

For Mr. Stevens, serving “the greatest ladies and gentlemen of the land” has given him the “privilege to see the best of England over the years” (Ishiguro 4), which is certainly true if we consider the cultural practices of the privileged class under the British Empire “the best of England.” It is clear that Mr. Stevens' ideology is rather affixed to a culture fabricated by the dominating class of that era, and that his understanding and knowledge of the world is limited to the perception that he had “seen it all” by remaining in one small corner of his country – which is incidentally only one small corner of the entire world – and in believing that he has in fact “seen it all” under employment of Lord Darlington, he becomes an instrument of cultural hegemony and a subject of cultural imperialism. His engagements as a butler, then, unquestionably impact the way he thinks as an individual. While Mr. Stevens assumes that whatever he sees and experiences at Darlington Hall is universally true, the novel contrarily suggests that his assumptions – by the very fact that they are assumptions – alone already implicitly challenge notions of truth and reality, and by extension, identity and its establishment. The novel, thus, foregrounds the question of Mr. Steven's identity construction – be it personal, occupational, or national – and whether these multiple subject positions can be conflated into one identity to appear cogent for the greater purpose of fabricating a coherent national identity. Anderson argues, “the ‘nation’ proved an invention on which it was impossible to secure a patent” precisely because the “nation” is a myth (*IC* 4). This becomes increasingly evident as the novel progresses and Mr. Stevens encounters different instances that challenge what it means to be “English.”

To complicate matters further, readers are only immediately provided with Mr. Stevens' perspective and reflections throughout the novel, which promptly raises the question of narrative reliability, and to what extent we can trust his narrative. According to Robert Eaglestone, characters like Mr. Stevens' typically tell us "what [*they*] think is important, and what [*they*] think is going on" (*DE* 103-4, emphasis mine). Certainly, Stevens is extremely biased in that he has developed a deep attachment and "profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson 4) in terms of what it means to be English, or particularly, what it means to be a dignified English butler; which, of course, is a very limited perspective. For instance, Mr. Stevens reflects on a time when he overheard Darlington Hall's housekeeper, Miss Kenton, cry over her dead aunt, which "provoked a strange feeling to rise within [him]" (176), and caused him "to stand there hovering in the corridor for some moments" (177). Stevens is clearly perturbed by Miss Kenton's grief as he was "preoccupied for some hours" giving "particular thought to the question of what [he] might best do or say to ease her burden a little" (177). In the end, however, he "judged it best to await another opportunity to express [his] sympathy and went on [his] way" (177). Yet, when another opportunity rose, he merely had a "professional discussion" (177) with Miss Kenton regarding new staff members at Darlington Hall and refrained from providing her with any consolation for her grief whatsoever. This is an obvious instance in which Mr. Stevens performs and exhibits "emotional restraint"; as mentioned earlier, he claims that this trait distinguishes Continentals from English butlers. In this specific instance, his behavior is a result of repeated cultural practices, and it supersedes his human sensibility and empathy to comfort Miss Kenton when in time of need. When his reflection comes to an end, Mr. Stevens observes, "I have drifted considerably from the account I was giving of this evening's events" (180),

suggesting that moment with Miss Kenton as a notable moment in his life, thereby indicating some level of faint consciousness in how inhibiting his pursuit of being a proper English butler has been on his private life. Although the days he shared with Miss Kenton at Darlington Hall are long gone, Mr. Stevens evidently excessively, and often unconsciously, reflects upon those “glorious” days at the estate. It is as if he cannot sequester himself from Darlington Hall and anything and everything associated with the place and era it thrived in; Mr. Stevens is trapped and confined emotionally and mentally in the past, because the only culture he knows is one from the past, and this culture, which has now changed, is tied to the very essence of who he is as an individual.

Be that as it may, an “essential element of the power of nationalism,” Anthony D. Smith contends, is “its chameleon-like ability to transmute itself” (NN 13). While I agree with Smith that nationalism is powerful enough to endure in spite of challenges it may face for any given reason and that it can and *will* change under different epochs because of varying political and economic reasons, Mr. Stevens clearly and staunchly identifies with something that no longer is, and is incapable of transmuting according to varying circumstances. Mr. Stevens’ faithfulness to the domestic cultural artefacts of imperial Britain, I argue, reflects on how penetrating the nationalist discourse of that epoch was – so much so that Mr. Stevens’ is so thoroughly interpellated that he becomes a ghost of that period that lingers in post-imperial Britain.

Conflating Identities, Uncanny Doubling

Not only is Stevens confined emotionally and mentally in the past, but he is also constricted in his physical appearance. When “the question of what sorts of costume were appropriate” for his journey, Mr. Stevens says, “I am in the possession of a number of splendid suits, kindly passed on to me over the years by Lord

Darlington himself” (Ishiguro 10). Stevens’ repetitive use of the term “costume” for his dress is suggestive, almost as if he himself is aware that he lacks a personal and private identity beyond that of an English butler in a “revered” household. The possession of Darlington’s suits allows him to mimic his master, thus assume gentility; when he puts on Darlington’s garments, he effectively puts on the costume of a gentleman, which allows him to falsely believe that is he, too, is of a higher-grade. This illusion, of course, is an effective rhetorical strategy to maintain Mr. Stevens’ unswerving loyalty and dedication to Lord Darlington, and by extension, the English aristocracy, which was (and arguably still is, albeit under a different guise) the dominating class of English culture, society and government. Mr. Stevens is undoubtedly a cultural and political embodiment of a particular role (subaltern and colonized class) in a particular country (England) during a particular historical period (British imperialism).

Writing about colonial enterprises in Africa, Mahmood Mamdani asserts that Britain “was the first to realize that key to an alien power’s achieving a hegemonic domination was a cultural project: one of harnessing the moral, historical, and community impetus behind local custom to a larger colonial project” (CS 286). If Britain realizes that hegemonic domination is necessarily a cultural project abroad, she certainly realizes it at home as well. Colonization, then, is problematized as its execution is not limited to geopolitical issues abroad, but is also a prevailing problem in class concerns at home. Consider Mr. Stevens’ diction when he uses the term “costume,” which implies a theatrical element, to describe his attire. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines costume as a “a set of clothes in a style typical of a particular country or historical period” or “a set of clothes worn by an actor or other performer for a particular role.” Although dressing himself in Lord Darlington’s suits

may allow Mr. Stevens to assume gentility, it is not a costume that deceives everyone. At Mortimer's Pond, Mr. Stevens comes across a chauffeur who is able to distinguish him as "one of them top-notch butlers" (Ishiguro 119). The chauffeur explains that because Stevens "talk[s] almost like a gentleman" (119), but not quite, his appearance is very misleading from his professional identity and the position he holds in society. After the chauffeur makes multifarious comments on how "posh" (119) the Ford and Darlington Hall are, he inquires whether Stevens "actually used to work for that Lord Darlington?" (120). Stevens surprisingly responds, "[o]h no, I am employed by Mr. John Farraday, the American gentleman who bought the house from the Darlington family" (120). Stevens' response suggests that he may be faintly cognizant of the ignominy associated with the bygone glory of those who prospered under the British Empire (or those who dabbled in Nazism). Unfortunately, Stevens happens to be a product of that zeitgeist.

As far as readers are concerned, everything he knows revolves around Darlington Hall. Because this is so, his thoughts and manners are products of that environment. In this way, he appears to be like a gentleman but in actuality, he is merely a servant – a proletariat, so to speak. Interestingly, Mr. Stevens' manners and appearance render him a mimesis of Lord Darlington as much as his historical embodiment is a mimicry of aristocratic English culture. Homi Bhabha asserts, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (LC 122). Mr. Stevens' situation is extremely uncanny; he exhibits the manners of a gentleman, but is not classified as one because again, he is of the servant class.

When the car ran out of gas during Mr. Steven's journey through a small part of the English countryside, he becomes stranded and encounters villagers near

Tavistock, Devon. Stevens' beneficent host, Mr. Taylors, tells him "[y]ou can tell a true gentleman from a false one that's just dressed in finery. Take yourself, sir. It's not just the cut of your clothes, nor is it even the fine way you've got speaking" (185). Finally, Mr. Taylor declares, "[t]here's something else that marks you out as a gentleman" (185). Of course, these comments reflect Mr. Taylor's ignorance, but the fact that Mr. Stevens does not bother to correct him indicates that Stevens feels that he indeed possesses traits of a gentleman. He proposes that "dignity" (185), once performed, signifies a gentleman. Ironically, this proposition reveals Stevens' own ignorance, for his understanding of what it means to be a gentleman is constructed by what Lord Darlington superficially appeared to be. However, Darlington's distinction and prestige has more to do with the class he was born into, rather than how he carries himself. Be that as it may, by reproducing and performing the superficial manners Lord Darlington possessed, Mr. Stevens misconceives that he, too, is of a superior breed, thus willingly subjects himself to the aristocracy's hegemony. Nevertheless, Mr. Stevens seems to show little to no concern for his uncanny situation as a mimesis that will never be complete. While he does exhibit certain aristocratic traits because his environment is pedagogical (he repeats and performs what he sees and knows), it does not equate to being an original. At best, Mr. Stevens is very similar to a "classic English gentleman," but not quite. Little does he know, he is merely a strange, but incomplete, double of Lord Darlington.

Ideological State Apparatuses

Mr. Stevens' identity is certainly ambivalent and strange, as he is a gentleman in appearance and conduct, but at the same time, he really is not a gentleman in accordance with his social standing. *Remains of the Day*, thus, is not a novel simply about a butler in an aristocratic household that flourished when Britain's empire did

as it so too, declined when the empire declined. Instead, the novel examines how the dynamic between the dominant and powerful class and the lower or subaltern class, exemplified by Lord Darlington and Mr. Stevens, duplicates very precisely England's relationship with its colonies; thereby problematizing the relationship between the colonized and colonizer, which is traditionally based on race. As argued, Mr. Stevens is a mimesis of Lord Darlington, and yet, he is also Darlington's willing servant and inferior. The relationship between the two certainly has its analogies with that between the colonized and colonizer, yet perhaps also with a significant difference. Hierarchy, for example, is no longer justified by race alone. Does this then post limitations to a post-colonial reading of the novel, or has the postcolonial novel transmuted because culture and society has been greatly impacted by neoliberal economic and globalizing trends of the 1980s and onwards?

Mr. Stevens is the apotheosis of the perfect manservant who obliterates all traces of his own personality, all instinctive drives and desires, all individual dreams in the service of his master. Mr. Stevens' eradication of any individuality is particularly evident when his father passes away. When Miss Kenton asked Mr. Stevens whether he would like to take a moment to see his father, he brusquely replies, "I'm very busy just now" (106) and returns to the smoking room to assist Darlington's fascist guests. Interestingly, Mr. Stevens' willingness and readiness to be subjected as an English butler emanates from his family, a presumably private sphere, as his father was also a butler. His father, then, becomes an agent of an ideological state apparatus (ISA) – the family. To consider something as private as the family as an ISA to interpellate subservient and deferential convictions relevant to the nationalist ideology fabricated by the ruling class is indeed a very perturbing thought. As Benedict Anderson argues, however, the "nation" is "something capable of being

consciously aspired to from early on” (*IC* 67). In Mr. Stevens’ case, it is not as simple as him being the son of a butler, as he also consciously strives to live up to the ideal of service achieved by his father; and living up to this ideal reifies his Englishness. He narrates, with great pride, one particular incident in his father’s life that epitomizes the celebrated British sense of “self-restraint.” Mr. Stevens’ father was informed by his master that a general who was responsible for the unnecessary deaths of a large number of young men, Mr. Stevens’ brother included, during the Boer war is expected at a luncheon. Mr. Stevens’ father, ever dutiful, suffered “the intimate proximity for four days with the man he detests” (42) and volunteered to act as valet to the general because he recognized that “his employer’s business aspirations hung on the smooth running of the house party” (41). The irony of this self-abasement, seemingly unnoticed by Mr. Stevens and his father, is that the business interest is utterly unsavory – illegal arms dealing – and neither father nor son question whether their sacrifices are for a worthy or justified cause. Instead, they carry on with “dignity” as perfect butlers who practice self-restraint.

The classic English butler is, thus, the perfect manservant and the ideal nationalist, devoid of all individuality and instinctive drives and desires, the mimesis with the “correct” accent, and of course, the “correct” manners. Mr. Stevens’ impeccable performance of an English butler is pervasive in all aspects of his life. Even when he reads recreationally, it is for work-related purposes and not leisure. When Miss Kenton caught Mr. Stevens reading a sentimental romance, he explained, “it was an extremely efficient way to maintain and develop one’s command of the English language” (167). Mr. Stevens explains that there is a “professional desirability of good accent and command of language” (167-8), which conflates occupational eligibility with cultural competency such that one must exhibit, perform,

and reproduce certain cultural norms of the nation to qualify as a desirable servant. Further, Mr. Stevens explains, “butlers of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role” and “cannot be seen casting it aside...as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume” (169). The metaphors of acting, of clothing, reveal how much Stevens’ notions derive from deeply entrenched British traditions. The British class system makes such role playing mandatory as every individual is expected to perform the role assigned to him/her at birth. A crucial element of such acting is the rigorous subjection of the private self to the demands of the public person. As Althusser proclaims, we “are *always already* subjects” (1503) because ideology, vis-à-vis ideological state apparatuses “drums into [people]...a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology” (1494). However, the drumming in of the correlation between possessing the desired qualifications and the ability to perform professionally deludes the subjected class into believing that they are part of a meritocracy. While the illusion of performing professionally in a meritocracy may disguise as an act of free choice and justify a sense of dignity and superiority in the likes of Mr. Stevens, in actuality, it is ideological interpellation that misguides and misleads the working class into believing that they have free choice with the aim that it appears as if they willingly reproduce certain ideologies and norms, rather than being subjected within existing power relations and by ruling class ideology.

The Hayes Society is yet another ideological state apparatus that functions to preserve ruling class ideology. Because the society claimed exclusivity, and admitted butlers of “only the very first rank” (Ishiguro 31), it “managed to keep its numbers extremely low” (32) thereby establishing imaginary power and prestige. The Hayes Society “did not regard the houses of businessmen or the ‘newly rich’ as ‘distinguished’” and “a prerequisite for membership was that ‘an applicant be

attached to a distinguished household” (32). Not only is it necessary for an applicant to be attached to a well-respected and prominent household, but the family’s prestige must also derive from old money. Through its illusive power and prestige, the Hayes Society manipulates individuals into aspiring towards these standards for what a great butler ought to be, and in doing so, produces individuals who are willingly subjected to both the aristocracy and national culture, insofar that the two correspond to one another. This suggests that the ideology behind the Society is an artificial construct fabricated to perpetuate uneven power relations, and is also historical because of its discursive formation and attachment to the British class system during a specific time period in British history. As Mr. Stevens explains, most people in post-imperial Britain are not “aware of the Hayes Society, for few talk of it these days” (31) because the society is an ISA of a bygone era’s ruling class ideology, which is no longer relevant, not so much because the power structure collapsed with the decline of empire, but because power and influence have shifted from the aristocracy – which has particular cultural practices – to the (American) new rich which operates differently despite reproducing a power structure.

Reifying and the Deconstruction of Identity

Althusser asserts that ideology “always expresses *class positions*” (1496) because “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (1504) through their social roles. The limitations of Mr. Stevens’ understanding of himself as an English butler goes hand in hand with his social standing in the lower class, thereby expressing his class position. When he performs his duties as a “great” (Ishiguro 33) butler, he becomes a concrete subject because his performances put his ideology into practice, and thereby materializes the ideology and his own existence as a subject. Therefore, only when he is performing as a classic English butler, and

hailed as one, does he feel that his existence and identity are concrete. Jonathan Culler explains, “[t]he English word *subject* already encapsulates this key theoretical program: the subject is an actor or agent, a free subjectivity that does things, as in the ‘subject of a sentence’. But a subject is also *subjected*” (109). For Althusser, this paradox of both free choice and subjection that occurs simultaneously, offers a double mirror-connection crucial to establishing identity, and by extension, power relations, because multiple recognitions occur. The subject recognizes himself as an individual with “free will” who thus willingly subjects himself to ruling class ideology, which incidentally implies a mutual recognition of difference, whether the subjected individual is fully cognizant of the differences, which implies the existence of a hierarchy. Recall that Mr. Stevens believes himself to be of a superior class because of his affinity with Lord Darlington, despite his illusive power to manipulate the subjected to remain colonized without any cognition that he has been comprehensively colonized.

Throughout the novel, Mr. Stevens is portrayed as a character who lacks agency, and is always subjected *and* a subject. His concerns entirely revolve around providing first-class service at Darlington Hall to Lord Darlington, and all its guests whom Mr. Stevens regards as worthy and important on the premise that they are high-ranking, well-connected, prominent and distinguished persons, which at the time meant aristocrats or those who were well-connected to the aristocracy. Mr. Stevens’ encounter with said persons, as mentioned earlier, undoubtedly requires him to assume and perform specific roles and responsibilities to reproduce a power structure in which they have cultural and ideological hegemony.

The mannerisms a professional and dignified English butler ought to perform and mimic are aristocratic conventions that purport to symbolize national culture, but

this only accentuates Mr. Stevens' position as a subject of the aristocracy and country, and an Other to his master. "[O]therness'," Bhabha writes, "is at once an object of desire and derision" (OQ 19). Since Mr. Stevens is an effective and persuasive mimesis of the aristocracy's mannerisms, he threatens "the fantasy of [their] origin and identity" (OQ 19), so they must clearly construct and distinguish Mr. Stevens as an Other to stabilize their own identity as the superior, the colonizers, while retaining Mr. Stevens' loyalty, dedication, and above all, amenability. When Mr. Spencer, one such individual who assumes that Mr. Stevens is likely to be unknowledgeable in all aspects outside of servanthood, incessantly questions Mr. Stevens on foreign policy, Mr. Stevens' only response is "I'm very sorry, sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter" (Ishiguro 195). It is possible that Mr. Stevens might have been able to provide some sort of informed response to Mr. Spencer's foreign policy questions, but the novel stresses that he chooses to not even consider doing so because he knows what is wanted of him, so he intones this standard reply repeatedly rather like a parrot, much to the gratification of Lord Darlington and his Nazi friends. This would otherwise be an extremely embarrassing moment for Mr. Stevens if he was in fact a dignified and autonomous individual who is merely resigned to an acquiescent and passive persona at that moment to capitulate to those who society regard as superior; but because Mr. Stevens was *always* already a subject, dignity and autonomy were never in his possession to begin with. For example, while Mr. Stevens' usage of the term "sir" is a cultural practice specific to his role, it invites us to see him as a subservient and powerless subject – vulnerable and submissive.

On the second day of his trip in Salisbury, Mr. Stevens recalls a very important conference held at Darlington Hall, in which an American Senator – Henry Lewis – challenged the motivation behind the conference. Lewis described all of the

conference's attendants as "naïve dreamers" and declared Darlington as a "classic English gentleman. Decent, honest, well-meaning," but is ultimately "*an amateur*" (102). Henry Lewis' proclamation challenges Mr. Stevens' long-established belief, whether he is conscious of it or not, that Darlington and his alliances are noble and altruistic, which by extension, also challenges the notion that serving these men honorably would emphatically render one as dignified and patriotic. At the very least, the moment is significant enough for him to retain and reflect upon it in a waning memory in a period when such beliefs were passé. The coincidence that he reflects upon this episode on a very short trip of only four days long during the historical period of the Suez Crisis intimates that changing historical and political circumstances prompts and facilitates a deconstruction of Mr. Stevens' ostensibly coherent identity, which is an integration of seemingly disparate multiple subject positions. As the novel develops, it becomes increasingly apparent that everything Mr. Stevens has ever known gradually becomes strangely unfamiliar to him such that what he thought he knew, he actually did not know at all. Mr. Stevens, thus, effectively experiences uncanniness, or "a disturbance of the familiar" (Bennett and Royle 25). Everything he knows and understands is limited within the ideological context of a being subject, an English butler who flourished by reproducing the cultural norms and practices of a vast and expanding empire. But when the empire waned, so too did Mr. Stevens' spirit and essence, which is not to say, however, that Mr. Stevens as a cultural embodiment of the imperial zeitgeist has entirely become obsolete.

According to Anthony D. Smith, "nationalism derives its force from its historical embeddedness" (viii), and further,

nations perform general human functions, providing social cohesion, order, warmth and the like; that is why particular nations, though no part of any 'natural order', seem to their members to be all-embracing and immemorial, and we in turn must admit the power and enduring quality of the fundamental cultural ties. (5)

Although the British empire may have declined, the nationalism it fabricated to retain the loyalty and dedication of all of its subjects remains pertinent because, as Anthony D. Smith contends, of its historical embeddedness and capacity to provide for human social needs. As demonstrated by Mr. Stevens' unease in the waning of the British empire, nationalism is a double-edged sword that is an ideology interpellated to ease the process of colonization and domination, but also provides mental stability for its citizens and subjects through creating fundamental cultural ties that produce social cohesion. According to Robert Young, landscape has cultural signification in fabricating the idea of Englishness. There is a "deep, primary affection for the English countryside" that "involves an attachment to the landscape...together with a certain class mobility" (9) that substantiates a profound sense of Englishness associated with grandeur and superiority, as if the landscape's evocation of Englishness *is* a certain kind of class mobility, albeit only an illusion of it.

This prompts the question of how landscape and geography contribute to identity construction. Mr. Stevens claims he came across "the English landscape at its finest" on his first day in Salisbury; and further, it "possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess" (28). According to Mr. Stevens, then, the English landscape possesses qualities unique only to England, such that the image of the English country is quintessentially English in nature. Homi Bhabha elaborates on the relationship between landscape and identity vis-à-vis national discourse, and explains that "the recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes...the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression" (*NV* 295). Although Britain's international influence was weakening and the domestic social and political atmospheres were also changing –

both of which, as has been argued, provides critical historical contexts that challenge and deconstruct Mr. Stevens' identity – he remarks that the “marvelous view” he encountered is “most deeply satisfying...and this quality is probably best summed up by the term ‘greatness’” and further, believes that “the landscape of [Britain] alone would justify” the name “*Great Britain*” (Ishiguro 28). For Mr. Stevens, landscape has an inherent relationship with the nation, which Bhabha argues, *naturalizes* the concept of a nation by discerning its manifestation in a visibly material form. By being able to visualize the “greatness” of the country in its landscape, “[n]ational time becomes concrete and visible” (NV 295), which only exalts Great Britain and intensifies nationalism for Mr. Stevens. By viewing such an astonishing and breathtaking landscape, Mr. Stevens is led to believe that Great Britain is, in fact, a real, concrete and material existence of which he can take pride in being a subject of. While British imperialism appears to be the topic, the novel is yet, of course, preoccupied with Englishness at a time when there is a slippage between ‘England’ and ‘Great Britain’; while the British empire may have declined, ‘England’ hauntingly persists and ‘Englishness’ is continuously interpellated and performed. Although many of the abstract components of British nationalism has been jettisoned or adapted to changing circumstances such as the waning of the British empire and the increasingly multiculturalism found in its metropolitan center, the English country unyieldingly endures as a cultural signification of the grandiose zeitgeist of British imperialism, which encourages Mr. Stevens to persist with that zeitgeist in mind and in practice.

Nevertheless, as Ernest Gellner writes, “[t]he cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions” (59), revealing the notion of a “nation” and its cultural shreds (which include issues of class and social position) as

mere fabrications. Because they are fabrications, practices that stabilize them must constantly be repeated and performed, and landscape happens to be “[s]uch a space of cultural signification” (*NN* 299) that inspires Mr. Stevens to continue performing certain cultural practices and norms that are passé. One must also note that the entire novel parochially takes place in the English countryside, distant from multi-cultural and diverse London, which at the time was experiencing mass waves of immigration after Windrush.² By circumscribing the novel within the countryside and largely ignoring direct references to London and its ongoing affairs, Ishiguro is demonstrably limiting the context in which Mr. Stevens functions within and presumably for good reason. Aijaz Ahmad contends, “‘culture’ generally and the literary/aesthetic realm in particular are situated at great remove from the economy and are therefore, among all the superstructures, the most easily available for idealization and theoretical slippage” (8) Mr. Stevens as an embodiment of cultural nationalism is removed from economic and political realities of the 1950s as per the Suez Crisis. What results is a “singularizing tendency” that “lends itself much too easily to parochialism, inverse racism and indigenist obscurantism” (8). We see this in Mr. Stevens’ unswerving veneration of the English butler as an esteemed professional in comparison to (those of) other nationalities, thereby rendering the English butler as an emblem of a unified and distinguished national culture.

Conclusion

Mr. Stevens is tragically deluded. He repudiates all personal relationships, including the tentative gestures of tenderness by Miss Kenton, and eschews all personal comforts and pleasures, opting to live in a small, damp, dark, and austere room because he finds fulfillment, or so he claims, in devotedly serving Lord

² Windrush marks the beginning of, what many people consider, a multi-cultural England.

Darlington. His behavior is at once conventional *and* eccentric because of a cruel misapprehension: he believes that Lord Darlington is a noble gentleman and Darlington Hall is a prestigious residence, both of which symbolize the greatness of England. He views the world “as a wheel” (Ishiguro 115) with England at the center.

After Lord Darlington’s death and having performed what he believes to be a dignified English butler for the majority of his working years, Mr. Stevens’ encounters a paradigm shift (how complete his shift is is utterly ambiguous and perhaps even indeterminable) that perhaps parallels Britain’s status quo as a nation-state. Tom Nairn writes, “[n]ationalism’ is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as ‘neurosis’ in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it” (359). Mr. Stevens needs the idea of ‘nationalism’ for subsistence just as Britain needs it to fuel its imperial causes; but at the decline of the empire, both Mr. Stevens and Britain are left “in the dilemmas of helplessness” (*BB* 359), but not entirely because nationalism, as suggested earlier, has a historical embeddedness that allows it to endure in spite of changing political circumstances. Be that as it may, even as England has to accommodate itself to the rise of America as a super power, Mr. Stevens, after having served Lord Darlington for thirty-five years, has to adjust himself to an American master, which he finds difficult. His situation may, perhaps, best be described as uncanny. Freud writes, “the uncanny would always...be something one does not know one’s way about in” (931). Mr. Farraday, Mr. Stevens’ new employer, seems to foil everything Mr. Stevens has ever known; and yet, this American master bought Darlington Hall only because he wanted “a genuine grand old English house” and a “genuine old fashioned English butler” (Ishiguro 124). Because Mr. Stevens is ghostly figure of British imperialism, he fits the criteria of this “genuine old fashioned English butler” that Farraday desires; he “at

once belong[s] to and haunt[s] the idea of a place, and belong[s] to and haunt[s] the idea of a time” (Bennett and Royle 160). Mr. Stevens is also a figure of desire because he represents English heritage, but also an object of derision for some precisely because feudalism is intertwined with his heritage and what he represents.

The brilliance of Ishiguro’s narrative strategy is such that, just as Darlington has convinced Mr. Stevens of the importance and nobility of his diplomatic maneuvering, the intimate tone of the narrative beguiles readers into a curious complicity with Mr. Stevens’ point of view, which enables one to empathize with Mr. Stevens even as the butler in him is completely taken in by Lord Darlington. Thus Ishiguro makes it possible for the reader to experience every nuance of the cruelly comic hoax which lies at the core of Mr. Stevens’ ideology and nationalism. Even the solid monumentality of Darlington Hall, the manifestation in brick and stone of England’s long and unbroken history of “greatness” is not real. Ishiguro’s narrative, however, is as performative as Mr. Stevens’ identity. Bennett and Royle write, “literary texts are part of a larger circulation of social energies, both products of and influences on a particular culture or ideology” (119). *Remains of the Day* is canonical in its portrayal of the end of the British Empire through a butler’s perspective, but at the same time, it is pedagogical as it influences what readers understand as British culture. *Remains of the Day*, through performing and revealing Mr. Stevens’ identity as a cultural construct, ultimately performs and reiterates those cultural shreds as “real” itself.

Throughout Mr. Stevens’ countryside tour, his borrowed clothes, borrowed car and learned accent and manners cause various people to almost mistake him for his master. As always, like a good butler and a good Englishman, Mr. Stevens plays his role as an subordinate dutifully. Mr. Stevens walks on the tightrope of identity – he is

culturally displaced, and he neither belongs to the current British society nor can he ever hope to attain a comfortable membership amongst those he reveres, who are now dead and buried. At the end of his tour, Mr. Stevens recognizes, as the result of his unsettling experiences on the road, a devastating truth: “I trusted in his lordship’s wisdom...I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can’t even say I made my own mistake. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?” (Ishiguro 243). And this very man who expounded with absurdly tedious lengthiness on the importance of always maintaining one’s dignity, of never revealing one’s emotions in public, breaks down and weeps openly before a total stranger he meets at the pier in Weymouth. The breaking down of Mr. Stevens results from ideological bankruptcy, a ramification of realizing the hollow sham of his servitude. Interestingly, it is only when he becomes ideologically bankrupt that he has the capacity to access his wealth of emotions. Nevertheless, Mr. Stevens’ remaining days seem bleak, hollow, and empty; culturally displaced and without his master and the only culture he has ever known, he is disoriented and isolated. Mr. Stevens’ struggles are “not [merely] against nations and states as such but for different articulations of class, nation and state” (Ahmad 11). *Remains of the Day* is a novel about the end of the British Empire as much as it is about the remains of Mr. Stevens’ days after the decline of the empire. The ghostly character of Mr. Stevens reminds us that literature is historical, and that the past informs and lingers in the present. As Bennett and Royle write, “a great work will always seem uncanny, at once strange and familiar; a surprising, unique addition to the canon and yet somehow foreseen, programmed by the canon; at once readable and defiant, elusive, [and] baffling” (164). Although *Remains of the Day* is historically set in the beginning half of the twentieth century,

the examined issues of class, nation and state are still relevant today despite the alleged postnational context of globalization and shifting hegemonies.

II

The Reflexive Resurgence of Local and National Formations in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*³

Introduction: Global Matrix

In an interview with Brian Hurley, Hari Kunzru explains that in writing *Transmission* (2005), he “wanted to do a book where nobody really meets each other” (May 2009), but everyone is globally connected by the transmission of people and information that is an effect of technology. The result is a novel that concerns itself with immigration and the ravenous power of new technology in a 21st-century global economy where the local and particular allegedly no longer have any meaning or power. “For Kunzru,” Ashley Shelden writes, “cosmopolitanism⁴ might well promise to produce a global ethics that allows for the admission of difference without demanding the assimilation of these differences to universal sameness” (CL 348). Despite all the highly mobile central characters – who reject the idea of place – being in different places, the eventual dispersal of a computer virus entertains the notion that the blurring of their destinies is only a mouse-click away, but as Shelden suggests, this does not necessary mean that there is universal homogenization. Nevertheless, many critics have characterized this phenomenon as the ultimate postmodern condition, as the cultural logic of “late-capitalism”, “post-Fordism” or neoliberalism. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, the political scientist and economist Francis Fukuyama declares liberal democracy, which I suspect masks neoliberalism beneath

³ In the last chapter, we witnessed the break-down of the “homogeneous nation” at the decline of the British empire, whose culture and narrative of national identity is becoming increasingly hybridized and ambivalent. This chapter will consider postnationalism in view of the globally produced local expressions of individuals experiencing mobile, hybrid and diasporic identities.

⁴ For Shelden, the word cosmopolitanism involves a way of organizing the world and/or type of subject position that pertains to the ethical relation of the other, and love is a “fundamental category of ethics” (349).

the veil,⁵ as a Hegelian universal end of history.⁶ Alluding to, but pace Rousseau, Fukuyama contends,

Technology makes possible the limitless accumulation of wealth, and thus the satisfaction of an ever-expanding set of human desires. This process guarantees an increasing homogenization of all human societies, regardless of their historical origins or cultural inheritances. All countries undergoing economic modernization must increasingly resemble one another: they must unify nationally on the basis of a centralized state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization[.] (xiv-xv)

Fukuyama's claim assumes that modernity necessarily equates evolution and progress, and that in the process of moving towards modernity, the local and historical are replaced with a unitary global vision. Further, the claim that liberal democracy is "the only coherent political aspiration," marked by liberal economic principles such as "free market" have "spread, and have succeeded in producing unprecedented levels of material prosperity" (17) renders the Western experience of industrialization as the model for all societies hoping for economic growth and technological progress to follow. As Anna Greenspan writes, "[d]evelopment was a game of catch up. No matter where, it could only occur by imitating this Western model" (18). Following the Western linear pattern of historical progress, then, renders local and national cultural formations as superannuated, and subjects all countries in the world to a western notion of progress and enlightenment. It is difficult, then, to avoid seeing Fukuyama's claim as both ethnocentric and ironically but unsurprisingly, totalitarian.

⁵ Wendy Brown catechizes, "the question is how much legitimacy neo-liberal governance requires from a democratic vocabulary, that is, how much does neo-liberalism have to cloak itself in liberal democratic discourse and work with liberal democratic institutions." There is a "transformation of American liberal democracy into a political and social form...organized by a combination of neo-liberal governmentality and imperial world politics, contoured in the short run by conditions of global economic and global security crises." See Wendy Brown's discussion of neoliberalism's legitimization project and liberal democracy's hypocrisy and ideological trickery in "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." *Theory and Event*. 7:1, 2003.

⁶ Fukuyama explains that he draws this understanding of History from Hegel. For Hegel, the end of history is Enlightenment, which means that human societies definitively reached a liberal state, but Fukuyama points out that, "[t]his did not mean that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end, that important events would no longer happen...It meant, rather, that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled" (xii), and liberal democracy accomplishes this by replacing the irrational desire in Hegel's master-slave dialectic to be recognized as greater than others "with a rational desire to be recognized as equal" (xx).

The columnist Thomas Friedman calls this the “Golden Straitjacket”⁷ – a situation where a national economy can prosper only by playing according to the rules of the global market system, a system which will theoretically lead to, as Fukuyama suggests, global cultural homogenization. These increasing ties across national boundaries have drastically limited the policy options of modern states in a variety of spheres, and nation-states are now strictly limited to a neoliberal model of limited government intervention. As Arjun Appadurai declares in *Modernity at Large*, “the nation-state has become obsolete” (169). It is, thus, commonly believed that globalization has “deterritorialized” nations and created a world populated by cosmopolitans.⁸ But neither the increasing amount of cosmopolitans nor globalization itself necessarily suggests that the end of *nationalism* is nigh. Far from obsolescence, nationalism does not appear to be waning. In fact, the current era seems marked by a resurgence of nationalism as a major force in global affairs. The nation persists as an important source of identity, community and collective memory for most of the world’s population.

To return to the idea of transmission in a world system, everyone and everything is on the move and always transmitting across borders from one (cyber)space to another in *Transmission*. The novel, despite its kaleidoscopic portrayal of madcap adventures around the globe, centers around two main characters: Arjun Mehta, an Indian computer geek-cum-IT specialist in Silicon Valley, and Guy Swift, a design-obsessed white British national who earns his living selling brand concepts. These characters are, according to *Telegraph* journalist Helen Brown,

⁷ See Thomas Friedman, *The Lexis and the Olive Tree*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1999: ch. 6.

⁸ “It is not the mark of provincialism,” Fukuyama argues, “but of cosmopolitanism to recognize that there has emerged in the last few centuries something like a true global culture” (126). The provincialism Fukuyama refers to in contrast to the increasing sense of cosmopolitanism is indeed what Mr. Stevens in *Remains of the Days* struggles with. However, in the previous chapter, I argued that in spite of its mythical construction, national identity remains pertinent.

“more easily recognisable from life than from fiction. But they arrive on the page fresh from the school of believable modern stereotypes,” because they are both active participants in transnational networks who contribute to the idea that the globe’s inhabitants are becoming increasingly cosmopolitan (May 2004). Kunzru tells *Granta*, “[w]e live in a networked age so we need a networked art form that can reflect that” (August 2011). “I think the novel, in all its complexity” he explains, “can editorialize and clarify the ways that networks are reshaping our lives.” Many, including Kunzru, believe that within the network- and neoliberal policy-driven world system we live in today, the United States is a neocolonial power deeply involved with economic and cultural imperialism. Kunzru tells Helen Brown, “America is squatting in the middle of the world like this enormous, chest-thumping baboon” (May 2004). “Even if you avert your eyes from it,” he says, “you are *deliberately* [emphasis mine] averting your eyes from it.” This would, unquestionably, situate the United States at the core and developing societies in the periphery at a time when it is hotly contested whether this structural model remains relevant to or applicable in understanding the world system. “The crucial point,” according to Appadurai, “however, is that the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” (31). He further contends, “[g]lobalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization” (17). In agreement with Appadurai, I think it is too simplistic a notion to equate globalization with Americanization. Further, that by conforming to neoliberal economic policies, a nation-state does not necessarily subsume itself under American hegemony; rather, it is a strategy to situate itself on the global stage as a global actor in a world economy that is increasingly valorizing the international division of labor.

Appadurai observes, “to the extent that different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently, there is still ample room for the deep study of specific geographies, histories, and languages” (17). While it may seem antediluvian to study these geographies and histories in a global age, *Transmission* is very much a novel that examines these abstractions through the cultural clashes its characters encounter in their transnational trajectories. This may inform *why* and *how* “globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even *localizing* process” (Appadurai 17). As a point of departure in analyzing the localizing processes via the renaissance of nations and nationalism as a resistance of a neoliberal postmodernity that posits the United States (or Western countries in general) at a core,⁹ I return to Kunzru’s Arjun Mehta, a boy from a subaltern culture engaging with the dominant power of the age.

Pursuing the American dream in a global and decentered 21st century

Arjun Mehta is a dorky, shy, and naïve computer guy who sees his life in terms of Bollywood movies. Having grown up in the traditional core of New Delhi as part of the stultifying middle-class India, Arjun decides to leave his booming country of high-tech outsourcing for the diminishing prospects in Silicon Valley to battle for fame and fortune, and so win the heart of his lady love, just as in many of the Bollywood plots he reveres. In the 21st century, this means having “bravery, decisiveness and [a] diversified investment portfolio” (35), which, to an IT specialist

⁹ In a discussion regarding postnationality, Richard Jenkins maintains that “[g]lobalization and heightened localization...are inter-linked: the world is becoming smaller and larger at the same time, cultural space is shrinking and expanding. Localism and ethnicity are...two sides of the same coin, and each may (re)assert itself as a defensive reaction to, or a result of, the increasing global context of social life” (*RE* 43). An elucidation by Wendy Brown may be necessary and insightful in understanding the context in which “post” is prefixed to nationality: “the prefix ‘post’ signifies a formation that is *temporally after but not over* that to which it is affixed” (*WS* 21). “‘Post’ indicates a very particular condition of afterness in which what is past is not left behind,” she continues, “but, on the contrary, relentlessly conditions, even dominates a present” (21).

in India, means going to America and working in computers. Thus, in endeavoring to pursue this glamorous life in dreamy California and moving towards embracing a globalized monoculture, Arjun becomes part of India's brain drain problem that calls attention to questions of loyalty and nationalism. As a country that has long been cast to the peripheries of world power and struggled with its allocation of resources, diasporic talented and skilled professionals are seen as renegades. Mr. Khan, brother to one of his college professors who employs him, brings light to this matter,

There is the loyalty matter," he growled, wagging a bony finger in Arjun's face, "of loyalty. And the matter of patriotism. Who has trained you to do this work? India! Who has provided the schools? What do you think it means for you to take yourself abroad, instead of using your talents for the good of the nation?" (22-3)

In *India and the IT Revolution*, however, Anna Greenspan explains that "[t]he image of a high-tech whiz has become the icon of a new India, one that defies the stereotypes of snake charmers and starving children" (3). "Indeed," she continues, "the Indian 'techie' has begun to take its place alongside blue jeans, fast food and MTV as one of the key symbols of contemporary capitalism" (3). "India," Greenspan declares, "is in the midst of a revolution; one that many argue is no less profound than the revolution of 1947 in which India was granted its independence" (2). With the IT revolution in mind, Greenspan describes a changing India and prompts a very curious question:

With a billion people, the world's largest democracy, an enormous pool of English-speaking engineers, an expanding middle class and one of the greatest untapped markets on the planet, India's encounter with cyberspace has a far-reaching impact on the future of globalization. Yet, how are we to understand this new India and its place within the information age? (3)

If, contrary to Mr. Khan's belief, Arjun is not contributing to India's brain drain problem but rather to its amplifying power and influence in the world, Arjun would not only be the novel's hero, but also India's. But is someone of Arjun's caliber likely to succeed in this task and story of when east meets west? The odds seem slim.

Standing outside a New Delhi office tower, “Connaught Place seethed with life...For a moment Arjun Mehta, consumed by hesitation, was the only stationary figure in the crowd” (6). Arjun’s dawdling ponderosity is contrasted with the fast-paced and highly mobile world around him. Arjun also displays signs of having difficulty grasping the relativity of time, an issue pertinent to global discourse:

Behind the front desk sat a receptionist. Above her a row of clocks, relics of the optimistic 1960s, displayed the time in key world cities. New Delhi seemed to be only two hours ahead of New York, and one behind Tokyo. Automatically Arjun found himself calculating the shrinkage in the world implied by this error, but, lacking even a best estimate for certain of the variables, his thoughts trailed away. For a moment or two the image hung around ominously in his brain, the globe contracting like a deflating beach ball. (6)

Arjun’s perturbation and fluster over the “shrinkage in the world,” realized in his temporal calculus of global cities, largely has to do with the temporal compression, as well as conflation, with space. Even as a computer whiz, Arjun’s innocence and naiveté renders him incapable of apprehending the reality of time-space compression. As he parts with his family, he “felt proud that in the eyes of his family he was finally doing something worthwhile,” but readers are simultaneously called to a Bollywood imaginary: “In a film the scene would be accompanied by music, and he would lead a crowd of long-haul passengers in a dance routine” (30). Arjun’s perception of reality is not only distorted and inseparable from the unrealities of his revered Bollywood films, but his awareness of global economic trends is also delayed. At a time when jobs are flying eastward, Arjun embarks on a trans-Pacific flight to the shrunken horizons of Silicon Valley. And he is completely unsuspecting and oblivious of this ironic gesture that is reality. Dreamy, geeky, and naïve, can Arjun Mehta’s story avoid becoming the tale of an innocent abroad, and reduce him simply to a boy from a subaltern culture who cannot compete against American hegemony?

Transnational enterprises: a mere simulation of coolness and audacity?

Enter Guy Swift, “thirty-three years old, UK citizen, paper millionaire and proud holder of platinum status on three different frequent-flyer programs” (11). “Guy Swift, twice Young British Market Visionary of the Year and holder of several Eurobrand achievement awards” appears to be everything Arjun is not (11). Everything about Guy Swift’s appearance shouts cosmopolitan and signals elite status; in short, he is someone who is unquestionably able to reap the benefits of globalization. As Arjun commutes to his interview for Databodies in New Delhi, Guy is flying first-class above:

High in the sky overhead was the vapor trail of a jet, a commercial flight crossing Indian airspace en route to Singapore. In its first-class compartment sat another traveler, rather more comfortably than Arjun, who was squashed against the damp shoulder of a man in a polyester shirt. Did Guy Swift sense some occult connection with the boy on the bus thirty thousand feet below? Did he perhaps feel a tug, a premonition, the kind of unexplained phenomenon that has its correlative a shiver or a raising of the hairs on the neck or arms? No. Nothing. He was playing Tetris on the armrest games console. (11)

In spite of his global competence, everything about Guy is studiously ironic, from the ring tone he chooses for his cell phone to his quest for finding the “perfect” gift for Gabriella, with whom he is in a floundering relationship. Perhaps the most ironic bit about this successful globe-trotting entrepreneur is his inability to comprehend the local and meet its needs. *Tomorrow** is the clever name he has come up with for his consulting business, which “[i]n three short years, Guy had grown *Tomorrow** into an agency with an international profile” (19). *Guy Swift: The Mission* states “the future is happening today, and in today’s fast-moving future the worst place to do business is the past. I strive to add value by surfing the wave of innovation” (19). While *Tomorrow** has been an up and coming company, Guy is experiencing a shortage of clients that requires him to seek funding from the transnational Transcendentia. Working with Transcendentia, however, requires Guy to tread into unfamiliar territories, which will inevitably illuminate his weaknesses:

There had been a reception in Barcelona, with canapés in the shapes of dot-com logos and waiters dressed as Antonio Gaudi. He had stood at a poolside bar and they had asked him to

imagine a *truly* [emphasis mine] globalized branding agency, concentrating on the local needs of transnational clients. If *Tomorrow** placed itself at this node, it would potentiate the synergetic emergence of something, thus maximizing feedback in something else and placing everyone at the apex of a place they all wanted to be. They stood, they told him, on the crest of the latest Kondratiev wave. Transcendenta, nine months old, was already valued in the hundreds of millions... So instead of being wedged in a West End toilet cubicle with a couple of nightclub PRs, he now found himself on the other side of the world, being driven around in an unstable electrical vehicle by a rich kid with a death wish. About to play golf. (168)

There is surely a lot of capitalist rhetoric going on in this scene that undoubtedly functions as a reminder that the globe we inhabit is becoming smaller and more integrated; and as such, the world is becoming more unified and interconnected. But what are Guy's bearings in all of this? When Guy fails to sell his brand concept with the owner of a golf resort chain, Guy's inability to meet the local needs of transnational clients is highlighted. While everything about Guy may epitomize "going global," he ironically falters when it comes to dealing with the local.

Golf is apparently a "blind spot in his recreational prowess [that] had never previously been an issue, and probably would not matter now were Mr. Al-Rahman not the owner of a leisure group that specialized in golf resorts, which in fact owned twenty-four scattered across the world from Osaka to British Columbia" (169). Unable to score affection with pitiful and non-existent golfing skills and the inability to give a PowerPoint presentation with cool visual effects on the green, Guy struggles to convey his proposal, densely filled with high-tech but meaningless locutions, effectively to Al-Rahman. Anthony D. Smith contends that "[t]hroughout the world humanity is bound to the wheel of automated technologies and encircled by a forest of mass communications" (NN 1). For Jean Baudrillard, this is "a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes" (SS 2). It is clear at this point that Guy has no substantial knowledge of golf – the sport he is venturing to exclusively brand for Mr. Al-Rahman – and instead

utilizes the impressive visuals of technology as an attempt to mask what he in fact knows very little about. Through Guy's utilization of technology to market the sport, Guy is effectively replacing the real thing with images, or signs, of what golf *might* be. Even without his computer, Guy markets the methodology of the simulation well as he attempts to explain to Mr. Al-Rahman, "[t]he method *Tomorrow** uses, which is a proprietary process, is called TBM. This stands for Total Brand Mutability, and like I say, it's our thing...[we] help our clients achieve their full Brand Evolution Potential" (170). Guy's agglomeration of empty signs, effectively, would imply that the golf resorts are feigning to have something they do not. From the perspective of Mr. Al-Rahman, this simulation of empty signs Guy proposes as part of the leisure chain's "Brand Evolution Potential" does not provide the company with due respect and dignity for its *real* services and worth. Al-Rahman tells Guy, "It is a question of respect, Mr. Swift. I like to do business with men who respect the things I do. You, I suppose, respect other things, such as your circles and maps" (172). Guy does not understand Al-Rahman's words, because Guy thinks his only trajectory is towards success seeing how he considers himself "better adapted to the environment of the global city," as someone who "made opportunities" for himself and "knew how to network, how to manipulate the flows of money and information to produce **results**" (206-7). But the results he promises are based on marketing empty signs that attenuate Mr. Al-Rahman's company and services; rather than marketing in such a way that *represents*, Guy seeks to *simulate*, and create the very products, services, institutions, or ideas of his clients. Baudrillard distinguishes between representation and simulation,

Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation

attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. (SS 6)

In representation, the sign is an equivalent image of the real thing; a simulation, however, entirely replaces the real. Unsurprisingly then, Mr. Al-Rahman – a character who very much appreciates and values the real – finds Guy’s marketing strategy offensive.

The EU: a simulation of supranationalism and a united continent

While Al-Rahman finds Guy’s attempt to simulate what he does offensive, the Pan-European Border Authority (PEBA), “an artifact of EU integration intended to harmonize the immigration and customs regimes of all the member states” (154) finds Guy’s talent to create simulations very functional and appropriate for their interests. The construction of the European Union is a bold effort at the peaceful integration of a multitude of nation-states into a transnational reality fit for globalization, which is still under construction, or perhaps, as Gerard Delanty might say, “under invention” (54). Guy, then, is the appropriate guy to help construct this transnational reality. But the question is, if the EU seeks the peaceful integration of a multitude of nation-states, why is border control such an issue? Bocca, a key figure in PEBA, states, “[a] common European border authority must have common information collection and retrieval...Otherwise you find some terrorist or economic migrant in one country and lose him again when he crosses into another” (Kunzru 234). More importantly, Bocca explains that “[t]he problem with these people is they lie, they destroy their papers. You have no way of knowing who they are. They say they’re from a war zone but actually all they want is to take a job from a citizen” (235). Bocca explains all of this to justify the need to go high-tech in border security, but at the heart of the problem is that economic interests are conflated with social and political concerns. Sam Pryke explains, “[t]he demarcated national patches of the world might be porous to ever

greater migration flows, but this hardly means that governments are relaxed about the matter” (*NGW* 2). Further, Pryke notes that “[w]hatever liberalization there has been of national economies over recent decades, it is hardly as if economic protectionism is a thing of the past” (2). Far from a utopian vision of extending democracy and granting global citizenship, the EU via PEBA seeks to deny both democracy and citizenship for people who are deemed less desirable.¹⁰

Interestingly, Europe, while concerned with keeping less desired migrants out and concurrently using these borders to assert its economic superiority across the continent, is simultaneously engaged with competing against American hegemony.¹¹ Guy tells the people who run PEBA, “[w]hat my team has come to realize is that in the twenty-first century, the border is not just a line on the earth anymore,” giving readers a faint impression that he has some awareness that structural boundaries no longer provide a functional understanding of geopolitics, only to follow up with declaring,

It’s so much more than that. It’s about status. It’s about opportunity. Sure, you’re either inside or outside, but you can be on the inside and still be outside right? Or on the outside looking in. Anyway, like we say in one of our slides, ‘the border is everywhere. The border,’ and this is key, ‘is in your mind.’ Obviously from a marketing point of view a mental border is a plus, because a mental border is a value and a value is something we can promote. (Kunzru 235)

So Guy returns to a structural understanding of the world, only to worsen things by bringing stature into the discussion. Guy states, “Citizenship is about being one of the gang, or as we like to say at *Tomorrow**, ‘in with the crowd’” (235). In doing so, he is

¹⁰ This unfortunately often refers to people from non-democratic and less economically developed societies. Judith Butler blogs, “neo-liberalism works through producing dispensable populations...it decimates long-standing institutions of social democracy, withdraws social services from those who are most radically unprotected – the poor, the homeless, the undocumented – because the value of social services or economic rights to basic provisions like shelter and food has been replaced by an economic calculus that values only the entrepreneurial capacities of individuals and moralizes against all those who are unable to fend for themselves or make capitalism work for them” (*Greek Left Review*, November 12, 2011). For Butler, neo-liberalism is the constraint of globalization that prevents radical democracy from taking place. In this light, neo-liberalism as what Fukuyama sees as the end of history is not only totalitarian, but also in the case of the EU, reflexively suggests who you are and where you come from still matter.

¹¹ The previous chapter discusses the shift of power from Europe to the United States in mid-20th century.

creating the image of Europe as an elite place, “somewhere you want to go, but somewhere that’s not for everyone. A continent that wants people, but only the best. An exclusive continent. An *upscale* continent” (235). Where Europe cannot compete economically, it defaults to the cultural. In spite of Director Becker’s denials of her interests in how culture can function as a key role in reasserting Europe’s influence and power, her words have betrayed her mind: “I don’t think classical music and television dramas about the Romans are enough. The promotion of heritage is one thing. We have won this argument” (238). This suggests that Europe has failed to produce a cultural space that matches with the temporal movement of American neoliberalism, if she feels, “[i]t is the youth we must persuade. Hip-hop gangster rappers must drive European cars. They must fire European guns!” (238). Needless to say, Becker is hardly concerned with promoting domestic security on the global front, for she is only concerned with protecting European borders as to rebuild a Europe that can reassert itself on the global stage and compete with the US.

Introducing some keycard blanks that “had EU blue and gold on one side and the words ‘platinum member’ embossed on the other,” Guy announces “welcome to Club Europa – the world’s VIP room” (239). While he lives and works as if he is a global citizen, the concept he seeks to promote in the PEBA project is one that would effectively deny people citizenship and cross-border entries on the basis of class.

Etienne Balibar has blogged about and shared his sentiments regarding this situation and the questionable European construction:

In its current form, under the influence of the dominant social forces, the European construction may have produced some degree of institutional harmonization, and generalized some fundamental rights, which is not negligible, but, contrary to the stated goals, it has not produced a convergent evolution of national economies, a zone of shared prosperity, far from. Some countries are dominant, others are dominated, with respect to shares in the markets, or concentration of financial capital, or industrial dependency. The peoples may not have antagonistic interests, but the nations increasingly do. (*Greek Left Review*, July 2010)

The EU's project led by Guy Swift's *Tomorrow** is based on a very thin and abstract condition of unity that aims to persuade us that a European audience might come to enjoy the imagined community and solidarity of some kind of supra-national identification, provided that they are "in with the crowd." In *Cosmopolitics*, Bruce Robbins asserts,

Instead of assuming that capitalism's insatiable drive to occupy every corner of the globe has led to the imminent collapse of the nation-state, we should consider how tied to particular places capitalism remains and how strong (if unequal) an interest it has in propping up the nation-state... Under many circumstances capitalism *needs* the stabilizing powers of the nation-state and will work to build the state up, not tear it down. (8)

Robbins' explication very clearly reflects the EU situation.¹² If the European construction is a small-scale model for the prospects of a truly transnational world in which national antagonisms no longer matter because economic and political developments are even, then the outlook is very dim. "Why", asks Tom Nairn, "has the End of History carried us forward into a more nationalist world?" (*LRB* 6).

Jonathan Friedman provides one possible answer:

the weakening of former national identities and the emergence of new identities, especially the dissolution of a kind of membership known as 'citizenship' in the abstract meaning of membership in territorially defined, state-governed society, and its replacement by an identity based on 'primordial loyalty', ethnicity, 'race', local community, language and other culturally concrete forms. (61-2)

These culturally concrete forms, in the end and reflexively so, reconstruct the national affiliations and identities that have been weakened by global processes. And as reflected by Robbins, the onrush of neoliberalism through which globalization thrives necessitates the existence of nation-states to reinforce and practice the economic principles, which invariably lead to a constant state of competing for power. Take

¹² Wendy Brown writes in *Theory and Event*, "the politically exploitable hollowness in formal promises of freedom and equality" as promised by the EU, "has largely vanished to the extent that both freedom and equality have been redefined by neo-liberalism." The EU's interests, exemplified through the establishment of PEBA and its interests, are more concerned with neoliberalism than democracy. Under such a condition, as explained by Balibar, some countries are dominant, while others are dominated.

Tony Blair for example. When he returned to London from the Nice Conference of the European Union at the end of 2000, he reported to Parliament:

It is possible, in our judgement, to fight Britain's corner, get the best out of Europe for Britain and exercise real authority and influence in Europe. That is as it should be. Britain is a world power. To stand aside from the key alliance – the EU – right on our doorstep, is not advancing Britain's interests; it is betraying British interests. (*Hansard*, 11 December 2000, Col. 351.)

In *Global Matrix*, Tom Nairn explains, “Greatness is all. For a world-power, making use of Europe is a necessity, but remains one tool among others,” as Tony Blair conveys (164). Nairn elaborates, “[t]here is no question of joining in the sense of merging, or identifying the national interest with such a wider project” (164). When Guy finds himself caught in the middle of an immigration raid after having been brought to an unknown location by an Eastern European prostitute, he finds it necessary to jettison his “global” citizenship for his national one. He tells the policemen, “English. I’m fucking *English*” (Kunzru 260) as if his nationality is superior and thus can somehow place him outside of this border controlling mess. At the very moment Guy Swift instinctively finds this need to perpetually assert and reiterate his British nationality, his cosmopolitanism recedes into the background whilst the question of nationality moves to the fore. What makes his genealogy urgent is his particular need to use this historical connection – to the decentered center – to have a specific political effect – that is, to get out of his arrest, detainment, and imminent deportation to a country he has no connections to and with whatsoever. Ironic as it is, Guy Swift – a figure from what was once considered the center – becomes unvoiced in this situation and attempts to utilize his genealogy to find a voice; yet, it is a voice not taken seriously by his detainers. For Foucault, genealogy resists the totality of continuous history; while the UK once exerted great power and influence over vast corners across the globe, it is now experiencing a discontinuity in its history, which assumed linear progression and an indefinite teleology. When useful

though, he redeploys a continental and transnational identity: “He spoke loudly and clearly,” to attract the attention of the guards, “*I am EU cit-i-zen. I need ta-xi to my hotel*” (261). Guy, in yet another ironic moment in his irony-filled life, becomes a victim of the borders he seeks to construct and protect against the subaltern groups, which he is mistakenly identified with in the immigration raid.

Postmodernity

The world as a seamless web

Under normal circumstances, Guy may have been more likely able to get out of this debacle. “How Guy Swift, young marketeer, British national and vocal speaker of English came to be identified as Gjergj Ruli, Albanian national, suspected pyramid fraudster and failed asylum seeker in Germany,” the novel tells us, “was one of the more bizarre stories to result from the infection of the Schengen Information System by what is now known as Variant Eight Leela, the so-called transpositional worm” (263). Leela08 is created by none other than Arjun Mehta, and the transmission of it across all corners of the globe demonstrates the interconnected vulnerability of human beings in the highly detailed chaos of our postmodern world. With rapid technological innovation there has been an increase in the volume, speed, and reach of individual and collective spatial mobility and a dramatic expansion of the power, speed, and volume of information transfers. Is culture included in these information transfers, and if so, are they able to transmit as hypersonically? In virtual reality, Leela08 is evidence that the answer is emphatically, yes; however, in the case of spatial reality, the process proves much more challenging and complicated.

As an Indian in America, Arjun is not only a traveller in space, but he is also a traveller in time, transmitted from an ancient culture to one that barely remembers

yesterday from its impatience in rushing to the future.¹³ Arjun's initial reaction to America is astonishment at the gargantuan scale of the cars, the malls, the freeways, and of course the palpable sense of money and power and possibility. After a year of this, however, he cannot sleep properly, has eczema, lies to his family about his success in America, has little or no illusion left after a year of largely being unemployed, and can be found walking on foot in suburban California, which makes him at least one of four things: "poor, foreign, mentality ill or jogging" (36). One whole year in America, and Arjun is nowhere closer to actualizing his dreams than when he was in India, "[l]iving his dreams was proving hard" (38); but to worsen the situation, he is both poor *and* foreign. Databodies, a fly-by-night company that makes its income by commissioning the wages of people who they find jobs for, finally finds a long-term position at Virugenix, in Redmond, Washington, as an assistant virus-tester for Arjun.

Just when he thought his life was starting to pick up, he gets laid off. Jennifer Johanssen, deputy director of personnel at Virugenix tells him, "In your time here, you have added quality and value" and fades into a discussion about compassion and the reversals of fortune, and finally "reality," as if Arjun had been living in an irreality all this time (90). But Arjun remained in denial: "Then it struck him. This was not his story. This was not his story because this was not how his story went. There had been a mistake" (90). It was not his story because it did not match up to the

¹³ This argument may be difficult to accept because the myriad techno-science parks and cyber towers in Asia are unmatched anywhere else in the West, and have shown how developing societies can speed through modernity through discontinuous jumps. Anna Greenspan explains, "India, like most 'developing' societies, has a kind of anachronistic culture in which the deep past mingles easily with the far future. Time here is often scrambled, and change rarely occurs through gradual steps or stages. Rather, one moves – in an instant – from the tea shack on one side of the road to 'Cybertowers' on the other. Here, on the periphery, the future does not emerge through a slow and steady process of development but arrives instantaneously through discontinuous jumps" (40). But one must bear in mind that infrastructural problems within the public space are often bypassed in these discontinuous jumps made to catch up to American development.

Bollywoodesque dreams he had envisioned for himself in America. According to Faiza Hirji, Bollywood is hybridized and “consciously mimics some American norms and contains other aspects of Western culture, yet it also repudiates the same, suggesting the superiority of Indian culture” (*DC* 19). What is more important to note, is that Bollywood also suggests “India as the only really desirable location for the authentic South Asian” (19). She continues, “[i]n its avowal of nationalism and cultural tradition, it presents a significant challenge to American domination of international film and culture” (19). Bollywood, thus, becomes a crucial assertion of nationalism and cultural tradition that “writes back” to and escapes from Americanization. Tom Nairn contends, “[w]ith all its shortcomings and contradictions, globalization had been showing signs of escaping from US neo-liberal hegemony over the past few years” (*NN* 30). Bollywood rhetoric effectively uses cinema, a mechanical art borrowed from American industrialization (in other words capitalism), to assert and demonstrate that while neoliberal economic principles may be efficacious in changing the world’s image and understanding of India, the country nonetheless preserves very strong cultural bearings independent of the hegemon. Borrowing and practicing America’s economic principles, then, is reduced to a means to an end, such that India is merely using “America’s way” to showcase its own long-standing cultural heritage. In Iyotika Viridi’s words, “India, imagined in films over the decades through binary oppositions – the feudal vs. the modern, country vs. city, east vs. west, rural vs. urban – now pits the national against the transnational” (*CIN* 202-3).

Interestingly though, Hirji claims, “Bollywood *itself* [emphasis mine] plays the role of attempted imperialist by primarily marketing Hindi-language films to an enormous community...by working to promote a kind of Hindu, Hindi-speaking, middle- to upper-class, pan-Indian identity that ignores the specificity of various

regions and cultures” (DC 19). Arjun’s affinity and affection towards Bollywood, as both a political and cultural artefact, then seem inseparable from an understanding of Arjun as an Indian national, in the most unifying sense, despite pursuing his dreams in America. Hirji explains, though, that in Bollywood films, “[t]he goal is not to ignore life outside South Asia but to overcome its lures; to return from overseas, a place of much temptation, and apply one’s knowledge to the betterment of India is a laudable goal” (108). “Globalization,” Hirji continues, “is a behemoth that cannot be put aside, yet in the end its alienating tendencies cannot overcome India’s traditions and deep sense of self” (108). Surely, Arjun thought he would one day return home to India after becoming a hero as well; and likewise, Arjun *does* find a very deep and profound sense of self in the Bollywood films he watches. Arjun, in performing and demonstrating his “Indianness” vis-à-vis his interests and the way he thinks, is both a subject *and* object of Indian nationalism and culture. This becomes much more profound and evident when Arjun releases and transmits the Leela08 virus.

As a result of the dotcom bubble’s bust and burst, and “because of first in and first out and being foreign national and all” (Kunzru 227), Virugenix laid off Arjun. Arjun Mehta, in America, is what Ernest Gellner would define as entropy-resistant: “A classification is entropy-resistant if it is based on an attribute which has a marked tendency *not* to become,” even with the passage of time, “evenly dispersed throughout the entire society” (NN 63). So Arjun creates a brilliantly complex virus in order to prove his worth, “to cause a little disruption, just a small problem, because then I could step in and solve it and be the hero” (227). But his release of Variant Eight Leela, named after his most idolized Bollywood star, ends up as “a swarm, a horde” (107) that mutates itself to invade and infect *every* organ of the world body and wreaks havoc on global economies. We are told that “According to Julia Schaffer

of Symantec Corporation, who has written extensively on Mehta's programming techniques, the viruses he unleashed represent 'a revolution in code'" (267), and this revolution in code is as much a revolution in IT and India. Appadurai, in *Fear of Small Numbers*, explains, "[v]irulent nationalisms also thrive in the context of cyberspace, but they nevertheless complicate the solidity of ties between space, place and identity" (24). As Greenspan suggests, the IT revolution "has enabled India to shed its image – both at home and abroad – of being a victimized, third-world country that is unable to compete globally" (*IT* 79). In other words, the IT revolution has placed India on the global stage, and competitively so. Arjun's decision to name the virus he disseminates across the globe after a Bollywood star only reinforces India's competitiveness in the global economy. The overbearing metaphor in all of this, is of course that the repression of the subaltern, whether with malign intent or not, undermines the dominant culture. When India's place in the IT revolution is juxtaposed with Bollywood, the effect of India's emergence is much more penetrating in global discourse. Hirji explains that "[o]ccasional visits, e-mail messages, and telephone calls may not offer the same window onto the homeland as that offered by cinema, which can display visual images and explanations of the rites and customs that accompany life events" (*DC* 102). Hirji's explanation, I would argue, extends beyond diasporic Indians and applies to anyone in the world who participates and uses the technological advancements of our day, and particularly to those who also watch Bollywood films. Both IT and Bollywood have unveiled an India that was unfathomable sixty years ago. Greenspan argues that "[i]n the globalized information economy, the marginal has the potential to overtake the mainstream" (*IT* 70). "IT," Greenspan contends, "is not inextricably tied to the West. Once opened up, the networks of globalization are influenced as much – if not more – by the creative

mutations that seep in from the periphery” (38). But when globalization is influenced as much by the “periphery” as it is by the “core,” or even more radically, the “periphery” contributes to a hollowing-out of the “core,” a structural core-periphery model seems rather anachronistic in understanding global processes.

The fallacies of quantifiable analysis of modernity

India has largely concerned itself with discontinuous temporal jumps to assert itself in global economics, but at the cost of this is a negligence of the spatial, and included in this is the spatial politics of democracy. The idea that third-world countries will progress to the extent that they imitate the West is a misguided myth for individuals and groups that believe globalization equates cultural imperialism or economic neocolonialism, and a dangerous one for developing societies that believe economic competitiveness is enough to qualify a country on the global stage. In a recent Ted talk, political economist Yasheng Huang draws from statistical evidence from the Asian model and concludes that, “there’s really no support for the idea that authoritarian governments hold a systematic edge over democracies in terms of economic growth.”¹⁴ In the same talk, Huang compares India and China’s levels of economic development, and while China’s economy has grown much faster than India’s because China is a totalitarian state that can disregard (the will of) its citizens, Huang ultimately argues that for long-term sustainability, China needs political reforms towards a democracy. Huang’s argument is interesting, to say the very least; however, I suspect that India’s growth is not entirely stifled by its democracy, but rather by the state’s failure to distribute its democratic values evenly across the nation.

¹⁴ The Asian model refers to the prosperity of the Four Tigers: Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea, which had authoritarian governments in the 60s, 70s, and/or 80s that allowed for the proliferation of economic development. However, North Korea, Burma, the Philippines, to name a few, did not succeed in spite of having authoritarian governments.

As mentioned previously, the assumption is that economic development can contribute to infrastructural developments. This is the case in India, but the infrastructural developments are limited only to those who contribute to the economic development. Besides slicing through bureaucracy (how democratic!), IT companies are able to “bypass India’s crumbling public sphere” (Greenspan 81) by situating the companies in sequestered and insulated techno parks where resources lacking across the country are in abundance.¹⁵ There is a striking distinction between the companies (private) and public space. According to Greenspan,

Walking down the street, one cannot fail to notice the discrepancy between people’s personal space, which tends to be extremely clean, with crisply ironed clothes, and spotlessly polished shoes, and the filthy, unpaved, garbage-littered public areas within which they are forced to walk... For IT companies, who require highly efficient transportation and communication grids in order for their businesses to function, it is imperative to escape these failures [power outages] of the State. The government, in an implicit recognition of its own ineptitude, helps facilitate this process... The STPIs, which are in the business of offering high speed communication links, also provide centers equipped with back-up power, telecom services, bandwidth and other technical infrastructure. (81-2)

Companies function extraneously to the state because of the state’s ineptitudes, but these companies and their subsidiaries are also the sole proprietors of any infrastructural development owned by the state. The IT industry’s avoidance of the breakdowns of the public sphere suggests a discrepancy between the economic and the social, and congruently, the temporal and the spatial.

“Failure to defer gratifications is often used by conservative critics, for example, to explain the persistence of impoverishment in an affluent society,” David Harvey writes in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, “even though that society systematically promotes the debt-financing of present gratifications as one of its principal engines of economic growth” (202), and this is what we are witnessing in not only India, but all societies practicing neoliberalism today. Harvey points out a paradox in the desire for immediate gratification:

¹⁵ India does not have a shortage of resources; the widespread inaccessibility is rather due to the *misallocation* of resources.

We learn our ways of thinking and conceptualizing from active grappling with the spatializations of the written word, the study and production of maps, graphs, diagrams, photographs, models, paintings, mathematical symbols, and the like. How adequate are such modes of thought and such conceptions in the face of the flow of human experience and strong processes of social change? On the other side of the coin, how can spatializations in general, and aesthetic practices in particular, represent flux and change, particularly if these latter are held essential truths to be conveyed? (206)

In other words, we have increasingly turned to quantifiable models to understand and measure social change, but how well can quantitative analysis represent the human experience of these changes? Surely, postcolonial nations such as India are evidently playing a game of catch-up in which development in a few limited areas – technology, for instance – reigns supreme, without due concern for proper allocation of these developments and resources. Thus, paradoxically, it seems that only through time, is time conquered; but again, in a nation-state's trajectory towards conquering time, the spatial is neglected.

Conclusion

While India may enter the twenty-first century on the brink of the biggest transformation in its history, the dissemination of its benefits is not expansive. If the glamorous economic prosperities have veiled the spatial discrepancies, including how extensive these economic prosperities are across a nation, what might address these spatial issues? Might fiction produce such a space that critically broaches the spatial discrepancies found in temporal leaps in globalization based on neoliberal principles?

Harvey contends,

Aesthetic judgments (as well as 'redemptive' artistic practices) have entered in as powerful criteria of political, and hence of social and economic, action. If aesthetic judgement prioritizes space over time, then it follows that spatial practices and concepts can, under certain circumstances become central to social action." (207)

While Hari Kunzru may argue that the novel is not the form to make obvious political statements¹⁶, *Transmission* itself is inseparable from political discourse. In writing about the global processes in the contemporary world, Kunzru already subjects

¹⁶ See Kunzru's interview with Brian Hurley.

Transmission as an agent of social action. The novel becomes a space that explores socio-political and economic issues and processes that are typically not found in the usual measurements of progress and development in global discourse. To return to Fukuyama briefly, the onrush of neoliberalism has merely cast democratic concerns to the periphery; but before democracy is extended to all citizens on the globe, can one really declare that there is a universal End of History? After all, Fukuyama is influenced by Hegel's master-slave dialectic, but has the vast majority of the world's population achieved dignity in mutual recognition? *Transmission* is certainly skeptical of this. One cannot ignore the figures who are almost invisible and float on the margins. In a bleakly comic vignette, at the Dubai golf resort Guy stays at, he encounters, "a Filipino dressed in dusky pink plus fours... Carolyn, a Singaporean woman dressed as a pink explorer... a pink South Asian bellhop (Bruce)...[and] a dark-skinned young man who was perhaps Indonesian" (166). But all too often, these subaltern figures *are* ignored in global discourse. And between Guy and Arjun, one might ask who gets the better end. With Arjun's shaking transmission of Leela08, we might be inclined to assume that Arjun does, but nay. *Neither* characters get the better end, but at the same time, I argue that both do. In the end, *Transmission* is a novel more interested in unveiling the complicated, dialectical, and *uneven* processes of globalization than answering who gets the better end of it. Might the contemporary Anglophone novel, in raising awareness of social issues that have largely been enshrouded, function as an actor for social redistribution?

III

Technocapitalizing Spooks in William Gibson's *Spook Country*

A community will evolve only when people control their own communication.
- Frantz Fanon

Technology is both the site of emancipation *and* domination. As the third millennium unfolds, the unrelenting expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is relentlessly accelerating globalization, thereby continuing to transform the production of an emergent postmodern economy marked by neoliberal principles and accompanied by networked societies aggrandized by cyberspace. As discussed in the previous chapter, globalization is not as much about Americanization as it is about the onrush of neoliberalism (as much as its roots may stem from the United States), powered largely by the digital/IT revolution. This, however, does not mean that the days of imperialism are over; rather, it signifies that colonization has advanced under yet another veil. If the veil has been lifted in modernity as a realism which attempts to provide forms of representation to comprehend capitalist industrialist development and imperialism, it has returned in this cybernetic and highly networked postmodern epoch of late capitalism as a much more complex and abstract formation than ever before.

The previous chapter examined Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* (2005) and the portrayal of the kaleidoscopic and cyber-frenzied world we now live in as an alternative lens to the dominant narrative of globalization, which justifies itself by quantitative measures such as temporal leaps in scientific and economic developments that largely ignore spatial discrepancies. I argued that contemporary literary fiction thus provides a spatial form to critically broach global processes neglected in mainstream views of globalization, thereby prompting social action. This chapter seeks to examine the novel's cultural reaction to postmodernity by expanding on the

concept of ghosts explored in chapter one, and elaborating on the social and political role of literary fiction broached in chapter two. I will argue that market capitalism has become technocapitalism in the militarization and weaponization of the body politic in the United States, as technology plays an increasingly significant role in concentrating ownership and by extension, power; further, technology has vastly contributed to the intense expansions and modulations of capitalist spatiality in the twenty-first century. These developments unquestionably transform geopolitics in the twenty-first century. Given these circumstances, it is necessary to consider how colonization resurfaces in our postmodern twenty-first century world in spite of the broad decolonization witnessed in the last century.

To this end, I turn to William Gibson's cyberpunk novel, *Spook Country* (2007). As I have argued in chapter one, literature is neither ahistorical nor apolitical. As such, literary aesthetics transform in different epochs to parallel the conditions to which the contemporary is subjected. In the current moment of late capitalism, fiction has taken a postmodern cultural turn, marked by what Fredric Jameson defines as "the full entry of art into the world of commodity production" (*GA* xii). Many critics have lambasted Gibson for writing "best-seller" novels largely driven by profit for the publishing companies, resulting in novels that fail to enlighten readers about little of anything. However, as James Kneale suggests, "it might make sense to read [Gibson's] novels as narratives, exploring the ways in which they are plotted in time and space" because "it is not what happens that is striking, but how these stories are told," which are "ways of making meaning" (*EPD* 183). Indeed, the cultural conditions of our time seems to necessitate that fiction, in order to have any hope for success (whether as a money-generating or thought-provoking medium), becomes involved in our world of commodity production. This may be, in the current context,

the most effective way of getting the greatest number of people thinking about the very contemporary problems (what with all the distractions we have in contemporary society now) we face, and as Raymond Williams (1977) suggested, bringing people to think about and discuss their situation provides the framework for practical consciousness, which is the beginning of a long revolution.

Cyberpunk setting, global context

For those who are not techno-geeks, *Spook Country*'s jargon may be unfamiliar, even daunting. On every page we inhabit a strange world of techno-babble of not only the basics such as the iPod, WiFi and WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy, already superseded by WPA), but “locative art,” GPS grids, geohacking, Handspring Treo smartphones, Virgin RIFID and geo-spatial tagging systems. All this is naturally par for the course in the hi-tech world of espionage and counter-surveillance, which is the kind of world *Spook Country* is set in, and also the very world *we* live in.¹⁷

William Gibson has said in many interviews before, that science fiction (SF) is not so much about the future, as it is about the present. What we find in our present is the increasing consumption of these technological commodities, and the increase of wealth and power amongst those who run the system that allowed for this proliferation of technology. Thus, critics have described cyberpunk fiction as a metaphor for the ills of globalization – the highhanded and audacious power of corporations, corrupt and feeble governments, and oppressive surveillance societies, all of which have been emphatically abetted by information technology and cybernetics. As a movement, cyberpunk seeks to break down the black and white and

¹⁷ By no means am I suggesting that *everyone* has access to these cool hi-tech gadgets. However, I do believe that everyone is living within a system driven by these technologies.

paint the world in shades of grey, blurring the lines between natural and artificial, organic and mechanical, real and virtual.

Spook Country opens with Hollis Henry, a hard up faded pop star and former member of the Curfew band, now turned freelance journalist, who has just arrived in Los Angeles, which “had much more to do with her financial situation than with any powers of persuasion” (Gibson 3), on assignment for a magazine (that may or may not exist) called *Node*, to investigate “locative art,” which uses global positioning systems (GPS) and WiFi to create forms of cyber-reality. Hollis eventually realizes that her boss, branding tycoon Hubertus Bigend (a figure who is all too familiar to those who have read Gibson’s 2003 *Pattern Recognition*), is using her to track a cargo container that turns out to be closely monitored by at least two other secret organizations, which have contracted individuals who specialize in one skill and one skill only to be puppets in a larger scheme. Milgrim is a junkie fluent in Volapuk, an artificial language in the form of “a visual approximation of Cyrillic, the Russian alphabet” (Gibson 23) “faked up” by the Russians when they first “got themselves computers” and found that “the keyboards and screen displays were Roman, not Cyrillic” (24). He has been kidnapped by Brown, a man with a large supply of pharmaceuticals and a need to eavesdrop on Volapuk text messages between members of an elite Cuban-Chinese spy family with ties to the CIA and the KGB, and have direct bearing on Tito, a Cuban ninja who slips data-encrypted iPods to an operative in the shoe department of Prada in hopes that this old man can shed light on his father, who died under mysterious circumstances.

Spook Country thus triangulates the Hollis/Bigend narrative with two other plot lines, each told from the point of view of someone with a limited understanding of their role in some obviously larger and certainly dangerous dynamic. It is obvious,

then, that these characters are all fit into a system.¹⁸ Through each short chapter that shifts the action to not only a different character, but also to another location, *Spook Country* cinematically crafts the seemingly disparate worlds of a cast of spies, artists, and losers who collide in the rolling turmoil of twenty-first century destabilized geopolitics. The narrative moves between the perspectives of spooks who may or may not be working for or affiliated with the United States government, and cyberpunk artists very much implicated in the transnational corporate culture that enables their work. Everything that qualifies these characters to perform the tasks they are assigned to qualifies their place within and their identity as a specialist within the division of labor in the system. Everything that equips them to penetrate these networks that they are a part of, also makes them vulnerable to the latter's manipulation. That is, those who wield power within these networks, to which we will return.

None of the narratives can stand alone to illuminate the narrative complexity of *Spook Country*, with its fugue-like advancement of these melodies toward an oddly harmonic resolution at a port in Vancouver. The resolution in Vancouver, however, is not the crucial point, because Gibson did not engineer this techno-thriller with a labyrinthine conspiracy plot to disclose the meaning at its core, for the maze *is* the message. Jameson explains:

in order for narrative to project some sense of a totality of experience in space and time, it must surely know some closure (a narrative must have an ending, even if it is ingeniously organized around the structural repression of endings as such). At the same time, however, closure or the narrative ending is the mark of the boundary or limit beyond which thought cannot go. The merit of SF is to dramatize this contradiction on the level of plot itself, since the vision of future history cannot know

¹⁸ In *Towards 2000*, Raymond Williams explains that “[t]he danger now, as has been widely if obscurely recognized, is of fitting human beings to a system, rather than a system to human beings” (31). Gibson’s characters feel like high-tech automatons with useful features but have little to no autonomy. Albeit flowing with wry thoughts about their situations, they do not seem to make many actual choices. Rather, external forces and cagey operatives push and pull them along. This is problematic because, contrary to the recognition and dignity that people receive, which Fukuyama anticipates as result of the world having reached an end of History, there is actually a reduction of humanity to commodity value based on the skills each person possesses. It is difficult, then, to perceive that humanity has indeed progressed.

any punctual ending of this kind, at the same time that its novelistic expression demands some such ending. (AF 283)

As Jameson suggests, closure marks the place where thought cannot go, which is precisely why the resolution in *Vancouver* is neither imperative nor interesting compared to the forces that led each character to that final destination, in the sense that it is not responsible for providing us with a detailed and concise resolution for the plexus of problems broached in the novel. This would simply render the novel as a dogmatic statement with the power of omniscience. Instead, the trivialization of the resolution begs readers to examine the processes that led up to the denouement, for in our reality, we are still – and indefinitely so – trapped in the postmodern flux without a resolution. In fact, with the world now so densely networked, it is inconceivable to even entertain the possibility of a totalizing solution for all of globalization's ills; to entertain this possibility would be very reductive, and would render Gibson's novel entirely as a meaningless commodity, which would signify that literature and culture are in a crisis. As Lance Olsen writes in *Postmodern Culture*, "[t]he very name cyberpunk fuses and confuses the techno-sphere of cybernetics, cybernauts, and, most of all, computer hacking, with the countercultural socio-sphere of punk" (1994).

Embedded within the cyberpunk subgenre is an attitude of resistance to the dark and gritty, and painfully realistic vision of our world system dominated by megacorporations and their breathtaking tech gadgets. If the novel is indeed omniscient, it is certainly a limited omniscience only to the extent that it provides readers a distance to examine the complex networks that conceal these megacorporations' pervasive power and dominance in the world, government, society, all the way down to our very individual and private lives. *Spook Country* – with its characters who are deeply affected and driven by corporate culture, technoculture, and political culture of the 1960s to some dismal time in the future – is undoubtedly

the pure expression of science fiction as a geopolitical aesthetic in writing about and seeking to describe an unthinkable present through the veil of technology and speculation. As such, it resonates out of modern history; it is a mimesis of what we know is happening in the global processes of our present, but cannot entirely grasp, because our reality, like the novel's narrative complexity, is a compilation of plexuses that promise to be self-sustaining and individual entities unto themselves, but are actually a part of an even larger dynamic. Thus, *Spook Country* is Gibson's intense visual imaging of the network behind the screen, the cyberspace – the ungraspable virtual space in postmodernity. This, however, does not mean that material space is no longer pertinent, for there are sharp details of cityscapes which are both set against *and* empowering technology at the same time. To understand this, we will consider the emergence of technocapitalism, and the novel's portrayal of the global city.

Technocapitalism and the global city: blurring the real and virtual

While many believe that the IT/digital revolution has contributed to the spread of democratic values and democracy itself,¹⁹ it has also been argued by many that technological proliferation perpetuates the interests of the dominant economic and political powers, intensifies divisions between haves and have-nots, and is a defining feature of global technocapitalism. Jameson thus argues that capitalist spatiality has taken the form of virtual space, and in turn, we have seen intense expansions and modulations of capitalist spatiality in cyberspace. Because intangibles such as creativity and knowledge are at the core of technocapitalism, and involves the emergence of a stage of capitalism in which technology is incorporated in its global

¹⁹ For example, Dahlberg and Siaper, in their introduction to *Radical Democracy and the Internet*, claim that “[u]nder the influence of neo-liberalism, media systems throughout the world have been rapidly undergoing commercialization, privatization, and de/re-regulation, and subsequently merging into global mega-media corporations” (2), and within the urgencies of this ideological hegemony, “there has been excitement,” as an alternative to mainstream media, “about the possibility of the Internet supporting, advancing, and enhancing autonomous and democratic public spaces” (3).

infrastructure, producing novel forms of economy, society, technopolitics, and technoculture in what Manuel Castells calls a networked society²⁰ necessarily brings the global city to the fore.

The Global City and its Discontents

It might seem rather absurd to jump from an intangible cyberspace to the material space of global cities, especially when futurologists are anticipating the demise of the city in light of the development of ICTs. The idea that virtual space is the node of advanced capitalism urges us, however, to recover concrete place in analyzing the global economy, particularly place as constituted in major cities, “[b]ecause,” as Saskia Sassen argues, “it allows us to see the multiplicity of economies and work cultures in which the global information economy is embedded” (*GD* xix-xx). In *The Global City*, Sassen writes, “[g]lobal cities are, however, not only nodal points for the coordination of processes; they are also particular sites of production” (5) of specialized services and financial innovations and the making of the market, such that they become the command and control centers in coordinating, innovating, and managing the intertwined activities of networks of firms (usually transnational) that are at the core of global economic processes.²¹ While technology (as well as finance capital) is critical to maintaining these networks, the global corporations which require highly skilled labor to manage not only these networks,

²⁰ Castells defines network as “a set of interconnected nodes. A node is the point at which a curve intersects itself. What a node is, concretely speaking, depends on the kind of concrete networks of which we speak. They are stock exchange markets, and their ancillary advanced service centers, in the network of global financial flows. They are national councils of ministers and European Commissioners in the political network that governs the European Union. They are coca fields and poppy fields, clandestine laboratories, secret landing strips, street gangs, and money-laundering financial institutions in the network of drug traffic that penetrates economies, societies, and states throughout the world. They are television systems, entertainment studios, computer graphics milieux, news teams, and mobile devices generating, transmitting, and receiving signals in the global network of the new media at the roots of cultural expression and public opinion in the Information Age” (*NS* 501).

²¹ For example, companies in the advanced services including finance, insurance, real estate, consulting, legal services, advertising, design, marketing, public relations, security, information gathering, management of information systems, and even scientific innovation; all of which can be reduced to knowledge generation and information flows.

which are becoming increasingly complex, but also to produce the very ICTs that enable networking, are nevertheless headquartered in global cities. Castells writes, “the Internet cannot bypass mega-cities: it depends on the telecommunications and on the ‘telecommunicators’ located in those centers” (NS 440). The material space of global cities, thus, remain relevant in analyzing advanced capitalism as they are production sites of postmodern capitalist modulations. In this way, global cities are the sites of technocapitalist proliferation, and in order to understand advanced capitalism in its latest form of technocapitalism, we need to consider the capitalist spatiality of both cyberspace and the global city, and analyze how they complement one another.

While I argued that *Spook Country* is Gibson’s intense visual imaging of the network behind the screen – the cyberspace – I also observed that each short chapter transitions to a different location – Los Angeles, Buenos Aires, New York, and Vancouver, with references to London, Brussels, Havana, Mexico City and San Jose – in a bombastic evocation of our interconnected and globalized world. It is critical to note that while the pervasiveness of cybernetics in our everyday lives may appear to be the focal point of the novel, Gibson also turns readers’ attention towards physical location. Castells writes, “space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression” (NS 440). “In other words,” he says, “space is not a photocopy of society, it is society,” thus “spatial forms and processes are formed by the dynamics of the overall social structure” (440). He proclaims that “*space is crystallized time*” (440). As Gibson’s characters traverse through the space of global cities, they witness a wide variety of micronized processes, often contradictory and conflicting, that shape the cities, allowing readers in turn to analyze society and its historical formations.

For example, the onrush of neoliberalism in the last thirty years profoundly changed New York City, as in many other global cities. Gibson draws readers to conceptualize these changes through Milgrim, who is addicted to narcotics likely because of social dynamics:

Milgrim remembered Union Square from twenty years before, when it had been a place of broken benches and litter, where a corpse might go unremarked amid the huddled and unmoving bodies of the homeless. It had been a flagrant drug bazaar, in those days, when Milgrim himself had had no need of such a place. But now it was Barnes & Noble, Circuit City, Whole Foods, Virgin, and he, Milgrim, had gone equally far, it sometimes seemed, in the opposite direction. (Gibson 231)

When Milgrim is caught by the men Mr. Birdwell, his East Village dealer, sent somewhere near Union Square and they witness a crime, one of the men says “[T]his place supposed to be gentrified... Two million a unit, here” (246). What we witness in this scene is exactly what the man says – gentrification – which in this case, is a process in which corporations “discover” a neighborhood as a strategic site for generating profit by establishing their businesses catered to a *haut monde*, and that attracts more affluent residents, which drives up the price of housing, and begins to drive out some of the very people who turned over the neighborhood. And over the course of time, gentrification begins to change the essential character of the neighborhood, which becomes safer, more comfortable and less edgy. But what about those who were pushed out of up-and-coming neighborhoods like Union Square and East Village, in the gentrification process, such as Milgrim? Or Tito, who may or may not be a legal immigrant in the United States, and who Milgrim finds interesting because he is an illegal facilitator “who spoke Russian and messaged in Volapuk” and also “lived in windowless mini-lofts on the fringes of Chinatown, wore APC and played keyboards” (157)? Tito is an embodiment of those very contradictions found in the global city: a combination of skills and talent and brand name products implicated in money and power, poor living conditions for those who are left out by

the flourishing formal economy, and the growth of an informal economy resulting in part from the growing inequality in profit-making capabilities in different sectors of the urban and global economy.²² We thus see a part of the city that is steadily built up by corporations and finance capital, which tends too often to veil the public space marked by social inequalities.

There is a political, as inseparable as it may be from the economic, reason for this phenomenon in which the globalization of the economy results in global cities concentrating “a disproportionate share of global corporate power and are one of the key sites for its valorization” while also concentrating “a disproportionate share of the disadvantaged and are one of the key sites for their devalorization” (*GD* xxiv). As mentioned in the last chapter, the proliferation of economic developments (in whatever form they may come in in our postmodern world), has a lot to do with making a place globally competitive. In the twenty-first century, global cities – despite their being an alleged denationalized place – are the metonymic places of a nation’s economy. One of the first things Michael Bloomberg said when he became the mayor of New York was “We’re not going to offer any subsidies to corporations to come here. If a corporation needs a subsidy to locate, in this *high cost, high quality, wonderful location* [emphasis mine] of New York City, if they need a subsidy to come here, then we don’t want them. We only want corporations that can afford to be here.” According to David Harvey, Bloomberg “didn’t say that about people, but, in fact, that policy carries over to people” (2007) as there is now an out migration from New York City of low income people because they can no longer afford to live there,

²² Sassen’s informal economy refers “to those income-generating activities occurring outside the state’s regulatory framework it evades. For this reason, the informal economy can only be understood in terms of its relationship to the formal economy – that is, regulated, income-generated activity” (*GD* 153). Tito’s situation is interesting because the nature of his work already renders him as part of the informal economy. However, what he has been contracted to do in the novel involves the shipping container, which is also part of the informal economy mostly because it is illegal, but derives its resources from the formal economy, so long as they wield political power to support and facilitate the process.

unless they live in ghettos. Interestingly, the Information Age renders closed societies incapable of competing. New York City is definitely not closed as it is a focal node in the global economy; however, it is closed in the sense that it seeks to be elitist, very much in the same way as Kunzru's Guy Swift wants the EU to project itself as a club everyone wants to be a part of, but is exclusive. It limits access and offers an assurance of exclusivity among those present. Thus, "New York," Castells writes, "is a dual city most fundamentally because its spatial restructuring has included some distinct segments of society in the making of history while excluding others" (*DC* 417). Consider Hollis' dual life for example. Much of her working life takes place in the more trendy and gentrified parts of Los Angeles, which benefits from and can easily access technological resources, thus caters to the dominant class²³ whose interests and organizational powers arise within a space of flows; "that is," Castells writes, "networks that transmit and facilitate the analysis of economically and politically relevant information" (*DC* 415). Even her sleeping place has to be a fashionable designer hotel located on the glamorous Sunset Strip in the modern and luxurious Mondrian. And yet, we find her eating a "dollar-fifty-nine barbecue beef rib with broasted potatoes" from Mr. Sippee, which is located near the "tents under the freeway" and caters "to an eclectic clientele of the more functionally homeless, sex workers of varied gender and presentation, pimps, police officers, drug dealers, office workers, artists, musicians, the map-lost as well as the life-lost" (Gibson 195). This contrast is unsettling, to say the very least, but it is not unexpected given the course of globalization.

New York and Los Angeles, thus, engage in a kind of Third-World situation somehow within the world system as their citizens are in their city boxes marked by

²³ I find Castells' definition of the dominant class as "the managerial technocracy allied to the global financial elite" with "a distinct spatial logic" useful in understanding technocratic societies.

prosperity and constriction all at once, and the loss of nature to modern conditions of production. Castells writes, “[t]he Information Age is ushering in a new urban form, the informational city...because of the nature of the new society, based upon knowledge, organized around networks, and partly made up of flows, the informational city is not a form but a process, a process characterized by the structural domination of the space of flows” (NS 429). Castells has written elsewhere that “[t]he formation of a unified world economy organized around the ability to communicate and process information has generated both the global city and the informational city, expressed in its ability to centralize and control the information flows on which multinational corporations rely,” thus “the dual city is the social expression of the emerging spatial form of postindustrial society, while the global city is its economic expression, and the informational city is its technological expression” (DC 415). As *Spook Country*’s characters traverse through these global and informational cities, they unravel the cities not as a constant, but as a process that is constantly reproduced in a regeneration and renewal in correlation to the current means of production, namely creative talent and knowledge.

The Informational City and the Precession of Simulacra

In the current era, technology and information are the decisive tools in generating profits and in appropriating market shares. This means that intangibles such as creativity and knowledge become the core means of production in the current phase of capitalism. This current phase of capitalism rooted in technological innovation and corporate power is technocapitalism. New sectors closely associated with technocapitalism are emerging out of systematized invention and innovation, which results in creativity becoming a commodity. According to Luis Suarez-Villa, the very person who coined the term technocapitalism, there are two types of

phenomena supporting the rise of technocapitalism: the macro – found at the level of the societal, and the micro, which involves processes of diffusion and generation of new knowledge that can lead to invention and innovation, such as locative art.

As already mentioned, *Spook Country* opens with Hollis Henry flying into Los Angeles on an assignment to investigate locative art. Within the very same chapter, Alberto, a locative artist, demonstrates the technology by showing a holograph of River Phoenix's corpse (a tragic victim of Hollywood's lethal cocktail of religion, drugs, and celebrity) lying face down on the sidewalk outside of The Viper Room – in the exact place where River Phoenix's corpse actually lay more than ten years ago. Locative art is fascinating because they are effective virtual renditions of site-specific incidents. In other words, they are virtual reality illusions that demonstrate cyberspace's capacity to evert into our everyday reality. According to Bobby Chombo, *Spook Country*'s leading locative artist, "once it everts, then there isn't any cyberspace, is there?" but "[t]here never was, if you want to look at it that way. It was a way we had of looking where we were headed, a direction" (Gibson 86). Bobby's enigmatic observation epitomizes Saurez-Villa's assertion that "[t]he microlevel elements form the backbone from which the macro components emerge, providing a vast collection of actions and decisions that eventually result in systemic change" (*IT* 228). The goal of cyberspace was to infuse it with our everyday reality, making certain intangibles more concrete to our imagination. However, instead of cyberspace functioning as a virtual rendition for that which cannot or no longer be experienced as a concretely physical phenomenon, cyberspace has become a part of reality itself. Bobby reminds us of how locative art is spatially embedded: "With the grid, we're here. This is the other side of the screen. Right here" (Gibson 86). In locative art, what we see is a blurring of the virtual and the real – "[c]artographic attributes of the

invisible” (31) in Hollis’ words. There is an “artist annotating every centimeter of a place, of every physical thing” and it promises to be “visible to all” (31), that is, all who have access to the locative pieces (which needless to say, is an elite few).

Though the access to technological developments does not extend to everyone, the impacts of their existence certainly have turned the world upside down. Guy Debord writes, “[i]n societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*,” such that “[e]verything that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (SS 7). “The spectacle,” Debord explains, “is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving,” and presents itself “simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a *means of unification*” (SS 7). Los Angeles, having long been a symbol of contradictions in America – extraordinary wealth, cutting-edge technology, but with a vast chasm between the rich and the poor – and being the entertainment capital of the world, leading the world in the creation of technological artifices such as television and stage production, motion pictures, video games, and recorded music, has long been the archetype of a society as a spectacle. After meeting Alberto and experiencing locative art, Hollis

walked back to the Mondrian through that weird, evanescent moment that belongs to every sunny morning in West Hollywood, when some strange perpetual promise of chlorophyll and hidden, warming fruit graces the air, just before the hydrocarbon blanket settles in. That sense of some peripheral and prelapsarian beauty, of something a little more than a hundred years past, but in that moment achingly present, as though the city were something you could wipe from your glasses and forget. (Gibson 34)

This is a rare but exhilarating moment when Gibson allows reality to break through the surreal and polluted artifice of Los Angeles’ modern metropolis. According to Baudrillard, Los Angeles is surrounded by “imaginary stations that feed reality, the energy of the real to a city whose mystery is precisely that of no longer being anything but a network of incessant, unreal circulation – a city of incredible

proportions but without space, without dimension” (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 13). In short, everyday living has been colonized by capitalist productions and commodification in becoming increasingly embroiled in the “precession of simulacra,” in exact copies or representations of everyday reality that somehow substitute for the real itself, while concealing that the real is no longer real.

This postmodern condition of society as a spectacle seems to prompt a nostalgic desire to return to an older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artefacts through once again. As Tito moves through New York City, he is accompanied by his family gods, guerrero warriors and spirits, both real and imagined:

The Guerreros took him up Broadway, through the sunlight. He hadn't expected this, assuming he'd reach Union Square by subway, then round and circle until the time of his meeting. But no, and so he walked with them, just as they led him. And soon he was simply a man walking, the orishas spread through a seemingly ordinary awareness, invisible as drops of ink in a volume of water, his pulse steady, enjoying the look of the sun on the floral ironwork that supported many of these old buildings. This was, he knew, though he avoided directly considering it, a still higher state of readiness. (Gibson 221)

Sharp details of the cityscape are set against Tito's memory of black NYU student freerunners from Dominican Republic who would call him “China” (222), building up to an unforgettable chase through the New York streets and squares, conjuring a balletic spirit of freedom, and defiance - not only of gravity but of sinister controllers. These are perhaps the memorable moments that Tito can recollect about New York, and “in this place that is a palimpsest, subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it as existence and makes it ‘be there’” (Certeau 109). While the global and informational city has become a spectacle, it is also a place of crystallized and historical time, revealing the processes that shaped/s and reshaped/s it into its postmodern form.

In a nostalgic moment reminiscing her late friend and former Curfew band member, Jimmy Carlyle, Hollis says, “[t]he world is already weirder and stupider than you could ever have guessed” (Gibson 160), because technological proliferation has complicated and transformed reality. Technology, as a means of production, has complex relations with deep political and economic transformations that profoundly change social and cultural relationships. Bobby Chombo tells Hollis, “if you hadn’t been told [the virtual rendition] was here, there’d be no way for you to find it, unless you had its URL and its GPS coordinates, and if you have those, you know it’s here” (Gibson 87). Knowledge, as Chombo, suggests, has to do with accessibility then. He proceeds to declare that “[t]he world we walk around in would be channels,” like blogs in which “each one is actually trying to describe reality” (87), or rather, create it. Technology is part of the way we find our way through the material world, be it through GPS coordinates or the Internet. “But,” Bobby continues as Gibson tries to convey a subtler message, “when you look at blogs, where you’re most likely to find the real info is in the links. It’s contextual, and not only who the blog’s linked to, but who’s linked to the blog” (87-8). In a sweepingly dense metaphor, Gibson manages to raise the question of “who?” leading to a series of critical questions – who *is* linked? who derives money, knowledge, and by extension, power from all of this? who has the most to lose? The simple answer is: *everyone* is involved. However, it is the companies that control the means of production, and military and political leaders who control the levers of power that “all are linked, sometimes informally, sometimes quite closely, but often with the effect of amplifying their power and securing their station – and implicitly with the consequence of heightening inequity within society” (Rothkopf 14).

All indicators, whether through inequalities and uneven development or simulation, point to a strengthening of the hierarchical structure of command-and-control functions and the resulting exchange of information in spaces, whether through cities or cyberspace (sometimes they may not necessarily be distinguishable). As the globalization of the economy continues to grow, cities increasingly become the strategic site of global (and) technological capital. It is unsurprising, then, for different governments to have a vested interest in making their global cities as the symbol of high life and society. By doing so, they can attract more investors, and by extension capital, which results in world-class standing, and symbolizes power derived from a class prerogative associated with place.²⁴ As Bloomberg's earlier statement indicates, there is a strong correlation between a quality place – marked by gentrification and glamorization (and simulation, too) – and quality investment – marked by the steady influx of capital brought about by (foreign) businesses, which according to Harvey, is often supported by the U.S. military, and again, shedding light on the very fact that national politics are still relevant.²⁵ What all of this inevitably suggest is that power is concentrated in the hands of a remarkably small number of people around the world.

Superclass: The Global Elite and Privatization

²⁴ This is tricky because denizens from these global cities, within my own experience, notably Los Angeles, New York, and Shanghai – tend to carry themselves as if they have an autonomous identity (usually with a touch of elitism) disassociated with the collective national one. However, under certain circumstances, national identification becomes pertinent for these people. Once again, as denationalized a platform the global city may allege to be, it has a complex dynamic with the national which makes it difficult to render the nation as obsolescent in spite of an increasingly globalized world that many have argued marks a period of postnationalism.

²⁵ Sassen has also argued that, “[e]ven though transnationalism and deregulation have reduced the role of the state in the governance of economic processes, the state remains as the ultimate guarantor of rights of capital whether national or foreign. Firms operating transnationally want to ensure the functions traditionally exercised by the state in the national realm of the economy. Notably guaranteeing property rights and contracts. The state here can be conceived of as representing a technical administrative capacity which cannot be replicated at this time by any other institutional arrangement; further, this is a capacity backed by military power” (*GD* 199).

In many ways, technology is the sidekick to global cities in the increasing privatization of capital and resources. Castells explains “major metropolitan centers still offer the greatest opportunities for personal enhancement, social status, and individual self-gratification of the much-needed upper-level professionals, from good schools for their children to symbolic membership at the heights of conspicuous consumption, including art and entertainment” (NS 416). Likewise, “e-mail, Web pages, Weblogs, open publishing/editing systems, peer-to-peer connections, Webcasting, podcasting, and other interactive, relatively low cost, and (somewhat) globally accessible computer networked communications, [can be] seen as providing space for the free flow of information, open debate of problems, and the formation of rational-critical public opinion, all of which enable citizen scrutiny of power and input into decision-making” (Dahlberg and Siapera 3). Both the global city and cyberspace are seen as spaces where opportunities and accessibility are open to their denizens and netizens, thereby empowering them. In this respect, both spaces are emancipatory. However, as Castells notes, these opportunities are largely restricted to a privileged group of people, as most of the world obviously does not even have telephone service, much less computers, or high-speed connections to access these so-called free flows of information or time to consider questions of personal enhancement and self-gratification. Anyone who assumes that globalization suggests that place no longer matters because of the accelerated spread of information via technology, is subscribing to the dominant narrative that concerns itself with only the upper circuits of capital, and not the lower ones. Thus, the arbitrary and one-sided notion that global cities are places of opportunities is crafted to fit a particular narrative in which its authors also want to advocate that there is in fact a correlation between the spread of democracy and the proliferation of the Internet.

If globalization has indeed marked the end of history, and all states are either practicing liberal democracies or moving towards a democratic form of government in one way or another as Francis Fukuyama suggests, why might it still be necessary to fabricate such a narrowly delusive narrative of globalization and its components? As I have suggested earlier in this chapter, colonization and domination have not ended, and have merely veiled under a different guise. “While neoliberalization,” David Harvey contends, “may have been about the restoration of class power, it has not necessarily meant the restoration of economic power to the same people” (*BHN* 31). The short answer to the previous question, then, is that the “postindustrial [globalized] era is no exception of a dominant class,” which in this case, is the global financial elite, “which has a distinct spatial logic” of transnationalism in global and informational cities that need to construct new forms of consent amongst the masses (*DC* 415). Neoliberalism, according to Harvey, captures “ideals of individual freedom,” turns “them against the interventionist and regulatory practices of the state” and is “backed up by a practical strategy that emphasized the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices” (*BHN* 42). Hence, the alluring gentrified surface of metropolitan centers that promise individual freedom, diversity, opportunities, and an overall better quality of life is ascribed to neoliberal globalization.

Privacy v. Privatization

Under the neoliberal state, all actors in the market are generally presumed to have access to the same information, especially with the proliferation of technology, which has led to the possibility of the Internet supporting, advancing, and enhancing autonomous and democratic spaces. Dahlberg and Siapera elaborate:

Through its mythological non-hierarchical network of free information flows, the Internet is seen as offering a perfect ‘marketplace of ideas’, a space for information exchange and individual decision-making free of bureaucracy, administrative power, and other restrictions (bodily, geographical, cultural) of ‘real’ space. Democracy here is equated with the liberty of individuals to satisfy private interests. (3)

The cyberspace of the Internet, thus, parallels the metropolis in what it promises to hold in store. In fact, the Internet arguably, through its virtuality and non-materiality, is a utopian space of a more radical concept of freedom and democracy as it is theoretically easier to satisfy private interests with the click of a mouse, free from the restrictions of material space and the power structures that come with it. Evgeny Morozov, however, observes that “[t]he idea that the Internet favors the oppressed rather than the oppressor is marred by what I call cyber-utopianism: a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside” (*ND* xiii). Furthermore, I argue that the premise of the notion that the Internet is a space of radical democracy derives from a facile conflation of privacy and privatization, between which we must necessarily distinguish.

When Hollis wakes up from her first night of deployment in Vancouver, Oliver Sleight of Blue Ant Vancouver informs her that Bigend has sent her a scrambler for her cellphone which “uses a digital encryption algorithm” that “rolls the scrambling code up to about sixty thousand times,” used exclusively for phone conversations between the two (Gibson 348). Rather unperturbed by and perhaps even insouciant to the mentality that leads to the desire of such hyper-security and protection of privacy, Hollis’ subsequent pithiness with Oliver suggests a markedly blasé attitude towards technological breaches of the free flow of data transmission. After all, prior to meeting Bigend, she had a “primeval fear that he’d caught her Googling him, peering into his Wiki” (100) when his first phone call to her came immediately after she leached Wi-Fi from “trusted wireless network SpaDeLites47”

(99), which she assumed was in the period apartment building across the street from her hotel room, and Googled him. Given the digital revolution of the Information Age, the flow of information is accelerated, and can easily be rerouted. In this digital frenzy, it is small wonder that Hollis is paranoid that her Internet activity can easily, and likely, be tracked, especially over a network unprotected by WEP. For Hollis, this digital tracking or rerouting of information is of a relatively petty concern that an elusive employer may discover and decide that a prying and intrusive employee is inappropriate for which he hired her. For Bigend, however, the free flow of data is a much more serious problem as he is “increasingly concerned with privacy” in spite of however relative it may be because at the least, the scramblers will make their phone conversations “more private than...not” having them (350). At a time when it is broadly believed that the digital revolution has facilitated the dissemination of democratic values and democracy itself through the accelerated spread of information, thereby rendering information public, Bigend seeks to privatize any and all data he collects in unraveling a government-backed scheme that is transnational in nature.

Little does Hollis know, it is partially, and I emphasize *partially*, due to her inquisitiveness that esoterically qualifies her for the investigative task, veiled beneath the title of “investigative journalist,” that Bigend hired her for, rendering her vulnerable to his manipulation. Nevertheless, Hollis’ investigative work, as a matter of course, extends beyond uncovering a scheme for Bigend; as a character in literary fiction, she is a social detective “who can most often be identified as occupying the space and position of the intellectual as such: that unhappy consciousness, forever suspended between the classes, yet unable to disengage from class realities and functions, and from class guilt” (*GA* 38). As intimated earlier in this chapter, Hollis is deeply implicated in the concentration of international finance and power, living what

appears to be a glamorous and cutting-edge cosmopolitan lifestyle, with access to the latest trends and innovations driving culture, economics, and society; yet, we also find her eating at an edgy spot in Los Angeles, and learn that her family is far removed from the money, despite the luxury of wintering in Puerto Vallarta, and power that enables her experiences. Her father has apparently developed “a fierce and uncharacteristic interest in politics” because he says “it’s never been this bad,” but according to her mother, “it’s only because he never paid it this much attention before” (Gibson 312). “And it’s the Internet,” her mother explains. “People used to have to wait for the paper, or for the news on television” (312-3). The Internet is immediately cast as an actor of freedom and democracy through its users’ instantaneous accessibility to news, and by extension, knowledge. And presumably, knowledge is power, as the old adage goes. However, Hollis’ mother is quick to remind us, that although her father may be more aware of social and political currents, “it’s not like there’s anything he can do about any of it anyway” (313). While the Internet revolutionized the accessibility to mainstream news, it is hardly a panacea for all corporate ills and failed states. In recent decades, for instance, the privatization of a vast array of sectors has led to a concentration of ownership, which subsequently leads to a concentration of power; while this is practically a truism, it is not something one will likely hear in mainstream media, for financial flows are taking control of media empires that influence political processes. According to Nick Dyer-Witheford, “[w]ho commands which means of communication is a question critical in determining what articulations may or may not be made” (*RD* 196). “And in advanced capitalism,” he continues, “the conditions of discourse, both its proliferation and its blockages, are deeply set by corporate power” (196). If corporate power is behind the keen control and production of information and knowledge, how might one access

pure information and knowledge, unmarred and unfiltered by corporate commodification and manipulation?

Hollis' dualistic investigative work – as both an “investigative journalist” for Bigend and a literary social detective – in addition to her suspension between the corporate class and everyday class renders her as the ideal protagonist to discover raw knowledge of the dynamics in society and reveal covert operations that drive the elite foundations of society. Jameson explains,

In any case, it will be the more general positioning of the intellectual in the social structure which endows the individual protagonist with collective resonance, which transforms policeman or journalist, photographer or even media figure, into a vehicle for judgments on society and revelations of its *hidden* [emphasis mine] nature, just as it refocuses the various individual or empirical events and actors into a representative pattern symptomatic of the social order as a whole. (GA 39)

Although Hollis' lifestyle may be implicated in corporate culture, which raises doubts of whether she has a collective resonance with the rest of society, it is precisely her implication in global corporate culture that provides her with the opportunities to experience the inner workings of society, which allows her to become a sort of correspondent – for readers – on the “hidden nature” of society that is not immediately available for many. Be that as it may, Bigend undoubtedly assigned Hollis to the locative-art beat not for her journalism,²⁶ but primarily because her celebrity status as the former lead singer of the indie-rock band Curfew is the precise tool needed to pry access to the goal: locating a mysterious shipping container whose location is allegedly known only to Bobby Chombo. According to David Rothkopf, “in the current era, celebrity is power” because “[w]ith modern information technologies, celebrity amounts to the ability to command the attention of mass

²⁶ I am, in essence, arguing that Hollis' function as a literary character is oppositional to her role in Bigend's venture, but the two are nonetheless discursively conjunctive. What I want to broach and examine, however, is the question of *what* might Hollis uncover about questions of privacy and privatization, and society at large through working covertly under the title of “investigative journalist” for Bigend. After all, “[o]ne of the scary things about Bigend, she supposed, was that with him you stood an actual chance of finding some things out” but broaches crucial questions: “And then where would you be? Were there things that were, in themselves, deeply problematic to learn?” (Gibson 230).

audiences,” and any star endorsing a product “is the power to generate revenue for a client, to draw consumers to merchandise or services associated with them” (S 236-7). It follows, then, that Bigend’s interest in the shipping container and subsequent creation of *Node* to probe the whereabouts of the container likely has more to do with concentrating power for himself through accumulating and exercising knowledge on covert operations than disclosing crucial information to the general public.

According to David Rothkopf, “[t]here is no single or universally accepted metric for power” and “[d]etermining who has it and who does not is made more difficult because some of the most influential among us commonly mask their power or use it infrequently” (S xiii). Hubertus Bigend is one such example. Indeed, the clandestinity of *Node* already raises suspicions regarding its existence and objective. Thus, Hollis’ qualms about the nature of her work and its course is anticipated with a cool calmness:

“Tell me about *Node*,” she suggested, “It doesn’t seem to be generating much in the way of industry gossip.”
 “No?”
 “No.”
 He lowered his finger-steeple. “Anti-buzz,” he said. “Definition by absence.” (111)

Bigend’s fascination for absence is curious. Pamela Mainwaring, English, who previously worked for Blue Ant in London describes the extremity of his enigma:

“He doesn’t want you to have heard of him. He doesn’t want people to have heard of Blue Ant, either. We’re often described as the first viral agency. Hubertus doesn’t like the term, and for good reason. Foregrounding the agency, or its founder, is counterproductive. He says he wishes we could operate as a black hole, an absence” (Gibson 146).

It is evident that Bigend has a desire to be absent, but also a desire to be an all-encompassing presence at the same time, as if his presence paradoxically becomes more powerful through an absent-presence. Pamela’s metaphor of operating as a black hole emphasizes Bigend’s stringent desire to have a vacuum effect on society and redirect attention and interest into matters *he* wants to define as concerning that as

yet have no market, which undoubtedly is a question of power. This discursive practice of wielding power and control through branding information knowledge is similar to the cool hunting work he has Cayce Pollard do in *Pattern Recognition* and the branding concepts of *Transmission*'s Guy Swift, which are largely about accessibility and avant-gardism. There is a crucial difference, however; in *Spook Country* and *Transmission* respectively, Bigend seeks to brand information and knowledge not yet discovered by others, and Guy attempts to brand a fabricated notion of a coherent and elite European Union – in which both situations are branding abstractions – but in *Pattern Recognition*, branding concepts are applied to material goods. Thus, in *Spook Country*, Bigend seeks to reshape access to and flows of information to his own pecuniary advantage through exclusive accessibility to raw information and knowledge, which explains his stringent desire for privacy and inscrutability, for a lack of either may foil his ability to privatize the information and knowledge he gathers.

Bigend's concern over issues of privacy, thus, derives from the necessity of masking his power to perpetuate it. David Harvey explains that in neoliberalism,

There are presumed to be no asymmetries of power or information that interfere with the capacity of individuals to make rational economic decisions in their own interests. This condition is rarely, if ever, approximated in practice... Better informed and more powerful players have an advantage that can all too easily be parlayed into procuring even better information and greater relative power. (*BHN* 68)

By masking the power he wields behind the scenes, Bigend is able to simulate the notion that power is not asymmetric, and that everyone has equal access and opportunities. What results is what Rothkopf defines as an *illiberal* democracy, in which the market becomes “illiberal if [it] offer[s] the appearance of free competition without a level playing field, without truly having equal opportunity for all” (*S* 322). Thus, the fact that Bigend's mother has a background highly involved with the Situationist International is highly ironic because the Situationist International stresses

the construction of situations, the use of technology, media of communication, and cultural forms to promote a revolution of everyday life, and to increase the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment; Bigend, however, only cares about empowering himself, and maintaining and increasing money and power, which in the 21st century, means exclusive information about and access to the latest technological innovations and the military-industrial complex, which I will elaborate on in the next section. Bigend is, thus, Gibson's image of hyper-capitalist consciousness evolved to such sophistication that it becomes indistinguishable from art and philosophy.

Advertising for Bigend is not a means to make money, but a method for manipulating individuals at the base of consciousness and culture. Although Bigend benefits from accessibility and exclusivity to information knowledge and innovative technology, it is important to bear in mind that Bigend is merely capitalizing on a larger scheme that already exists beyond his individual capacity.

Ghostly Matters: Public Concerns, Private Solutions

The narratives all converge on a shipping container of unspecified cargo that is transported to – which we discover at the very end of the novel – Vancouver. In Vancouver, an old man – who still has connections to American intelligence circles, and whom Tito passes iPods with encrypted data to in department stores – and his team irradiate the shipping container and uncover millions of U.S. dollars diverted from Iraq reconstruction funds. This might sound too incredulous of an overarching espionage plot that only reiterates the question of whether the novel has any cultural, political, and/or social value whatsoever, but what if a similar situation has indeed occurred in our reality? In 2007, just as Gibson was preparing *Spook Country* for publication, *The Guardian* journalist David Pallister reported, “[i]n the year after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 nearly 281 million notes, weighing 363 tonnes, were sent

from New York to Baghdad for disbursement to Iraqi ministries and US contractors” for reconstruction, but billions were lost without a trace to corruption and waste. Then Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Henry Waxman, said the way the money had been handled was startling: “The numbers are so large that it doesn't seem possible that they're true. Who in their right mind would send 363 tonnes of cash into a war zone?”

Spook Country offers an explanation to Waxman’s question. The old man explains how the cargo came to his attention: “It was discovered in transit, by a team of American intelligence operators, assigned to look for a very different sort of cargo” (Gibson 465) that is, “weapons of mass destruction” (WMD). “They were ordered off the case immediately,” he continues, “but in a way that created a snag in the fabric of things, bureaucratically” (465), thus suggesting that high-ranking officials were involved. But why was America searching for WMD in Iraq in the first place? The war in Iraq definitely seems less based on substantial evidence of the Iraqi government’s involvement in terrorism and more on fallacious logic. On February 12, 2002, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, at a press briefing where he addressed the absence of evidence linking the Iraqi government with supplying WMD to terrorist groups, stated: “[T]here are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – there are things we do not know we don't know.” In *The Reality of the Virtual*, Žižek explains that

...if Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq were the ‘unknown unknowns,’ that is, the threats from Saddam whose nature we cannot even suspect, then the Abu Ghraib scandal²⁷ shows that the main dangers lie in the “unknown knowns” – the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we

²⁷ U.S. military personnel and other governmental agencies committed human rights violations in the form of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse including torture, sodomy, rape, and homicide of Al-Qaeda detainees held in Abu Ghraib.

pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values. (2004)

In aftermath of 9/11, the American public had a heightened sense of anxiety and desire for homeland security regardless of how inhumane and blatantly racist some of the implemented security measures were. The shared feelings of deep vulnerability, rage, and grief which 9/11 aroused could not help but unite the people affected by this monumental act of violence. There was a general sense of unity across all political and social divides in the American public with the burgeoning of patriotism – Americans united as victims of an “unwarranted” attack, and united against a common enemy. In short, Americans acquiesced to anything the government conducted and imposed in the name of homeland security.

According to Stephan Salisbury, “[t]he ubiquitous fantasy of ‘homeland security,’ pushed hard by the federal government in the wake of 9/11, has been widely embraced by the public” (2012). Those in high-ranking official positions have capitalized on the ambient sense of invasiveness in all aspects of American life after the collapse of the twin towers to build patriotism amongst the public and justify a war for profit. According to the old man, the hundred million was never intended to return to “any part of the First World” because the amount was too “unwieldy” and there “are [Third World] economies, however, in which that sort of money can be traded for one thing or another, without too punishing a discount” (Gibson 465). He tells Hollis, “[i]n terms of profiteering from the war, Miss Henry, this is a piddling amount” but he finds “the sheer gall of it fascinating” because it was simply and unimaginatively put “[o]ut the door of the New York Fed, onto the back of a truck in Baghdad, one thing and another, then sail[ed] it away” (466). Yes, the entire scheme was just that easy, which illustrates that money laundering and its derivatives have become significant and a troubling component of global financial flows, but more

importantly, that the political class is heavily implicated and has manipulated and mobilized nationalism for their private interests in reaping the benefits of informal global financial flows while disregarding public needs of their citizens. Salisbury criticizes that “[s]o much money has gone into armoring and arming local law-enforcement since 9/11 that the federal government could have rebuilt post-Katrina New Orleans five times over and had enough money left in the kitty to provide job training and housing for every one of the record 41,000-plus homeless people in New York City” (2012), many of whom – as aforementioned – were left out in the gentrification of the city in its pursuit to become world-class.

Perhaps the political class’ implication in global financial flows is not entirely one out of self-interest, but a circumstance necessitated as a reflexive method of protecting national interests – at least insofar as keeping corporations within their country’s borders. Rothkopf states, “[c]orporations now enjoy transnational status which, while still subjecting them to national laws everywhere, often allows them to exert significant power on the governments whose laws define them” because “[w]hen one government won’t oblige, they move to another” (S 80). For instance, former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney’s Halliburton derives a significant amount of its revenue from the U.S. government and its U.S. operations, but when public opinion turned against the company, it moved its headquarters to the Persian Gulf. Rothkopf elaborates,

In a global economy in which multinational corporations are no longer bound to any single country, they have gained a new kind of power over national governments, which by their nature are confined by borders. Companies have created a new kind of marketplace in which governments compete with one another for investment, essentially undercutting in a fundamental way some of the most familiar, potent, and until recently enduring foundations of sovereignty. (119)

Rothkopf is, of course, suggesting that global economics has undermined the enduring foundations of democracy in exchange for a “free market” where nation-states take a

backseat to governing and yield to TNCs with the ambition of attracting investment on their soil. David Harvey writes,

Asymmetric power relations tend, therefore, to increase rather than diminish over time unless the state steps in to counteract them. The neoliberal presumption of perfect information and a level playing field for competition appears as either innocently utopian or a deliberate obfuscation of processes that will lead to the concentration of wealth and, therefore, the restoration of class power. (*BHN* 68)

The state, I argue, is a failed one if it fails to protect and preserve its democratic foundations and/or values and does not take measures in providing a (relatively) level playing field, and instead contributes to the concentration of wealth and power within an increasingly small (and transnational) population, even if it is concomitant of a national interest to remain globally competitive. In Morozov's words, "[t]he only thing worse than an authoritarian state is a failed one" (*ND* 264). What becomes evident is that the democratic form is fundamentally compromised and colonized by the interests of capital in the postmodern epoch.

In the present stage of capitalism, Debord writes, "in which social life has become completely dominated by the accumulated productions of the economy," there is a bringing about of "a general shift from *having* to *appearing* – all 'having' must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances" (*SS* 11). States no longer need to *have* democracy; they merely need to *appear* as democratic – that is, as a liberal democracy that practices neoliberalism. With the proliferation of ICTs that ensure the smooth running of global capitalism and enhancement of global financial flows, technological innovations become a form of measurement for democracy, and of course, the advancement or world-class stature of any given country. At this point, it is necessary to address the conflation of the state and country, and its impacts and relevance to citizenship in global discourse. To be a citizen is to bear the rights and obligations attached to membership in a given political community; for example, as an American citizen, one is entitled to certain liberties by

statute, but also has the responsibility of protecting the democratic statutes of the United States of America. But the American government and many of its bureaucrats is leaning towards capitalism that has no sense of social and moral responsibility, which brings us to whether Americans ought to consider themselves as subjects of the American government, or American citizens. Ronald Beiner explains that “it is through rational dialogue, and especially through political dialogue, that we clarify, even to ourselves, who we are and what we want” (*PJ* 152). Further, “it is through speech and deliberation that man finds the location of his proper humanity, between beast and god, in the life of the citizen” (152). According to Beiner, civic participation is crucial to humanity and individual identity. But as I have been arguing throughout this chapter and the previous chapters, capitalism creates a state in which people become subjects – of a higher authority – who have an illusion of having free choice rather than citizens of a country whose government exists to ensure their rights and freedoms (which, incidentally, includes providing equal opportunity to its citizens), and particularly in light of 9/11, Americans have become even more “willing” to surrender basic rights and freedoms in exchange for an illusion of security.

As one would expect, a world-class state must necessarily have world-class technology, especially when it comes to the question of security. The fantasy of homeland security “has also excited intense weapons- and techno-envy among police departments and municipalities vying for the latest in armor and spy equipment” and [t]he truth is that virtually the entire apparatus of government has been mobilized and militarized right down to the university campus” (Salisbury 2012). For instance, in the past year alone, we have seen many protests against tuition hikes across the University of California campuses – perhaps most notably, the ones taken place at the University of California, Davis (UC Davis) in which professors and students were

arrested. David Simpson describes Davis as a campus that “has long been popular with parents looking for a safe and sequestered life for their children, deterred by the history of student radicalism at Berkeley or Santa Cruz,” but when Davis students set about a peaceful occupation with night sticks, a UC Davis police officer “in full riot gear” doused students “at close range and in the face with military-grade pepper spray” (November 2011). While I agree with Simpson that compared with global violence, this incident is considerably a trifling matter, it nevertheless *is* evidence that even the university campus – a place of higher education and typically of free thinking – has militarized in the name of “homeland security.” Simpson further discloses that “[s]tudents of various non-majoritarian or dissenting groups have consistently complained about the campus police and have made claims of racial profiling and threatening behaviour” that’s gotten worse since 9/11 perhaps because “[p]eople who wear a uniform and body armour and carry a gun can all too readily imagine themselves as homeland heroes.” He ultimately explains that “[i]n a highly militarised culture obsessed with high-tech weapons and actively involved in using them all over the world, it is not surprising that an officer in an unthreatening situation should resort to some sort of violence” to suppress a form of mass communication to perform collective responsibility.

In *Spook Country*, however, the prospect of civic participation having any impact, as Hollis’ mother suggests, is dismal when information is tightly controlled and power is concentrated amongst a very few, such that the old man decides to take matters into his own hands by organizing a team of spooks with specialized skill sets necessary to foil the WMD cargo conspiracy. Even in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, when there was a great surge of patriotism that led Americans to blindly accept infringements upon civil liberties, the old man who “was a counterintelligence

officer” who once kept secrets for the government is as “American” as one can get in putting his position as an American citizen before his subject position to the state; hence, he is now considered a “a renegade, a rogue player” (Gibson 191). Although he was a spook for the American government, he now spooks his former employer because he “detest[s] certain policies, certain figures in the government whom [he] believe[s] guilty of crimes” (Gibson 192) that divert the US from being a welfare state to a failed state that caters to private interests and disregards public interest. The present political environment is one in which the power of the state to intervene in markets is constrained by private global ICT networks endowed with a velocity of information flow, resulting in a decline of civic engagement in a liberal democracy; as such, the old man’s re-engagement with politics is dependent on the use of Internet and new and more interactive communication technologies as seen through the use of locative art. Thus, the old man utilizes the connections he built as a spook to access various technologies an average person would not be able to for “ethical” reasons.

Near the end of his famous essay “The Question Concerning Technology”, Martin Heidegger concludes that the only way to recover agency with respect to the enframing essence of modern technology and its associated modes of being - modes of being characterized by calculation, instrumental reason, rootlessness and the will to master human and non-human nature – is to manage somehow to “catch sight of what comes to presence in technology, instead of merely gaping at the technological” (32). Every technological instrument or system is evident of the very essence of technology itself and, if we catch sight of that, it becomes possible to establish a relationship with technology in which we do not cede to it the ground of independent moral and political judgment upon which stands human agency and citizenship. If, however, we approach discrete technologies *simply* as instruments, either to be used or even to be

mastered, we give ourselves over to the enframing essence of technology, to being enframed as technological beings, such as the militant police officers at Davis. It is therefore the responsibility of the active citizen to creatively engage these technologies, as well as to critically analyze the diverse developments of the cyberculture, especially when cyberculture is used against humanity. The old man indeed creatively engages with the technologies available in his society only to reveal his scheme as an expensive and criminal but arguably righteous(?) plot in preventing money laundering. In spite of the resources he has collected and exploited to correct a wrong, the moment and role he plays in history will remain a secret, and so too will the covert operation he seeks to obstruct. Moreover, the level of privacy his entire project requires is problematic in and of itself because everything is privatized and conducted covertly, the government notwithstanding, suggesting that the political class plays a significant role in technocapitalism, which is exactly why his interception must also be a covert operation. While the old man is promising a private solution to a serious social and political problem, we must be wary of the fact that he is ultimately relying on private dead-end measures to correct a wrong that *he* personally finds problematic, but this provides no real and viable solution for everyone else who is subjected and victimized by neoliberalism and militant governments of failed states.

Conclusion

The world in the 21st century, as *Spook Country* portrays, is undoubtedly very alarming in that individuals are constantly under surveillance and left only with the illusion of having free choice; but at the same time, it is phenomenal and audacious with the combination of technological innovations that increase efficiency in global financial and informational flows and challenge conventional perceptions of reality

and materiality, and the gentrification of previously run-down neighborhoods in global/informational cities as a movement towards world-class stature, which leads to the umbrella image of neoliberal globalization (re)shaping the world into a hi-tech one populated with savvy cosmopolitans. But as we know, the superclass have control – they control the economy and politics to safeguard their interests, and imperial corporate power even controls media so that people cannot see the human costs behind their greed. What is perturbing is that it is more than the United States, it is the people controlling the United States, Britain, and other countries that impose neoliberal economic policies both on their own soil and abroad. And beyond all of this, the university which was once thought of as the place of higher education, academic freedom, and intellectual curiosity – in short, the birthplace of ideas, innovations, and knowledge – has fallen under neoliberal surveillance²⁸ and is no longer a steppingstone haven for political reform. Be that as it may, literature – as much as it has necessarily become a commodity in our postmodern epoch of increased privatization and commodification – in its postmodern form, remains pertinent to socio-cultural and –political discourse. By portraying the very real problems of our global 21st century in commodifying fiction, it becomes more widely accessible and understandable. In the case of *Spook Country*, William Gibson, through the eyes of Hollis Henry – who becomes a social detective for us – illustrates the underlying dynamics of the glamor of globalization, which is deeply problematic, and needless to say, uneven. Nevertheless, understanding that neoliberal globalization and/or liberal democracy is profoundly uneven and undemocratic, and some of the basic dynamics that lead to these quandaries is already a good start towards social and political reform,

²⁸ See Chris Lorenz' "If You're So Smart, Why Are You under Surveillance? Universities, Neoliberalism, and New Public Management."

and literary fiction is a tool that can instigate the understanding and critical examination of global processes.

Conclusion

Francis Fukuyama has declared the post-1989 global movement of nation-states towards liberal democratic governance as a Hegelian universal End of History; with the Fall of Communism/Autumn of Nations, humanity has finally reached the teleological endpoint of 'Enlightenment', such that there is a decentering of geopolitical power relations - in other words, who you are and where you come from no longer matters because domestic/international and political/economic goals have conflated for the advancement of civilization. However, I believe that at some point in the 1980s, with Reaganomics, Thatcherism, and the general onrush of neoliberalism or global capitalism, history took a turn in the opposite direction. Thus, this thesis considered three works of fiction published in the 1980s and onwards to examine the transition of contemporary literary fiction in juxtaposition with changing economic and social conditions. In chapter one, I examined the myth of the nation and the enduring quality (and necessity) of nationalism in spite of shifting power dynamics and a concomitant reconfiguration of social hierarchy in accordance with the economic and political changes as the British empire waned. In chapter two, I discussed modernity as a game of catch-up dependent on a nation's ability to develop technological innovations and infrastructure to compete in the global economy. And finally, in the third chapter, I argued that the unrelenting expansion of ICTs is relentlessly continuing to transform the production of an emergent postmodern economy, in which democracy is declared when the chasm between the rich and poor has only widened.

Far from the end of history, I therefore argue that we are experiencing a reversal in history. Baudrillard writes, "[o]nce the apogee of time, the summit of the curve of evolution, the solstice of history had been passed, the downward slope of

events began and things began to run in reverse” (*IE* 10). This cultural logic of late capitalism emphatically marks “the end of linearity, and in this perspective, the future no longer exists” (10-1). “But,” Baudrillard continues, “if there is no longer a future, there is no longer an end either. So this is not even the end of history” (10-1). If we take the a priori assumption that English departments contribute to cultural production, or at least the reproduction of it vis-a-vis what I consider to be the antediluvian claim that they seek to “enlighten” and move civilization towards advancement and progress by raising cultural awareness, why, then, are English departments nevertheless pedagogically privileging and reproducing the cultural norms and practices of what was known as the “center”? The bifurcation of English literary studies into “American” and “English” literature seems, to me, to reinforce the idea that the West remains at the center of civilization, and by extension, Enlightenment vis-a-vis modernity, which in this perspective, is to say that there is a great deal to learn from Western cultures. In other words, English departments are still producing national one-sidedness curricula, thus contributing to the (re)production of cultural hegemony and imperialism in an epoch when globalization (which implies postnationalism and decolonization) is at the forefront. In short, the English department is too far removed from current economic, social, and political realities, which renders it dysfunctional for its purported objectives and functions in the advent of the liberal arts and/or interdisciplinary studies. If the English department is to remain relevant and viable - and we’ve all certainly heard of the quagmires the humanities are facing - to culture and society, it necessarily needs reforms contingent to the cultural logic of our postmodern global 21st century.

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