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Existential Meanders of Bloody Ignorant Apes

Waiting as the Organising Principle of Existence

Bobrowicz, Katarzyna

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Introduction

Paweł Wojtas

For want of a word that would best capture the collective efforts that made possible the publication of this volume, *roundtable* lends itself as the most accurate for good reason. This publication consists of a collection of academic papers that emerged as a result of a lively collaboration with my students – who act as contributors to this volume - throughout the undergraduate course *Contemporary Anglo-American Literature in Context* I taught at Faculty of Artes Liberales of University of Warsaw in 2012. The roundtable discussions generating a plethora of productive thoughts on some aspects of 20th century Anglo-American literature would later be consolidated as term papers, the revised version of which is now extended before the reader's eyes.

If this sounds like a hoary old chestnut (indeed another book that seeks to recapitulate some well-worn aspects and concepts of contemporary literature would be just too much of a good thing) the ways in which the contributors breathe life into the relatively exhausted literary debate deserve due attention. Namely, the authors are in the most part interdisciplinary students completing combined undergraduate modules in arts and humanities (e.g. Social Science, Philology, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Law Studies, to list but a few). Such a reading practice differs markedly from traditional ways of approaching the literary text, with benefits of this slant being twofold: firstly, a broad gamut of scholarly angles from which the authors close-read literature eschews hermetic interpretative closure symptomatic of literary scholars' exclusionist reading; secondly, given the essentially academic character of the publication, it takes pains to offer inquisitive readings flying in the face of instrumentalist interpretation characteristic of some lower orders of Cultural Studies.

In a daring attempt to bridle the topically miscellaneous pieces, the chapters are arranged chronologically. In the opening chapter Julia Naumowicz attempts to interrogate aspects of human nature, civilization and savagery in William

Golding's early prose centring on the relationship between evil and civilization. Placed in the context of philosophical theories of Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke, the author attempts to elucidate the ways in which civilization and savagery affect the human nature via Golding's lens.

In chapter 2, interdisciplinary – philosophical and ethological – at its core, Katarzyna Bobrowicz's reading of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* rehashes some crucial aspects of this much-debated play. Drawing on Heidegger and Rilke, the author probes existential meanders of a (non)human condition. This is to test the culturally sanctified limits between humanity and animality by unsettling their clean-cut epistemological locus. Katarzyna Bobrowicz persuasively argues that Beckett's text demonstrates this existential liminality in the ways that eschew explicatory narrative stances or affirmative gestures. Instead it provokes by dramatizing these fundamental, yet uncharted, philosophical and phenomenological queries.

In a similar existential breath, Ryszard Bobrowicz embarks on a comparative analysis of Beckett's and Martin Amis' works so as to revisit some central philosophical and ontological questions. The notions of *being* and *time*, as demonstrated by the writers in question, both extend and unsettle the spaces of interiority and exteriority manipulating the characters' representation and consciousness. These deliberations, however, zoom in to a total cultural context exposing the ways both Beckett and Amis appropriate these tropes to lay bare their prophetic project: a dystopian vision of the modern human being entangled in the irresolvable spatio-temporal existential aporias.

Delving into postmodern aesthetics, Antoni Głowacki offers a playful anthropologically-oriented reading of *Crying of Lot 49*, proposing that the notion of 'hegemony' helps establish a systematic angle from which to approach the novel. The author argues that the novel can be interpreted as a statement on meta-political level and a narrative about power relations.

Conceptualising her own account of the literary, Aleksandra Paszkowska militantly argues in chapter 5 that literature heavily depends on universality for its existence. If this reads like a sweeping statement, the author, by placing it against the backdrop of William Gibson's rhetoric of otherness, persuasively complicates this seemingly cut-and-dried claim. Gibson's textual estrangement, extending its futuristic economy on the surface, does justice to a universal condition of man. Seen in this light, textual blind-spots of the uncanny, seemingly

mafficking the novel's proleptic potential, veering off from organic humanity, serve to undo this noble project.

In his own take on Gibson's oeuvre, linking cyberpunk with comic books, Oskar Lubiński bites into some scarcely researched characteristics of postmodern character construction as essentially genre contingent. Rather than structured according to the rigid dictates of a single genre, the multiple genres of postmodernism, absorbing intertextual – literary and graphic – materials in plenty, coagulate in *Neuromancer* to complicate the protagonist formation. So configured, Lubiński demonstrates that the language of *Neuromancer*, and cyberpunk overall, absorptive of hybrid cultural and artistic forms, exposes the fissures of generic indeterminacy that unsettle the uncontested literariness of the novel.

Closing the cyberpunk debate is chapter 6, where Wojciech Mamak takes issue with postmodernist reading – or in fact any instrumentalist reading bowing low to passing literary fads – based on the premise that postmodernism's failure to function as a consistent philosophical system assures an insufficient angle from which to interrogate the peculiarities of the cyberpunk genre. Having established that the generic multifurcation typical of postmodernism fails to do justice to the text it usurps to hermeneutically monopolise, the author elucidates the ways philosophy serves to cater for the yet unmapped and wildly contested notions of transhumanism and cyberpunk.

The roundtable closes with Filip Rak's study linking Michel Houellebecq's *The Map and the Territory* with Jean Baudrillard's notion of *simulacrum* in a lively attempt to probe the existential condition of man immersed in the consumerist deluge of representations. Given that our collective experience is one of inertia and passivity – in keeping with the author's apprehensive diagnosis – this chapter offers a timely recapitulation of the post-simulacrum human condition.

Allowing that the chapters take as their focus assorted literary and philosophical aspects inspired by essentially interdisciplinary lens of their authors, the final chapter, "Spectres of Posts- and -Isms", which compliments the volume immeasurably, plunges in a mammoth task of amalgamating some of the central issues iterating across the book as well as haunting its contributors, myself included, throughout the semester of fertile intellectual collaboration. In this round-up, I interview a renowned Scottish scholar affiliated with Stirling

University, Dr Adrian Hunter, an energetic commentator on 20th century literature, who expertly talks over (re)current issues in contemporary literature and education that beg contemporised deliberation, such as The Canon, the literary, literature in the age of Cultural Studies, (post)modernism, to enumerate a few.

It is hoped that this volume, a fruit of our collaborative labour, will stimulate an exchange of scholarly ideas, be they literary or otherwise.

How Does Evil Relate to Civilization? A Study of Correlation between Evil and Civilization in William Golding's Works in the Context of the Views of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau

Julia Naumowicz

Abstract

The aim of my work is to explore the themes of human nature, civilization and savagery in William Golding's early prose, namely in the novels *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors*. In particular, my work focuses on the correlation between evil and civilization implied by Golding in his works. I attempt on the explanation how, according to Golding, civilization and savagery influence the human nature. This line of argument is placed in the context of the views of the philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes or John Locke. I seek to answer the questions: 'What is the relation between civilization and human evil? Is the human nature naturally vile, or is it civilization and society that cause corruption?' How does William Golding assess the human condition and how do his opinions relate to concepts of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau? The in-depth analysis of Golding's prose via the lens of philosophy aims to give a complete outlook on Golding's views on human nature and compare it with the philosophical views. Literary devices and tropes are examined when relevant to the context of my work.

Keywords: evil, civilization, Golding, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau

The evil of man is a fundamental issue discussed in such academic disciplines as philosophy, literature, psychology and theology. Human evil also seems to be a recurring theme in William Golding's prose. Notable here is the inevitable relationship between society (or civilization) and evil implied by the author. Both his first, best-selling novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and the succeeding *The*

Inheritors (1955; claimed by Golding to be his favourite work) explore the dark sides of human nature in relation to civilization, but in different ways. While *Lord of the Flies* tells the story of a group of British boys marooned on an uninhabited island, who descend into savagery and are consumed by their own evil, *The Inheritors* concerns an alleged annihilation of last tribes of *Neanderthals* by more socially and technologically advanced (but also more vile) tribe of *Homo Sapiens*. In this work I will try to explain the relation of evil to civilization in the mentioned novels of William Golding against the backdrop of the views of the philosophers Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. I intend to answer such questions as: How does civilization relate to human evil and vice versa? Is the human nature naturally corrupt, which then mars the whole collection of individuals, or is it perhaps civilization that is to blame for the corruption of an innocent human being? Is civilization a cure for human evil?

First, for clarity's sake, we need to define the term 'civilization'. It may be used in reference to:

1. "an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been reached."
2. "those people or nations that have reached such a state."
3. "any type of culture, society, etc., of a specific place, time, or group: Greek civilization."
4. "the act or process of civilizing or being civilized: Rome's civilization of barbaric tribes was admirable."
5. "cultural refinement; refinement of thought and cultural appreciation: The letters of Madame de Sévigné reveal her wit and civilization."
6. "the comfort and convenience of modern life, regarded as available only in towns and cities: in the UK nowhere is very far from civilization" (Oxford Dictionary 2012).

Civilization (meant as advanced state of human society, people of this society or convenience of modern life), or lack of thereof, is one of the elements of the depicted world that are used by the authors of literary works in order to achieve their purposes. The portrayal of a human being away from civilization, its institutions, rules, settings and inventions often serves to convey some universal

truths about the human nature. When deprived of civilization, the characters strive to survive. The genre that focuses on the works which deal with this theme is referred to as *survivalist fiction*. The most prominent subgenre of survivalist fiction is the genre Robinsonade, named after the famous novel by Daniel Defoe. According to some sources within the scope of the Robinsonade genre, we can distinguish between: Robinsonade proper, science fiction Robinsonade and apocalyptic fantasy Robinsonade. In works labelled as proper Robinsonades, the authors throw an individual or a group of individuals into an uninhibited, preferably tropical island. The most common example of such works in culture are the adventures of Robinson Crusoe, *The Coral Island*, or the famous TV series, *Lost*. All of the works attempt to grasp the nature of human being in unusual circumstances – separated from the social conventions of civilization, out of the so called ‘civilized world’, when one has to fight for their own survival and encounter wild forces of nature.

Another literary genre that deals with the theme of lack of civilization is a subgenre of science-fiction, called apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction. Apocalyptic fiction depicts the world in time of the violent end of human civilization, caused by such events as nuclear war, pandemia, alien invasion, Armageddon, end of supplies or other similar causes. Post-apocalyptic fiction focuses on the aftermath of such events and can be set immediately – leaving the survivors with memories of the destroyed civilization – or many years after the catastrophe - including the possibility of pre-catastrophic civilization being forgotten. The apocalypse either leaves the world in a primal, agrarian state, eliminating technology completely (by which such works come close to Robinsonade novels) or partially at best. As in Robinsonade novels, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic works most often follow an individual or a group of individuals on their quest for survival. While the aim of survivors on a desert island is to return to the world they once knew, in post-apocalyptic fiction there is no ‘home’ to come back to, so the survivors have to try to rebuild the civilization themselves.

Lord of the Flies

In the context of the considerations above, *Lord of the Flies* seems to be balancing between the proper Robinsonade genre and post-apocalyptic fiction. The story depicts the hardships of survivors on a desert tropical island who have narrowly

escaped a nuclear world war. We do not know for sure whether the world that the boys come from has been destroyed, whether they have a home to come back to and how this home would look like. Piggy says: “Didn’t you hear what the pilot said? About the atom bomb? They’re all dead” (Golding 1954, 9). Even though Ralph is saved by the arrival of a cutter and naval officer, and there is also a “trim cruiser in the distance” (216), we do not know what the world that boys will return to would be like.

The authors seem to turn to survivalist fiction in the times when the existence of our civilization is no longer certain. Also the traumatic experience of World War II planted the seed of doubt about the future of our civilization in the mind of people. William Golding’s experience of the war had a profound effect on his view of humanity and the evils of which it was capable. As Golding himself said about the war: “All this has nothing to do, directly, with Nazis or anything; it has much more to do with people. One had one’s nose rubbed in the human condition” (Olsen 2000, 186).

Lord of the Flies may be a parody of R. M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island*, but the differences between the two works are striking. *The Coral Island* is an adventurous tale with educational values addressed to children and youth, while *Lord of the Flies* has the qualities of an allegory and is clearly not an adventurous book for children. *Lord of the Flies*, although it may share some themes with Ballantyne’s novel, conveys a completely opposite message: in *The Coral Island* boys face savages who are beastly and evil because they are not civilized and Christianized. In *Lord of the Flies*, on the other hand, the beast is hidden inside the civilized, British boys and rises to surface as the effect of being cast out of the society. The names of young heroes remain the same; their qualities are opposite in both books. On the Coral Island, brave boys have to battle evil savages; in Golding’s tale “the beast” is, in reality, something inside them. There is a discrepancy between the two outlooks on humanity presented in both books. *The Coral Island* tells us reassuringly that Christianity and civilization are enough to control human evil impulses, whilst Golding’s novel shows, with terrifying authenticity, that the evil of human nature is a force mightier than both. Civilization is not a salvation from evil – if anything, it is just a skin which, once shed, exposes the real beast in us. The differences between the two books are visible even on the level of style and imagery used. *The Coral Island* is claimed by the critics to be “obtrusively pious” (Lessing, Ousby 1993, 54) and having high

moral tone, boys are using flawless language and act with careful planning and consideration similar to this of an adult. In *Lord of the Flies* young heroes make grammar mistakes, talk childishly and act accordingly; they engage in a play and forget about work. Although a fable, Golding's book is much more realistic than Ballantyne's, which further points to its universal meaning.

The Inheritors

While *Lord of the Flies* could serve as a sort of parody of *The Coral Island*, in *The Inheritors* William Golding reverses the Wellsian picture of a prehistoric man, criticizing the author's optimistic view on the matter. As Golding remarks:

In *Chips*, *Mr. Polly*, *Tono Bungay* and others there are very good bits of writing, but then if you put over against them his [Wells'] propaganda pieces, his *Science of Life*, or his *Outline of History* even more so, you find he has an extraordinary, really nonsensical, optimism. He does stand everything on its head and pretend that the history of man is a gradual improvement which is going to go on. [...] And I sympathize, but I would attack his simplistic view of history and his simplistic view of the nature of man at the same time as I deplore some of the novels (Golding 1982, 138).

On the word of Oldsey and Weintraub *The Inheritors* is

a fable of prehistory, which relates the encounter between the last surviving family of the Neanderthal species and the first 'true men' (as Wells calls Homo Sapiens in his *Outline of History*) and the eventual extermination of the former by the latter. The new men, [...] these inheritors, [...] take the cave men to be devils and flee in terror (1965, 24).

Here, unlike *Lord of the Flies*, moral descent of a man goes along with the development of civilization and evolutionary advance. The Neanderthals' society has a simple structure: consists of a family, in which the oldest person is treated with the greatest respect and care and has the highest authority and social status. Primitive people "share pictures and feelings, they become one mind or no mind.

[...] It suggests a state of undifferentiated consciousness, “togetherness”, a state of harmony between man and man” (Oldsey, Weintraub 1965, 27). We can, however, clearly notice that the ‘new people’ have a sense of their individual identity. Primal people do not know such concepts as jealousy, self-other rivalry; ‘new people’ are greedy, envious, driven by lust for power and for beautiful women. It seems that in Golding’s eyes the end of man’s innocence occurs in the moment of fragmentation of the undifferentiated consciousness into individual minds, the moment of gaining self-awareness and individual identity. This view is confirmed in the interview with the author:

Now with our awareness of ourselves as individuals inescapably comes in this other thing, this destructive thing, the evil, if you like. It seems to me that this self-awareness, intelligence, with these come the defect of their virtue. We have to learn, and it's quite possible, I think, that we never shall learn, that as a species that will be the thing which will trip us up, our own intelligence and our own lusts. But if we are going to survive those two aspects of man, his selfishness and his intelligence, we've got to learn to control those, otherwise they tend to destroy us. I think they are what mark us off from the animal kingdom, so far as we are marked off from it’ (Golding 1982, 135).

Philosophical analysis of human evil and civilization

In the discussion of the relation between human nature and civilization vital is the concept of social contract, developed by philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. However, in the scope of this investigation I would examine only the aspects of this theory which are relevant to the central focus of my work, that is human evil. The theory of social contract assumes people’s consent to a governmental power, giving up some of their rights in order to gain protection of their natural and legal rights. The sole fact of coining this idea conveys some truths about human nature and its flaws – if a human being was flawlessly good, no protection of rights would be needed because no one would break them in the first place. The concept differs to varying degrees in the thinkers’ accounts: Hobbes claimed that people need to give up all of their freedom to an authoritarian monarchy; Locke postulated liberal monarchy and

included a possibility of overthrowing the government; Rousseau proposed the direct rule of people, either republicanism or democracy. Different interpretations of the social contract theory are connected with the philosopher's different views on the human nature.

Hobbes' view

We can see that Hobbes' conception postulates the strictest control of the human behaviour, by which he seems to put the least trust in the human nature. This is confirmed by the philosopher's views on state of nature: one preceding civilization, 'primitive state'. As proposed by Hobbes:

In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, not culture of the earth, no navigation, nor the use of commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes 2012).

Hobbes claims that in the state of nature there will be a 'war of all against all' (*Bellum omnium contra omnes*) over the limited supplies, caused solely by the nature of man who is egoistic, envious and greedy at the expense of the other. As argued by Meyer "Hobbes believed human beings are programmed, mechanical objects to pursue self-interested ends, without regard for anything other than the avoidance of pain and the incentive of pleasure. What motivates human beings, thinks Hobbes, is self-interest" (2011). It is also worth noting, that according to Hobbes, man is not a social animal and an establishment of society is only possible under the coercion of governmental power.

Locke's view

John Locke, on the contrary, considers man to be a naturally social animal and is convinced that people are capable of forming civil society with state intervention and support, but not coercion. He thinks people naturally want what is best for

them, and they would desire government because it provides things that are unattainable in the state of nature, for example stability and security. However, life would be also possible in the state of nature, which is the state of 'perfect freedom'. In his *Second Treatise of Government* Locke also claims that humans are able to find the correct moral path, using reason. Locke sees a human being as a blank sheet (*tabula rasa*) at birth; the human mind is then shaped by sensory experiences. This view undermines the Platonic, Cartesian and Christian view that a human is born with innate, fixed ideas (or in the Christian case, with original sin). Nevertheless, it must be noted that Lockean mildly optimistic view of the nature of man is based on his belief that it was God who created man in his image.

Rousseau's view

While both Hobbes and Locke deem living in some kind of organised society – be it absolute monarchy or liberal government – crucial for leading a safe and fulfilling life, Rousseau does not consider it a necessity. He believes in the intrinsic good of the man, who is most moral and happy in the State of Nature – that is, a state untouched by laws or government. Where Hobbes claims that man in a State of Nature is selfish and evil creature, Rousseau proclaims the opposite thing – that man in the uncivilised state is driven by natural, uncorrupted morality, which causes his actions to be inherently good. The State of Nature seems the best stage in the development of humanity – an optimum point between savagery of animal on the one hand and destructive influence of developed civilization on the other. Although he never used the term himself, the notion of 'noble savage' is attributed to Rousseau. It would be also an oversimplification to say that Rousseau rejected the good sides of society and government entirely – in his advanced thought it is evident that he valued the benefits of living in organised society since it helps to accomplish the goals that common will of united people considers good. The society however serves, according to Rousseau, to achieve common aims that lie beyond the reach of a single person and ensure freedom, rather than to contain the beast that is hidden in every man. Therefore, his view on human nature is more uplifting than that of Hobbes.

Golding's view on human evil and civilization in light of the philosophy of human nature according to Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau

The brief account of the views of notable philosophers of 'social contract' allows us to look at the conception of evil in Golding's works from a new perspective. William Golding wrote the following about *Lord of the Flies*: "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature" (Epstein 1987, 277-278). In the context of the philosopher's views, the author sympathizes with Hobbesian characteristics of human condition. Boys were savages at heart; when the weak mask of civilized surroundings was removed, they displayed all the evil and wilderness that human may be capable of. However, is in this case civilization a salvation, as Hobbes would claim? There are two arguments behind a negative answer to this question. First,

"[...] Boys come to the island already acculturated. And what do they bring? They bring a tradition of carnivorous blood-lust, human violence, tribalism, ingenuity in warfare (it is a truism that the technological progress of the Western world has consistently been the direct consequence of a struggle for supremacy in weaponry), anti-intellectualism, and the vivid memory of the carnage they were trying to escape" (Levitt 1969, 522).

They have been brought up in British society and lived long enough to know the rules of the civilized world. When they are thrown out of this world, they initially perpetuate some of the civilization's premises, but, as the time flows, they are getting more and more savage. Is this only the fault of a separation from civilization? Or perhaps it is the civilization that, along with the British civility, good manners and other "good" guidelines, provoked in the boys such traits as bloodlust and irrationality? Can we really blame *only* the setting of a remote island? If so, how to explain the children's cruelty towards each other in a safe and civilized setting of a school? And how to explain evil in developed societies?

Secondly, even though elements of civilization (that is, the naval officer) save Ralph from being murdered, and thus save boys from a complete descent into bloody beasts, not everything is saved. The boys already killed; they lost their innocence (if they had any in the first place). Arrival of a naval officer seems to offer a happy ending; sadly, it does not. A question arises: who is going to save

the officer? Who is going to save the humanity from the malevolence which does not seem to be much subdued by civilization?

Lord of the Flies defies both Locke's and Rousseau's views: boys were unable to form 'civil society' as the corrupt nature took over. Outside of the society they did not show Rousseauesque good and innocent side of human nature.

Golding calls himself "a propagandist for Neanderthal man" (Kermode 1971, 240).

My simple people have an almost Rousseauesque picture of the universe; I don't even think they're aware they have a view of it. I think they feel it to be good. Perhaps they, like us, are making it in their own image because they are *Homo moralis* rather than *Homo neanderthalis*. I think they actually do have a kind of God-sense. Only their image of it is the female one, that is to say a reproductive mother figure, a womb and breast figure rather than a thunder and lightning and cloud (Golding 1982, 140).

Rousseau viewed man in the state of nature merely as an animal; so did Golding: his primal people are guided by instinct, show most primitive involuntary responses, communicate by sharing 'pictures', because their language is not developed enough to express their thoughts. According to Rousseau, man was meant to remain in this state forever; it would be best for him. The 'petulant activity of our egocentrism', as Rousseau refers to the development of civilization, is undoubtedly something that marred the innocence of man according to Golding. 'Man's rise to consciousness is seen by Golding as a fall' (Subbarao 1987, 3); so is by Rousseau. The message of *The Inheritors* clearly opposes Hobbes' views with regard to Neanderthals and confirms it as regards more advanced, vile species.

Golding claims that the corruption of human nature occurred in the moment of individualisation of mind by prehistoric man. Since then, civilization with many of its good inventions brought along also moral plagues. Golding's diagnosis of human condition is pessimistic: man is a "morally diseased creation" (Golding 1982, 134), which cannot come back to its original state of innocence and moral good (undifferentiated consciousness), and civilization is not always able to control the evil side of human nature. The frame of contemporary

civilization is mostly able to cover evil but once man is thrown out of the society, he comes back to his savage state – and not the good, naïve savage like *Neanderthal* tribe shown in *The Inheritors*, but rather corrupt, malevolent and bloodlust *Homo Sapiens* from the same novel.

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Existential Meanders of Bloody Ignorant Apes: Waiting as the Organising Principle of Existence

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Abstract

“People are bloody ignorant apes” (Beckett 1986, 15), says Estragon pacing back and forth under a bare tree in the first act of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Regardless of whether this statement is addressed to his unlucky fellow, Vladimir, sitting right by his side, or whether he just blurts it out without any purpose at all, he inadvertently includes two terms in it. Combined, they provoke a question leading straight into the centre of the anthropogenic machine. Is this ‘bloody ignorance’ the lost *notā characteristicā* sought by Linnaeus in his *Systema naturae*? Pacing back and forth, just like Beckett’s puppets do, I intend to face this problem and take issue with Estragon’s point. To reconnoitre the topic thoroughly, I reach out for Heidegger’s story quoted by Agamben in his *The Open: Man and Animal*. In this context I reflect on the animal’s “poverty in the world” and its intrinsic agent of “profound boredom” to ask whether these factors prevent the non-“bloody ignorant apes” from the reckless waiting for the – both literal and metaphorical – redemption. In my article, aimed to be rather an attempt to muster a spark than to add fuel to the already dazzling flames, I will also refer to *8th Duino Elegy* by Rilke as well as the Parmenidean definition of the man, which, as far as I am concerned, splendidly covers the man’s, and not the ape’s, conviction to eternal becoming, and to its tragedy - performed while being forever stuck on the deserted stage with the same tree and the same stone, visited endlessly by the same guests and two unlucky non-apes.

Keywords: Godot, non-ape, animal, anthropogenic machine, Umwelt

If the anthropogenic machine has been up and running for centuries now, its mechanisms seem to have got rusty recently. No one goes existential these days, as there is no time to deliberate over a random bare tree or stone, waxing lyrical about bold prophecies without any purpose. Stuck in this setting forever and ever, we forget about our reckless waiting for the - both literal and metaphorical - redemption which is never to come unless we recognize the lost *notā characteristicā* sought by Linnaeus in his *Systema naturae* in the notion of bloody ignorance mentioned by the character of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. If Didi and Gogo were the bloody ignorant apes indeed, would they be able to wait or not-to-wait for the advent of the one who is to come tomorrow, and insist on delaying the act of hanging themselves till the day the pigs fly?

Opening his *Systema naturae* with the *Introitus*, Carolus Linnaeus reveals the reason for refusing the man any *notae characteristicae* as opposed to the other Antropomorphae. Even though in the Linnean taxonomy each species in the anthropoid order may be distinguished from the other thanks to a specific identifying characteristic, the man retains his bare generic name *Homo*. It is accompanied by the old philosophical adage ushered in the ancient Delphian sanctuary. The Greek *gnothi sauton* is transformed here into *nosce te ipsum* (know yourself), which in the 10th edition would be replaced by a complete *Homo sapiens* name. The Appolinean spell suddenly vanished into thin air, cursing the humankind. For man differs nothing from the ape as long as he does not recognize the man in himself. Ecce animal, which recognizes itself as the man and which, refusing this recognition, remains a ridiculous creature abandoned by its own nature in the moment of its birth, is forced to learn how to exist in the world. Does the conscious self-recognition suffice to fill and define the break between the man and the animal? At this point I would like to express my reservations inspired by the trope of waiting permeating Beckett's play and Martin Heidegger's thought on the notion of the *other*.

The first act of the play presents us with a seemingly insignificant scene. Estragon puts the Evangelist's reliability into question here, mentioning the promises that Jesus Christ apparently made to both of the fellow-crucified prisoners. - "Who believes him?" - asks Gogo before hearing the answer - "Everyone. It's the only version they know" (Beckett 1986, 15). It provokes him to make a remark, which, including the commonly used, unflattering phrase, seems to be key for grasping the specific characteristic of the thinking man. -

“People are bloody ignorant apes” (Beckett 1986, 15). Bloody ignorance, the naïve faith in something already repeated so many times that is finally accepted as true, might have been the desired characteristic which differentiated Linnaeus from Diana - his favourite Barbary ape. Neither of them is the Cartesian *automata mechanica*, but there is something else beneath this human ignorance which builds an impassable bridge between the man and the animal. It is the man’s ability to watch out for something yet unpresent; waiting for something which is to supersede the lack of the here-and-now and simultaneously something which the process of waiting could not unfold without – the awareness of this lack. However, one cannot foster such awareness. One may only be born with or into awareness, as it inevitably craves for the possibility to factor oneself out of the species-specific world at least for the blink of an eye. Jakob von Uexkull, and later Martin Heidegger as well, named the world *Umwelt*. *Umwelt*, the mosaic of both species and individual differences, becomes the animal’s reality, the world-around. It is a set of perceptual molecules of *Umgebung* – the neighbourhood or the environment spreading around the living creature. As such, it lives and creates its life parallelly, using the sensual tools the nature provided it with. Thus, it may smell the world’s passages, taste them, touch them, see them, hear them and, nonetheless, never be any closer to the foray into the passages available for the other species. Environmentally inherent, the animal is not to foreknow the mere existence of *Umgebung* and remains imprisoned in its own special *Umwelt*. Since its birth, the animal is, on the one hand, surrounded by being and, on the other, deprived of the ability to take anything away from around-being and assimilate it.

The pure impossibility of *wegnehmen* defines the mode of being proper to the animal, namely captivation, which in the Heidegger’s notion of the case gains the name of *Benommenheit*. It provokes him to play with words and unpack them etymologically. Each of them refers in a way to the verb of *nehmen* – to take, which derives from the Indo- European root **nem* – to give, to distribute, to allot, to assign. Heidegger pays attention to the relationship between *benommen* – stunned, captivated, taken away and blocked as well, *ingenommen* – taken in and *Benehmen* – behaviour. Although none of these words alone may fully describe the animal’s condition, combined together, they reveal the essence of its behaviour. The animal is completely absorbed by its own existence, sentenced to life imprisonment as long as it performs its behaviour in the circle of its own *Umwelt*. This way, unable to factor the self out of non-self and *Umwelt* out of

non-*Umwelt*, it remains the prisoner miraculously unaware of the world behind the invisible bars. That is why it behaves in its environment, but never in the world, (“einer Umgebung sich benimmt, aber nie in einer Welt”) (Agamben 2004, 52).

Is the man a prisoner as well? The answer seems to be obvious and has to be negative, for the man actually gained the ability to recognize the existence of *non-Umwelt* and *Umwelt* at once, and consequently broke the animal chains. Leaving the state of cosy captivation, he sentenced himself to the eternal – as Rainer Maria Rilke points out in *The 8th Duino Elegy*,

Forcing its sight to fix upon/things and shapes, not the/freedom that they occupy,/that openness which lies so deep/within the faces of the animals,/free from death!/ We alone face death./The beast, death behind and/God before, moves free through/eternity like a river running./Never for one day do we/turn from forms to face/that place of endless purity. All the creatures, seeing the unobstructed world with their whole eyes, are unchained from the torments of waiting. Only our eyes are turned back upon/themselves, encircle (Rilke 2013).

and spin the man around to turn the animal before-and-behind hierarchy upside down uniquely in the human case. They doggedly face him with the unrelenting end, making sure that God and eternity stay behind his back.

Could that surefooted beast, /approaching from a direction / different than our own, acquire / the mental knack to think as do we,/he would spin us round/and drag us with him./But he is without end unto himself: / devoid of comprehension, / unselfscrutinized, pure / as his outgoing glance./ We see future; he sees/eternal completion./ Himself in all. (Rilke 2013)

Paradoxically then, the animal environment is open – *offen*, but not openable, disconcealed – *nicht offenbar*. It is filled with beings which are open for the animal, though not accessible – they remain open in their unavailability and non-definition, whereas the animal cannot join them or refer to them anyhow. This

disconcealed openness sets the crucial difference between the animal poverty in the world and the ability to shape the last, which was reserved for the man at the very beginning of his history.

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found (*Genesis* 2013).

Imprisoned in the essential inability to unchain itself, the animal cannot possess its Umwelt. While absorbed by the open space, it cannot become aware of its existence, and so should be in its essence defined with the poverty and lack alone, according to Heidegger. The animal, in its thought, is eternally moving in the nothingness without “no”, which makes the man exclusively see the Open. Looking out for the confirmation of such a thesis, Heidegger refers to the experiment described by Jakob von Uexkull in his *Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (2010). The procedure is simple: the bee is placed over a cup full of honey. When it starts to feed on the aromatic liquid and the experimenter cuts its abdomen off, the bee, nevertheless, keeps taking the liquid in and does not notice the sneaky trick, with the cascade of honey leaking out of its body. Uexkull (and Heidegger, who credulously adopts his interpretation) considers the story a convincing proof of the fact that the bee is neither aware of the honey’s presence nor of the abdomen’s absence and hence continues its instinctive behaviour. It is taken in – *hingenommen* – by the process of feeding, which protects it against the imperative to stand out of its behaviour and face it. Playing with the derivatives of *nehmen* again, Heidegger suggests that in this case it was all about *benehmen*, behaviour, which lacks the element of keeping, *vernehmen*, but also, as I presume, giving back, *zuruckgeben*. This issue is of the utmost importance for the poverty in the world and its intrinsic agent of profound boredom, which I would like to summon in the light of the issue suggested in the title. Not only did I pose in the abstract a few questions preceding my argument, but I also promised the reference to a passage from Heidegger’s short story that goes as follows:

We are sitting, for example, at the tasteless station of some lonely minor railway. It is four hours until the next train arrives. The district is unattractive. We do have a book in our rucksack, though – shall we read? No. Or think through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock – only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Then we go out onto the main road. We walk up and down, just to have something to do. But it is no use. Then we count the trees along the main road, look at our watch again – exactly five minutes since we last looked at it. Fed up with walking back and forth, we sit down on a stone, draw all kinds of figures in the sand, and in doing so catch ourselves looking at our watch again – half an hour – and so on (Agamben 2004, 63-64).

Is there a man who did not experience such a situation? Usually absorbed by things that absorb him, often completely lost in the reality, captivated by things happening around, and bored stiff to boot, he suddenly finds himself lonely in the empty space. However, things neither get absorbed by the emptiness around, nor are they taken away. They are still present out there, but they have nothing to offer to him anymore. They do not invoke any desires or curiosity, but – simultaneously – the man cannot unchain himself from them all. Left in the lurch, he strives for something that bores him to death. He is aware of this boredom, though, becoming the animal that learns to be bored and wake up from its captivation to its own captivation. The act of animal waking up to its own captivation, unsettled and heroic Open to non-Open is, as it seems, the man. In Beckett's play the unlucky non-ape spits out:

We wait. We are bored. (He throws up his hand.) No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! (He advances towards the heap, stops in his stride.) In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness! (Beckett 1986, 75).

If we are to believe the argument above, no animal but man would be able to produce such words. And these are not only the doubtful animal achievements in the field of human speech responsible for such a situation. As a matter of fact, Didi's statement seems to be the perfect synopsis of what gives his being-in-the-world the character of the non-ape being. We may notice here, along with the awareness of the lack and its inevitable advent, the course of waiting, which only the man is blessed or cursed with.

However, research shows that the attempt to corner human-specific *notae characteristicae* had already been made long before Carol Linnaeus and his *Systema naturae*. It was definitely less oafish than the one I made above, as it dates back to the times when the man was able to experience all the *Umgebung* beings mentally. The man is *deinotaton*, incredible and uncommon. He is the one who precipitates himself out of being-here, out of the safe and familiar ring. Such precipitation deprives the man of being himself and, as a result, he can only make himself at home, but is never and nowhere home. In fact, it makes him the one who is most uncommon. Not only does his essence dwell in the space of such incredibility, but he also crosses his most familiar boundaries by transgressing the limits of himself – Heidegger writes. He then adds that to assess properly the significance of the choir's words regarding the man, we are to consider by this statement that the man is *deinotaton* – uncommon – does not ascribe any specific characteristic to him and does not assume he is something else beyond this quality. It is rather said that being uncommon is the fundamental trait of the human being and we are to draft all his characteristics into this trait.

Does it deny the incredibility's candidacy for the chair of species-specific characteristic, distinguishing the man from the other Antropomorpha? I do not think so. The Greek incredibility combines all the possible pieces of evidence that condemn the ape to become a wonderfully ignorant non-ape, such as the eternal becoming, being stuck always forever on the deserted stage with the same tree and the same stone, visited endlessly by the same fellow banished non-apes.

You are human beings none the less. (He puts on his glasses.) As far as one can see. (He takes off his glasses.) Of the same species as myself. (He bursts into an enormous laugh.) Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image! (Beckett 1986, 24).

The animal, as opposed to Pozzo, who happens to say these salutary words, can neither wait, nor not-wait for the advent. It cannot insist on delaying the act of hanging itself endlessly, either. But why should it be so? Is not the argument I propose here just another proof of my fierce never-ending delirium, my *Umwelt-imprisonment* and fatal human pride? I am not sure, one can never be. I never intended to find any answers to the questions I posed above. As long as I am just searching for them, I do not pull the mental strings connecting me to the reality, which, as far as I am concerned, is already present out there and is not created by my pathetic twaddle about the animals' lack of the ability to wait for Godot. To avoid another pathetic twaddle about twaddle, I would just like to insert another vignette before arriving at the vital conclusion.

It is the story of Santino, the chimpanzee. It lives in the zoological garden in the Swedish town of Gavle and is not a particularly enthusiastic fan of the swarm of tourists who choose to stare at Santino day after day. In March 2009, apparently fed up with their subtle curiosity, he started collecting stones available at its exhibit. Soon, in possession of the desired amount, Santino dug up the hatchet with the intruders, throwing the stone bullets at the unaware visitors. When the zoo keepers cleared the exhibit off all the eventual threats, the ape suspended its procedure keeping the stones until the following spring. It included the pieces of concrete blown by the water freezing in the slots. Is this just an example of another instinctive behaviour with a surprisingly long pause between the appetitive behaviour and its final compensation? Could Santino plan his actions with a few months' delay if he was imprisoned in his *Umwelt*?

In conclusion, even though the philosophical evidence provided does not settle the argument, it attempts to weigh in the man's favour. If Gogo was the ape, he definitely could not wait for Godot or introduce the notion of bloody ignorance into Beckett's play. I am not sure, however, if the lack of data on the animal awareness of *Umgebung* may serve as the argument for the lack of such. Having a considerable ethological background, I would opt for the greater prudence in making any final statements. Although the gap between the man and the animal is simultaneously indisputable and impassable from the philosophical point of view, some rope bridges may be spread over the abyss. The man was once supposed to be the link between the ape and the *Urbmensch*, but it would just make the issue even more complicated in this case, so only the man-ape

relationship should be considered here. The mere links might cover some cognitive abilities, which may be of the different levels obviously, but set on a continuum of some kind. What for? – one may ask. For the reason mentioned above. The reality is, to my belief, waiting out there for the human re-cognition and the discussion between the philosophers and ethologists may lead us to the surprising discovery of the gifts *Umgebung* still has to offer.

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Contemporary Landscape in Being and Time: Comparative Analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Martin Amis's *Dead Babies*

Ryszard Bobrowicz

Abstract

This paper offers a comparative analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Martin Amis's *Dead Babies*. It seeks to show a description of the emerging revolutions and landscape of contemporary society and civilization sketched by both writers. This begs exploration of the following tropes: *being*, which refers to the characters' identity, to what defines them, to their being in the world, to *dasein*, their interior qualities; and *time*, which refers to their exteriority constantly influencing characters from the outside and shaping their consciousness. This paper also attempts to show the characters' struggle with these categories both in reality and their minds. Finally, it aims to prove that Beckett's observations were prophetic and that Amis's work, written in the course of the revolution, is an excellent evidence of that. It also draws on the work of other thinkers, such as Parmenides, Karl Jaspers or Giorgio Agamben.

Keywords: Godot, Beckett, Amis, being, time

The 20th century brought about some rapid changes and transformations, both in social life and science. The World Wars completely changed human thinking about the reality, death and the absurdity of life. Scientific breakthrough is equal to the Copernican one: Einstein's discoveries, the string theory, black holes, are just a few examples of newness which shows the whole new perspective of the universe's enormity – it all frightens a common bread eater, causing a sort of Jaspersian fear, and this trend penetrates deeper and deeper into human existence, becoming one of the most basic elements of human perspective on the world at

the end of 20th century. Furthermore, its second half unleashed sexual revolution that reaches to the point at which it cannot discover or penetrate anything new anymore. All conventions, prohibitions and morals have been broken. The previous order has fallen apart, never to return to its former shape. Liberty, equality and tolerance now define modern civilization. But the main problem of the revolution is that it annihilates everything before it, and starts to build a whole new reality. However, to build anything, one needs foundations which, however, falls prey to self-annulment of its limits as a result of denial of tradition.

Against such backdrop characters of the British writer, Martin Amis's novels find themselves. Failing to understand the context, they have nothing to say. They do not know anything about culture and by this they cannot identify with art. Born during the fat years of mass culture, one of the strongest media that helped humans excel has been distorted. Sadly, mass culture has nothing to do with higher culture, with its nobleness. The characters are bored by the reality and are constantly trying to stimulate their senses by any kind of substance. Nonetheless, this is not working for them, and they are more and more blazed with the flow of time. Amis is the master of shaping 'modern humans' and pointing out their weaknesses. Hence, interestingly, we might not find any positive qualities of his characters.

Samuel Beckett, in turn, is a writer who wants to show changes in the world around. His *Waiting for Godot* is a preview and manifestation of 'intermediate state' for Amis' representations. It prophetically shows the incoming disaster, which entails the revolution of consciousness.

To start with, I would like to focus on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Being is inseparable from time here. At this point, it is worth to evoke Saint Thomas Aquinas' division of time into *tempus*, *evum* and *eternitas*. My diagnosis is that being is something between *evum* and *eternitas*: the ever recurrent past. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* lends itself as exemplification of the diagnosis:

VLADIMIR: When I think of it . . . all these years . . . but for me . . . where would you be . . . (Decisively.) You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it (Beckett 1986, 11).

VLADIMIR: (...)We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties (Beckett 1986, 12).

On the other hand we cannot see future vividly. It exists potentially – ultimately they are waiting for Godot – but he is never coming. The boy shows up every day to tell the main characters that Godot would not come that day, but he surely would come eventually the following day. This situation is well demonstrated by the following passage:

ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?
VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow.
ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.
VLADIMIR: Possibly.
ESTRAGON: And so on.
VLADIMIR: The point is—
ESTRAGON: Until he comes.
VLADIMIR: You're merciless.
ESTRAGON: We came here yesterday.
VLADIMIR: Ah no, there you're mistaken.
ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?
VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday?
ESTRAGON: Yes (Beckett 1982, 16).

Whereas there surely is presence, and ostensibly time is flowing because we can see that something is happening, there is no real change. Reality is constant. The characters' memory does not register anything either. There is everydayness of a kind: ("VLADIMIR: Boots must be taken off every day" (Beckett 1986, 12)), and *alwaysness* of a kind: (VLADIMIR: (angrily). No one ever suffers but you. (Beckett 1982, 12)). Both 'always' and 'everyday' show us that something is constant and never changes. And we can see in other parts of the text that there is a strict dichotomy between the always and never:

ESTRAGON: (forcibly). Bags. (He points at Lucky.) Why?
Always hold. (He sags, panting.) Never put down (Beckett 1986, 31).

The above passage brings to mind the term *eternitas*. What is, is, and what is not, is not. If we were to go into metaphysical analysis of this state, we could quote Parmenides: “It is necessary to speak and to think what is; for being is, but nothing is not” (B 6.1-2). Although taking metaphysical consequences from this presentation of time would be, in my opinion, too far-fetched, I would like to leave it for the reader’s consideration.

Seemingness of time is reflected in the reality, where hardly anything is defined or has serious influence on reality for that matter. They are without meaning and relevance. For example Pozzo keeps asking a lot of questions, but in the end he gives it all up: “It’s of no importance” (Beckett 1986, 29).

Aging, strictly connected with time, seems also irrelevant:

POZZO: You are severe. (To Vladimir.) What age are you, if it's not a rude question? (Silence.) Sixty? Seventy? (To Estragon.) What age would you say he was?
ESTRAGON: Eleven (Beckett 1986, 28).

Beckett’s observation in this matter was prophetic in every aspect. Sadly, it reflects the condition of many ‘modern people’. Indifference is one of their basic attitudes toward the reality. The statement ‘who cares?’ became a meme and is evoked not only in borderline situations, but also in totally usual, everyday ones. Nobody cares about anything (except themselves, but even this is not a rule).

Time also corresponds with happiness and joy. But it is only true for the human dimension of time – *tempus*, which is ‘the time that is flowing’. The happiness and joy makes the time flow, but it is only a dream, an illusion:

ESTRAGON: (wild gestures, incoherent words. Finally.) Why will you never let me sleep?
VLADIMIR: I felt lonely.
ESTRAGON: I was dreaming I was happy.
VLADIMIR: That passed the time (Beckett 1986, 83).

Also in this respect Beckett proves prophetic. The invention of LSD, discovery of all other psychedelics, interest in OOB and hypnosis are excellent examples of modern human need to explore other realities in search for happiness. Discovering

other states of mind in which time flows differently. The characters play the game of illusions, they wear masks through which the pain flows: the pain felt inside, void which cannot be filled:

VLADIMIR: One daren't even laugh any more.

ESTRAGON: Dreadful privation.

VLADIMIR: Merely smile. (He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.) It's not the same thing. Nothing to be done (Beckett 1986, 13).

However, it says that NOW you could not let yourself laugh. This means that there was a past of a kind, in which things were better. Human nostalgia about the imagined golden age was always present in human history. But there is something more to it. There is the real void made by all the revolutions: social, political, cultural and – in the near future - sexual. As stated previously, the lack of foundations paves the way for yet unresolved vacuity. The characters are not even subjects of law. They are subjects of an unknown person. They do not even remember how they got rid of them:

ESTRAGON: We've no rights any more?

VLADIMIR: You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited.

ESTRAGON: We've lost our rights?

VLADIMIR: (distinctly). We got rid of them (Beckett 1986, 20).

The suicide seems to be the only reasonable solution in their case (“What about hanging ourselves?” (Beckett 1986, 18) but it does not seem to work either and is finally given up. Even prayer is somehow closer to the unspecified request. Memory is a problem, too. It is strictly connected with time, because it lets people capture the passage of time. There is a problem with it in this play: (“VLADIMIR: (sententious). To every man his little cross. (He sighs.) Till he dies. (Afterthought.) And is forgotten” (Beckett 1986, 58)). Death slowly erases the human being from history and from time. It is another example of the relativity of time and, in fact, its irrelevance.

Finally, I would like to pay attention to another passage from this play that resists interpretation. In one of Vladimir's utterances, the sense of sight is

connected with the sense of time: “POZZO: (violently). Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too” (Beckett 1986, 80). The visual perception of the world is strictly connected with the notion of time because it is the only sense that makes people see the changes clearly. But we may also see that time needs all human capabilities to be fully understood. It is the most human dimension, and as such, it needs full humanity to be revealed. This way of interpretation will be confirmed by Amis's prose.

Oscar Wilde wrote that "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul" (2011, 19). Characters in *Dead Babies* cannot be cured at all – both their senses and souls are dead, just like the title says. Their bodies are exploited to the limits, being only poor substitutes for the previous human form. Their souls do not exist. We do not know if they ever did. We can presume that they ‘ran out’ from their bodies as a result of corruption, but there are slight suggestions of such a state in the text.

Only their minds are still alive, but they are distorted by the reality, by its brutality and wildness. They are also drugged by tons of chemicals. Characters in *Dead Babies* are caricatures; they are intended to show the condition of modern society and its attitudes. Sadly, the diagnosis is tragic – the author presents the reader with a group of blazed, bored, rich people, who are exploring the reality only on the sensual level. Despite the similarities, there is a whole range of characters from an extremely materialistic (Marvell Buzardt) to the ‘old-fashioned’ one (the law-abiding Quentin Villiers).

Quentin Villiers is a foundation of everything in the novel, both as a host and as a person who knows everybody. He is also the only person without any antipathies towards anyone. Sadly, it is only a fiction. Quentin does not exist. He is only a mask, a cover. In fact, he is Johny, a conceptualist, who wants to destroy everything. He is a pure destruction, personalization of entropy. And according to the ideology of conceptualists, art is the only purpose of destruction. It should be the answer to human need of transcendence, which undeniably is found in the ‘postmodern human’.

The lack of Villiers makes everything fall down. The lack of Quentin is equal to the lack of fundamentals. The reader, however, can presume it from the beginning. Villiers is the character who is too perfect, too ideal when compared to his friends and additionally contradictory. He has mutually exclusive views. It would not be so strange if we could see a struggle in him. It is totally otherwise.

He is absolutely calm. Amis plays with the reader once again. He shows him the person who he wants to believe in. Quentin symbolizes modern 'authorities'. They pretend to have the key to the reality, they show the way in which the society should go, but they are ignorant of what is good and what is evil. This character also shows that in modern society evil is denied – as a conceptualist he places himself outside the morality – while his actions, which in the moral categories should be called wrong, are called 'artistic'.

As stated by Diane McWhorter in the article *An Ugly Joke: "Dead Babies"*:

Marvell Buzardt, a "small, owlsh American, postgraduate in psychology, anthropology, and environment at Columbia University, underground journalist, filmmaker, and pop-cultural entrepreneur," is the arbiter of the dead baby ethic. "Fuck all this dead babies about love, understanding, compassion," he urges. Or to someone who has just admitted a tolerance for anti-violence: "I can't believe I'm hearing this babies. What are you, a fuckin' flower child?" Romantic love, religion, morality? anything that can't be reduced to a chemical equation falls under the rubric of dead babies (McWhorter 1997, 73).

Everything extrasensory, which is in some way noble, the whole spiritual sphere is reduced to the chemical reactions, to simple changes of matter. A human being is only a total of particles.

In this context sex also is reduced to a concept:

We agree, don't we, that sex isn't erotic any more. It's carnal? conceptualized? to do with geometries and sensations? . . . And that perversion is justified? no demanded? by an environment that is now totally man made, totally without biology? Futuristic it isn't (Amis 1991, 170).

There is nothing like love in it, nothing like complete unification. Conceptualisation again shows us fiction, concept is not even being in potency. It is pure abstraction, project, which became nothingness with the mind that is

creating it. In this short passage the reader can see in good light that modernity goes in the way of conceptualization (it can be seen also in art).¹

The characters shown above are the most distinctive ones. Apart from them, there are also intermediate characters. There is Lucy, who on the one hand has a strong character, individual views and something to say, but on the other, when someone physically stronger, brutal and dominant comes onstage, she becomes a drudge and a scapegoat. Despite psychical discomfort, she agrees with that, and even takes it as a norm. Giles is a character who is irrationally afraid of losing his teeth. It can be interpreted as a symbol of consumption: the fear of losing the ability to consume. Giles suffers from the attacks of street melancholy as well: an ailment that is ridiculous and absurd (but happens to each of us one way or another). There is also Skip, molested and beaten by his father, who is more of a dog than a human, and in whom there is a lot of aggression, as in a savage beast, coming out on certain stimuli. There is Roxanne, who is unsatisfied and associates everything with sex. Her main desire is to experience, when she is to choose any state, she wants the maximisation of sensations. There is also, as in every Amis's novel, a disgusting, unlucky person, Keith, the personalization of every abomination and human ailment. He is a fat, stinky midget, who does not have much to say. There is Celia, Quentin's wife, a character with nothing special to her. We may also see Andy here, the antropomorphisation of brutality and physicality.

Time in this novel appears on many levels. Firstly, the plot is divided into three main parts: Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This is the only relatively accurate definition of time in this book. What is curious, many references of time are emphasised in this novel, as in this passage:

"What's the time?" she asked achingly.

"How much more day is there," Lucy said.

Quentin looked at his watch, a guilty host. It had stopped. "Not long," he said. "Not long" (Amis 1991, 156).

¹ Very good example of that, but also a terrifying one is the British first episode of the *Black Mirror* series.

References to the exact time are always unclear and vague as time plays with the characters:

“and it was over, the untenable moment had opened and closed like a vent in another time... (113) Then came the lagging time. It came abruptly, flopped down like an immense and invisible jelly from the ceiling, swamping the air with marine languor and insect speeds — lagging time, with its numbness and disjunction, its inertia and automatism, its lost past and dead future. It was as if they were wandering through an endless, swarming, rotten, terminal marketplace after a year of unsleeping nights. (...) "Jesus I" said Andy on the way to the sitting room. "What in the fuck was that? "Lagging time," said Quentin. (133).

Time is hostile to the characters. Even Quentin, usually calm, after lagging time is very upset and attacks Marvell for the antidote. Marvell as an exemplary materialist tries to reduce everything to mechanics:

"The central nervous system is a coded time scale," began Marvell, "and each overlap of neurones and each spinal latitude marks a unit in neuronics time. The further down the CNS you go—through the hind brain, the medulla, into the spinal track — gene activity increases and concentrates and you descend into the neuronics gallery of your own past, like your whole metabiologic personality going by in stills. As the drug enters the amnionic corridor it will start to urge you back through spinal and archaeopsychic time, reactivating in your mind screen the changing landscapes of your subconscious past, each reflecting its own distinct emotional terrain. The releasing mechanisms in your cytoplasm will be awakened and you will phase into the entirely new zone of the neuronics psyche. This is the real you. This is total biopsychic recall. This is the lumbar transfer (180).

Time is also a basis for the characters' interiority: “The solidity of the familiar objects—her makeup, her shoes, his books, his hairdryer—steadied her further.

The present was there all right, then, even if it was leaving her for a short time” (190).

To sum up, both Amis and Beckett show their reader the increasing void in cultural life as well as in individual consciousness. But they are writing from different positions. Beckett is prophetic: he is a good observer of reality and makes good conclusions as well as a proper analyst of his recent history. He analyses the course of events in the first half of the 20th century to provide paths for its second half, and shows the ways in which the society and civilization will go. And his visions turn out to be right. We can see evidence for their truthfulness in Amis's novels, because he, on the other hand, sees the way it all works and simply puts it down. We can see that ‘modern human’ is totally lost. Amis consistently points out more and more flaws and ‘dead alleys’. McWhorter concludes the book with the following words:

Dead Babies is like a 206-page dead baby joke: an unutterably bad situation deteriorates. Martin Amis has fashioned a vision of society so sinister, so toxic and so repugnant that one would be hard put to elaborate on it (McWhorter, 1997, 72).

It is hard not to agree with her. The vision presented by him terrifies, but it is the fear caused by the awareness of the state of facts. It is the worst kind of fear, the kind in which we can see how we are in reality and what qualities are created by modern society. In fact, when we look at the characters of Amis's novel, we will see that world has not changed that much since the barbaric times. We will see that we are still savage and brutal, and that we care only about satisfying our needs with simple pleasures. We can say that characters in both works are Agambean *homo sacers* – they are not the subjects of any laws. In Amis’s novel they can also be killed for that reason, which the reader can see on the example of conceptualists. They are killed for no other reason than art. Everything is unfriendly for them. Even the most human dimension, time, is tricking them.

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Maxwell Demon as a Hegemonic Ruler: Politics in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

Antoni Głowacki

Abstract

In this paper the theory of hegemony by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe is used to analyse Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. I argue that the novel can be read as statement on meta-political level and a narrative about power relations. Its central metaphors - paranoia, Trystero, WASTE system, Maxwell demon - all concern bringing arbitrary order into contingent reality. This reality cannot be reached in itself without the aid of structuring narrative. The necessity of creating order is the main linking point between the themes explored in the novel and the theory of hegemony. I show political pessimism coming from Pynchon's work - futility of every struggle to change existing hegemony, for there can never be non-hegemonic system and every new order would mirror preceding one.

Keywords: hegemony, power relations, emancipatory politics, dominating narrative, arbitrariness

If you opened *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* - printed in 1892 by Royal Anthropological Institute for tourists, missionaries, traders, and whoever else might have come to contact with non-western societies - you would find precise instructions on how to proceed with your investigations in order to obtain most valuable information (or specimen, if possible). Among them, a couple of chapters devoted to the questions of power (as opposed to politics - primitive tribes were believed to be free of the latter) - entitled "Laws", "Customs", "Government", "Taboo", "Crimes", "Morals", provoke numerous questions to ask. They would all seem ridiculous to a modern anthropologist – ethnocentric relying on flawed,

evolutionary assumptions, trying to determine a relation (in evolutionary terms) of primitive social orders to modern, western forms of government in details (“33. what is the revenue of the chief and the others rulers and officers? 34. How is it raised?” (*Notes and Queries* 1964, 153). Indeed, they seem more adequate to studying their own culture than other ones.

But why am I citing a manual that is outdated by at least 100 years? And why cite anthropological methodology at all when speaking about modern literature? Because the way in which I try to approach Thomas Pynchon's work reminds me of classic ethnologists or social anthropologists, fresh from Malinowski's or Radcliffe-Brown's seminar. I will try to mimic their naivety. Much has been said about non-transparency of language, our inability to reach reality itself - be it “meaning” of culture or “meaning” of literary work. I am not pretending all those debates did not happen; I will refer to them later in this chapter. Nevertheless, I am approaching *The Crying of Lot 49* in the most straightforward way. Why? Because we all know everything about the complex process of the production of meaning, we are all schooled in literary and linguistic games, and we do not need to be reminded of them yet again. And if we disregard them for a moment, and focus on “content”, however difficult to define, there are other interesting lessons to be learned from Pynchon.

I shall then treat all my “informants” (all people speaking to me through the text of *Crying of Lot 49*) as truthful; including my most privileged informant, who I will name, in the long and praiseworthy anthropological tradition of protecting privacy of those we interview by giving them nicknames, The Narrator. I will pretend, until the end of this chapter, to believe in every word he says. While reading his account I will ask questions about power and politics: who holds the power? How does he/she use it? What are her/his means and goals? What are the stakes? How are the alliances made? How are the enemies defined? And, perhaps most importantly, how is the field of politics constructed? These are precisely the same questions every pre-post-modern anthropologist would ask while entering a remote village of Bongo-Bongo.

The same questions could be asked on the meta-level. What interest did Pynchon have in writing such a book as *Crying of Lot 49*? What are his goals? How does he construct himself in his work? How does this situate him in a broader perspective of power relations? But this kind of unmasking materialism, interesting as it may be, is not vital for this essay. It could, perhaps, follow from

the conclusions I will present; but I am not in a position to lead the way. It could be also said that this problem loses its importance in the postmodern period, as the position of the author is less stable and often questioned. He may be even dead, as Barth teaches us, even if The New York Times obituary section does not feature it.

What vision of politics is present in *Crying of Lot 49*? First, it needs to be said, that The Narrator is deeply suspicious of the late capitalism. He takes a clear stance, often using irony, but sometimes speaking with stunning straightforwardness. Let us consider the story of a worker replaced by a machine, who has been

since age 7 rigidly instructed in an eschatology that pointed nowhere but to a presidency and death, trained to do absolutely nothing but sign his name to specialized memoranda he could not begin to understand and to take blame for the running-amok of specialized programs that failed for specialized reasons he had to have explained to him (Pynchon 1990, 50).

All this sounds like taken straight from the Luddite manifesto, or from virtually any other critique of capitalist alienation in the last 200 years. This hostility towards modern capitalism, capitalist ideology, false promises of capitalist culture is visible even more clearly in the following passage:

In school they got brainwashed, like all of us, into believing the Myth of the American Inventor—Morse and his telegraph, Bell and his telephone, Edison and his light bulb, Tom Swift and his this or that. Only one man per invention. Then when they grew up they found they had to sign over all their rights to a monster like Yoyodyne; got stuck on some 'project' or 'task force' or 'team' and started being ground into anonymity (Pynchon 1990, 38).

But the same collectivisation that makes their work unbearable (because it opposes the cult of individuality and effectiveness), makes their life easier: because by keeping in touch, they can see that they are not alone. This need of alliance is not without meaning.

But just stating that *Crying of Lot 49* is a critique of late capitalism - although it is, an ironic, pitiless critique – would not be enough. It has nothing in common with naive socialist utopian thinking. It does not believe in easy revolution. The one anarchist appearing in the book receives newspapers from nearly a hundred years ago, and it is quite clear that he really is way behind his times, unable to challenge modern system as he did with ancient regime. Traditional notions are of no use, they do not describe the politics any more, just cause confusion: “You're so right-wing you're left-wing”, Fallopian says to Oedipa, when her republican views bring her dangerously close to Marxist theory of surplus value (Pynchon 1990, 38). Divisions of yesterday do not work any more. Political fractions are not set once and for all - their identity is not as stable as we are used to think, and the rules are not so simple. “»You think like a Bircher,« Fallopian said. »Good guys and bad guys. You never get to any of the underlying truth. Sure he was against industrial capitalism. So are we. Didn't it lead, inevitably, to Marxism? Underneath, both are part of the same creeping horror«” (Pynchon 1990, 20).

“Underneath” - this is the political dimension in which *Crying of Lot 49* reveals its radicalism, and which we should investigate. If we could no longer rely on traditional ways of articulation, parties, states, ideologies (to name only already mentioned liberalism and Marxism), then we are lost in the chaos of particular interests and individual actors, with no system to organize them. Or, even worse, it could be impossible to identify interests and actors, for we have no categories to use. By rejecting flawed and unacceptable divisions, we find ourselves in the primordial chaos of pure politics. With nothing to guide us, we are not far away from Oedipa, lost between powers she does not understand.

Oedipa Maas is a hero in a futile struggle, trying to find regularities in cosmic-scale mess left to her by Pierce Inverarity. Obsessed with “»bringing something of herself« —even if that something was just her presence—to the scatter of business interests that had survived Inverarity. She would give them order, she would create constellations” (Pynchon 1990, 39). Giving order is crucial. She does not know who the actors are, which side they are on, whether they exist. What are their interests - and what is hers? Is Metzger on her side, or on the side of Pierce (or are those two sides one), and who is he really, a lawyer, an actor, both, neither? Are the experts on post stamps and seventeen century revenge tragedies giving her genuine information, or fabricating them, leading her

deeper in some imaginary conflict? Is it by chance that she met Fallopian and Mr. Toth, and learned about W.A.S.T.E., or is it a deliberate plot against her? But the main question is more basic - is there someone else to decide all this, or is it left to her? Maybe “it was part of her duty, wasn't it, to bestow life on what had persisted, to try to be what Driblette was, the dark machine in the centre of the planetarium, to bring the estate into pulsing stelliferous Meaning, all in a soaring dome around her?” (Pynchon 1990, 35)

Oedipa is designated by Inverarity to organize all that is left by him. But it is possible that “what is left by him” means everything. In what is perhaps one of the most meaningful passages in the book, the Narrator writes:

did it matter now if he'd owned all of San Narciso? San Narciso was a name; an incident among our climatic records of dreams and what dreams became among our accumulated daylight, a moment's squall-line or tornado's touchdown among the higher, more continental solemnities—storm-systems of group suffering and need, prevailing winds of affluence. There was the true continuity, San Narciso had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America (Pynchon 1990, 79).

If so, then it really is a herculean task - to organize the world, left in disarray after its ruler is gone, to draw boundaries in true continuity.

If we understand paranoia, a central theme in *Crying of Lot 49*, as a way to organize the world, where everything is accidental until placed in a system or outside of it (the choice which is always arbitrary), then we are not far away from the notion of hegemony, as proposed by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian socialist who revolutionised Marxism by stressing the role of ideology rather than material, economic base. This change resulted in a different vision of reality: not structured by objective laws, with working class fulfilling historical necessity, but open to all kinds of changes. It was not determined any more, rather overdetermined, in Althusserian terms. Ideology played a crucial role in this project: not a superstructure, it had the power to create reality, to put different elements into meaningful systems, which were accepted as natural and necessary - hegemony.

As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe put this in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: “if, as shown in the work of Derrida, undecidables permeate the field which had previously been seen as governed by structural determination, one can see hegemony as a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain” Laclau, Mouffe 2001, XI).

But since we are dealing with political theory, the main question should be about power - what its nature is and who holds it. In the theory of hegemony, power is discursive. It is the ability to create symbolic system that structures reality in a way that is best for one's own interest. If masses accept this kind of discursive formation, it becomes hegemony, and assures reproduction of hierarchy. It is embodied in institutions and apparatuses, and in this sense it is material, but at the same time it remains ideological.

Who can do this? Gramsci wrote about historical blocks - alliances that can be independent from social or economic classes, and unite actors who see themselves as pursuing the same goals. Basically, it can be anyone, or any group strong enough to assure its dominance. And the power given by hegemony is great - not only the ability to structure the world, but also to define identities of actors.

A conception which denies any essentialist approach to social relations, must also state the precarious character of every identity and the impossibility of fixing the sense of the 'elements' in any ultimate literality. It is only in contrast to a discourse postulating their unity; that an ensemble of elements appears as fragmented or dispersed (Laclau, Mouffe 2001, 96).

Every identity is constructed in relation with hegemony - because it is hegemony that structures the world and gives meanings. This of course includes the dominant, who, as Marx famously said, is “dominated by its dominance”.

In what I consider one of the central metaphors of *Crying of Lot 49*, the Maxwell demon is sitting in a box, separating warm molecules from the cold ones, creating energy in the process. When asked what makes it possible, John Nefastis talks at length about entropy, similarities and relations between the world of physics (it is more safe to talk about “world as seen by science” than essentialist “natural world”, since the impossibility of reaching the non-mediated “real” is a

consequence of theory of hegemony) and the world of theory of information. But when trying to specify this link, he needs to rely on language.

»Entropy is a figure of speech, then,« sighed Nefastis, »a metaphor. It connects the world of thermo-dynamics to the world of information flow. The Machine uses both. The Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally graceful, but also objectively true.«
»But what,« she felt like some kind of a heretic, »if the Demon exists only because the two equations look alike? Because of the metaphor?« (Pynchon 1990, 46).

Arbitrariness becoming real and governing actions - this is the rule of both theory of hegemony and Pynchon's vision.

It is only adequate that literary work should present the vision of power as discursive force. It would be tempting to concentrate on the author's own interest, but let us instead focus on two elements of plot illustrating similarities between conspiracy theories and hegemony.

First, briefly, let us consider Oedipa's doubts about her own sanity, arising as her paranoia increases. The question is - does Trystero really exist, or is it only an elaborate prank played on her by Inverarity. Or, to put it in more basic terms, is the whole world in which Oedipa lives created by one man, Pierce Inverarity? We cannot rule it out. In one place The Narrator says explicitly that "the dead man, like Maxwell's Demon, was the linking feature in a coincidence" (Pynchon 1990, 53). But if we accept the hegemonic reading of *Crying of Lot 49*, then the whole question is absurd. It is not possible to determine what is "real", since the world is pure coincidence and makes no sense. Important is the order used by Oedipa to look at reality; the order created by Inverarity - he put her in it by naming her his heir, and established identities of all elements and relations between them. If it works, and it does, there is no objective reason not to accept it. The dead man certainly was powerful, there is not a moment in the book when we could forget that; he controlled everything, every institution, organisation, every link between events was somehow connected to him (openly or secretly). He was indeed the element that connected all the others. He transformed chaotic reality into an ordered world.

Inverarity did so by the power of his narrative prevailing over others. But it would not be accurate to see his power as residing strictly in language, in some metaphysical kingdom of discourse, metaphors, words. Ideology, and it must be remembered, is material. Pierce Inverarity is a rich man, and he can create and control worlds because he possesses things - objects, antiquities, institutions, factories, enterprises, money, all sorts of goods, people.

Structuring function of hegemony could be seen by analysing the position of Trystero. It is a secret organisation, competing with the official post system, whose existence needs to be proven by connecting various seemingly accidental events, gathering relations from the last couple hundred years. It is a conspiracy on the world scale. It is constantly present in the book, even when the plot takes an unexpected turn, it always leads to Trystero. But what do we learn about the organisation itself? Nothing specific. Its beginnings could be linked with the rise of Thurn and Taxis post system, but after the initial conflict it steps underground and every effort to unveil its history becomes “archaeology of silence”, to cite Laclau and Mouffe referring to Foucault. The history of Trystero can be seen as a Foucauldian arc - from personal privileges of European aristocracy to faceless organisation. It is, basically, defined by what it is not: an official postal system, be it Thurn and Taxis or state post office. It is devoid of any positive feats; a real, existing negativity. It is feared, because it is unknown, and it cannot be known. It does not have any stable form, because it always mimics its antagonist. Emery Bortz held “to a mirror-image theory, by which any period of instability for Thurn and Taxis must have its reflection in Trystero's shadow-state” (Pynchon 1990, 72), and his intuitions were right. Also right was the bizarre sect of Scurvhamites when they “felt Trystero would symbolize the Other quite well” (Pynchon 1990, 70). “The brute Other” is indeed a fairly accurate approximation of what Trystero is.

It is even more evident when we take into account who uses W.A.S.T.E. post system. First, inventors who do not want to have their inventions robbed from them by their employers; a network of failed suicides; an old man with sailor tattoos; and as Oedipa wanders deeper into San Francisco nights, she finds others; Negros, Latin American immigrants, gamblers, Alameda County Death Cult, a boy who wants to open negotiations with dolphins, who would succeed men,

a facially-deformed welder, who cherished his ugliness; a child roaming the night who missed the death before birth as certain

outcasts do the dear lulling blankness of the community; a Negro woman with an intricately-marbled scar along the baby-fat of one cheek who kept going through rituals of miscarriage each for a different reason, (...); an aging night-watchman, nibbling at a bar of Ivory Soap, who had trained his virtuoso stomach to accept also lotions, air-fresheners, fabrics, tobaccos and waxes in a hopeless attempt to assimilate it all(...); and even another voyeur, who hung outside one of the city's still-lighted windows, searching for who knew what specific image (Pynchon 1990, 54).

Every one of them is an outcast, assemble of subalterns, excluded from society for one reason or another, or just trying to hide from government. W.A.S.T.E. seems like an alternative order for all of those who cannot or simply do not want to use official institutions. “Last night, she might have wondered what undergrounds apart from the couple she knew of communicated by WASTE system. By sunrise she could legitimately ask what undergrounds didn't” (Pynchon 1990, 54).

Using WASTE is a political gesture, it is a sign of opposition. It is Fallopian who places private post institution in political field:

in 1861 the federal government should have set out on a vigorous suppression of those independent mail routes still surviving the various Acts of '45, '47, '51 and '55, Acts all designed to drive any private competition into financial ruin. He saw it all as a parable of power, its feeding, growth and systematic abuse (Pynchon 1990, 22).

Delivering letters is as political as everything else, and can be the field of “endocolonization of America by its government” (Chalmers 1994, 378), as Paul Maltby characterises as a common concern of Pynchon's fiction.

But it is a political gesture on the shallow level, not “underneath”. It is simply allying with one force against another. There is no emancipatory potential, WASTE cannot be the seed of revolution. There is no chance to undermine hegemony, because it is not a simple antagonism that smashes the existing order. “A hegemonic formation also embraces what opposes it, insofar as the opposing

force accepts the system of basic articulations of that formation as something it negates, but the place of the negation is defined by the internal parameters of the formation itself” (Laclau, Mouffe 2001, 139). Trystero may oppose official forces, but it cannot win. Or, even if it did, it would not change a thing. Because on the most basic level, they are the same thing; and this is why it was possible for Trystero leaders to consider merging with Thurn and Taxis, and why they did not decide for “a takeover by force, while their enemy was vulnerable” (Pynchon 1990, 73). They define themselves in negative terms, as not-official; so, becoming official would destroy the only thing that identifies them.

The same can be said about subalterns using WASTE. The only thing that links them is not belonging in the system, the state of being excluded. This is a basic example of the process of establishing equivalence, as described by Laclau and Mouffe: despite their different interests, they occupy the same place in the system, they become homogenous. “The differential positivity of all its terms is dissolved” (Laclau, Mouffe 2001, 128). They are stuck in their marginal position in the hegemony. They cannot challenge the dominant discourse, because the very fact that they are united and stand as one excludes the possibility of forming a democratic political sphere, where all identities would have the possibility to fight for their interest. It is the hegemony that constitutes its enemies as one category. They no longer have other identity than “opponents of the system”.

We might say that the diverse 'elements' or 'tasks' no longer had any identity apart from their relation with the force hegemonizing them. On the other hand, these forms of precarious articulation began to receive names, to be theoretically thought, and were incorporated into the very identity of the social agents (Laclau, Mouffe 2001, 69).

If we accept that the main political concern of Pynchon's book is the emancipation of the subject, as critics have claimed (Chalmers 1994, 377), then we must state that the vision of politics presented in *Crying of Lot 49* is deeply pessimistic. His subjects are decentralized, fluent, as Maltby observed (Chalmers 1994, 378). But what is most striking is that they cannot establish their own identity without relating to power structure, or dominant discourse. Just as there is no “real world” possible to reach without the help of discourse, there is no “real subject”; this

could be metaphorically read from the scene in which Mucho Maas, Oedipa's husband pronounces her name wrong, “allowing for the distortion on these rigs, and then when they put it on tape” (Pynchon 1990, 62). Mucho himself is a “walking assembly of men”, devoid of any particular identity. The only moment when they can gain a stable place is when they enter into antagonism, but then they are reduced to negativity. And it cannot be altered, as in optimistic, ready-to-use theory of Laclau and Mouffe; every potential change would be just the change of holder of power. Trystero is exactly the same as official post office, just inverted.

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William Gibson's *Neuromancer* as Phantasmagoria of Fear in Contemporary American Society

Aleksandra Paszkowska

Abstract

Published in 1984 and having received three prestigious science fiction prizes, William Gibson's 1984 debut novel *Neuromancer* comments on the current human condition through the perspective of a possible future of humanity. The article looks at the founding novel of cyberpunk through the perspective of cultural studies, attempting to infer information about contemporary social fears shared by the author and his readers by researching materials such as interviews with Gibson, his blog posts or media feedback. It examines the narrative structure of the novel in order to discover what attitudes might be assumed towards certain aspects of future life: the environment and ecology, the availability of food products, drug use, weaponry and warfare, medicine and body modifications. It attempts to draw analogies between the depictions of those aspects in the future and problems faced by America today, and tries to find a common denominator in these fears.

Keywords: *Neuromancer*, social fears, cyberpunk, cultural studies, sci-fi history

The theoretical framework of cultural studies excludes any pretensions of a text's universality, in so much as the relations of power, values and even minimal units of everyday life presented in a given work are only applicable within a certain culture. However, the claim to any kind of "universality" should not be disposed of altogether. After all, "universality" is intelligibility: without it, texts would be highly contextualized if not entirely undecipherable. A non-universal text becomes just a piece of "unpublishable private literature"

¹, therefore losing any voice in the poly-dialogue of the culture in which it was created. I would most certainly posit that universality in this sense of the word is the first necessary condition for a text to enter a given body of literature.

Nevertheless, the sometimes unfeasible achievement of universality will not determine the attractiveness or desirability of a given text among its recipients, and cannot automatically assign value to the work. What grants the text a place in the canon (one of many, in space and time) is its *r e l a t a b i l i t y*, a feature which can be most clearly explained with an excerpt from Aristotle's *Poetics*, and which is known as *mimesis*:

...the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. [...] Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. [...] Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, "Ah, that is he." For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the colouring, or some such other cause. (Aristotle 2013)

The seductive pleasure which tempts the reader to give significance to a certain text stems from the text's ability to create a relationship with them, whether positive or negative. Readers often tend to value works which get considerably fewer accolades from critics, but which emanate this sense of relationship, an accurate depiction of my world with my problems, prompting the exclamation "A h , t h a t i s m e ." Although one might argue that realistically very few literary works elaborate on themes relevant to the lives of their readers, because the number of possible narratives seems too vast, and personal narratives too particular for this phenomenon to ever occur, memorable

¹ A phrase from Allen Ginsberg's 1956 poem entitled *America* (l. 50).

literary works (i.e. ones that at some point were canonical) indubitably share the common characteristic of relatably describing human dilemmas, power struggles or emotional patterns.

The settings and subject matters of science fiction and fantasy literary genres seem particularly inconsistent with the claim of correlation between popularity (or attractiveness) and relatability. Sci-fi and fantasy are just that – depictions of imaginary worlds, clearly separated from the “real” world by time, space or variation, in other words: serving as alternate realities. Yet, as Hannah Arendt rightly states, such literature acts as a “vehicle of mass sentiments and mass desires” (1957, 2), disguised in the decorations of “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away”, safely and acceptably mediating the problems of the “real” world through the mirror created by the fantasy world of literature.

Therefore, it is safe to propose that William Gibson's 1984 debut novel *Neuromancer* which sparked substantial interest having been the first one to achieve the three most prestigious science fiction awards for its original (namely the Nebula, the Hugo, and Philip K. Dick Award, together known as the triple crown), critically acclaimed by *Time Magazine*, and finally even mentioned by the *New York Times* after a decade of influential perseverance on the publishing market, has to be reckoned with as a significant literary work responding to the needs of the contemporary public. Thus, investigating the tropes and archetypes present in the novel would undoubtedly suggest possible explanations of its popularity, and consequently help diagnose the desires and longings of readers who have reached for it and found it memorable or satisfying.

One striking clue could be its indisputable linguistic influence: Gibson has created the neologism *cyberspace*, relevant and in use even today, commonly utilized as a term for the World Wide Web in the 1990s, and popularized his friend's acronym ICE (Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics, which he usually spells “ice”, adding poetic ambiguity). Clearly, both terms relate to the critical role of *Neuromancer* in contemporary popular literature: it has initiated the now-respectable genre of cyberpunk and paved the way for other such creations to come, noticeably striking a nerve with its audience who encouraged Gibson to continue his work and ultimately extend it into a trilogy.

Thus, it is difficult to avoid the temptation of deeming Gibson “a modern oracle” and comparing his “prophecies” to state-of-the-art inventions of almost 30 years later. Such comparisons just distract the critical reader from the true

significance of predictions found in science fiction: they should be regarded as commentaries to the present rather than information about the future. For instance, around the same time when Gibson was nearing the half-way point of *Neuromancer*, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* premiered in American theatres. Having seen 20 minutes of the film, Gibson was convinced that his new novel's success was absolutely ruined by a motion picture, which essentially illustrated what he meant to publish. Fortunately, at that time *Blade Runner* coincidentally has not reached its peak of popularity in North America, allowing *Neuromancer* its place in the canon of 1980s iconic sci-fi. This fact certainly does not diminish the work's originality. In fact, originality is not of interest here, but rather a skilful and accurate accidental unoriginality, which only confirms the function of literary works as expressions of contemporary feelings. In a 2003 entry on his blog, Gibson mentions having lunch with Scott (10 years his senior) much later and discussing mutual influences and pop-cultural favourites which inspired both men. Moreover, in a very recent interview Gibson elaborated on the reality in which he grew up:

....anybody with half a brain woke up every day with consciousness that that could be humanity's last day. Everybody knew what was going on in the world. I just took that for granted. Because the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were sitting there with umpty billion nukes pointed at each other... (io9futureshow 2012)

And although some still keep pointing out his failure to anticipate such inventions as the mobile phone, this kind of "clairvoyance" is not what contributed to Gibson's success as a commentator of the now and the near future, but instead his ability to see through the basic principles of socio-technological development and possible problems it may bring. He realizes that the present and future are very much unlike oil and water² – an idea unwittingly shared by so many against the logic of spatiotemporal continuity.

What seems to have drawn readers to such an unwelcoming and ominous world as depicted in *Neuromancer*, a world of instability, lacking an ethical compass and most components that humanity has come to label as natural,

² Jack Womack's comparison from his afterword, cf. Womack 2000, 271.

beneficial and good? Ultimately, a world where all recent and long-lasting fears have become a hostile reality? The more plausible hypotheses would include the universal masochism of readers in the First World, who seek a violent thrill in threats made to their very *Weltanschauung*, or – more reasonably perhaps – the need to confront certain menacing fantasies and immerse in a therapeutic process of watching them *through the looking glass*.

“In fear, the emptiness of an unknown danger is filled with images from one’s own fantasy”³ (Mitarski 1995, 327), and Gibson readily furnishes the uncertain void of the technocratic future with a plethora of images which appear as an aptly conceived assemblage of worst-case scenarios, so familiar to readers in the Western world. Mitarski outlines several approaches to expressions of fear throughout history, referring to the most recent one in this way:

Every epoch creates its own images of fear. Today, when the secularized imagination of the society is shaped more by pure sciences than humanistic traditions, metaphysical and psychological symbols of fear have become less frequent and increasingly dehumanized. Notions pertaining to anxieties haunting humanity today are concrete and materialized, a threat to the anonymous mass: nuclear holocaust, overpopulation and famine, environmental pollution and disturbance of ecological homeostasis, the domination of machine over man, and the growing standardization and dehumanization of man. (Mitarski 1995, 334)

In his novel Gibson masterfully encompasses all categories of modern fears articulated so aptly by Dr Jan Mitarski, not simply embedding isolated instances of danger in the scenery of *Neuromancer*. Instead, he constructs his setting and plot on those very fears – they permeate each layer of the storyline, from the geopolitical construction of his world, through the landscapes and the creation of characters, to minute details of a given decoration or scene. Although it might be argued that he does not intend to evoke the anxieties of today in his novel, Gibson himself has admitted that he is looking for this “weirdness”; he wants his prose to

³ All quotations from Polish are translated by the present author.

be “weird”. Surely, he would not be speaking merely about an effect of confusion or lack of clarity, which sometimes appear in his writing. It is the classically Freudian *uncanny* that he pursues. Gibson depicts things that should be familiar, being set in close enough a future for this purpose; yet they seem strangely foreign, creating a very uncomfortable feeling in the reader. His “violent, visceral and visionary” (TIME 2005) prose is frequently distressing due to strangeness and discomfort rather than straightforward blood and gore.

His Earth is polluted and remains an urban wasteland. Images of environmental damage recur throughout the plot, starting with the characteristic and odd colour of sky above the Japanese city of Chiba, the colour of static noise on television. Both images – a gray smoggy sky and no signal in a TV set – are familiar, yet combined they produce a disturbing effect. (This also foreshadows numerous other instances of nature being overtaken by technology and machinery in the near future.) However, large agglomerations are most frequently hooded with domes, which prevent normal meteorological phenomena from occurring; thus, noticing a newspaper hovering on a gust of wind, Case blames the unusual sight on a malfunction in the domes. Later, when the characters find themselves in Freeside, they encounter artificial blue sky and almost too lush vegetation, which further enhance this effect: nature remains only a simulation.

The few species of animals mentioned are extinct (like horses, present only as a dusty stuffed eccentric-looking corpse), inherently repulsive (like insects), mutated (like the carp on sale at a street stall), and always in captivity. The presence of other animals is hinted at on occasions of meals: in Chiba, krill products and chicken are eaten, while in the Sprawl bacon and eggs are available with Molly emphasizing their authenticity. The reader quickly learns through the example of collagen furs built on mink DNA that the “real” food probably comes from tubes as well, genetically cultivated to be organic tissue. In Freeside, the characters dine on steak, a good clearly accessible only by a select few because of its expensive natural origin (““Jesus,” Molly said, her own plate empty, “gimme that. You know what this costs?” She took his plate. “They gotta raise a whole animal for years and then they kill it. This isn’t vat stuff”” Gibson 2000, 132-133). Clearly, environmental conditions on Earth seem inappropriate for mass-scale agriculture as we know it today. Contemporary society fears scarcity and famine, the hyperinflation of the value of wholesome foods, and the

processing of food products, including GMOs, and Gibson responds to this worry in a very overt way.

One cause of widespread contamination on Earth could be military nuclear activity and nuclear power in general. The menace of nuclear war in the 1980s was (and continues to be) omnipresent, boding the dusk of humanity. Thus, Gibson has commented on his imagining of the future with “any humans still around” (io9futureshow 2012) as an act of optimism in the dire times, and jokingly explained that in his version of history the governments engaged in the Cold War met with a protest from corporations who saw the annihilation of all humans as a significant limitation to their prospective profit. Nevertheless, nuclear warfare remains a threat – suspended but very much present – signalled for instance by the use of EMPs during the operation *Screaming Fist*, the main themes of arcade games and the mention of Bonn, now just radioactive debris. Interestingly, Gibson has remarked several times that he avoided proving the existence of the U.S.A. as a nation state in *Neuromancer*, but he never doubted the survival of Russia: yet another fear haunting Americans at that time (cf. io9futureshow 2012).

Moreover, numerous other examples of dangerous weaponry appear in the novel. However potent may seem the “fletcher” gun or the modified riot gun used by the bartender in the *Chatsubo*, Gibson offers more disturbing ones, such as the cobra (whose name and shape only call to mind horrible pain), or the vapours of psychoactive drugs and even blinking lights. The latter two are especially disturbing, because they operate most deceitfully, transforming innocuous necessities into lethal perils. In addition, they were used in an act of terrorism – America’s number one fear and obsession, seemingly in the future as well.

Still, Gibson conceives Molly’s retractable blades as the most threatening chimera of dangerous weaponry: a woman with a predator’s claws, the claws being surgical double-sided blades. She uses them stealthily, precisely and deadly. They embody a dream for which she had a tough price to pay, they represent her metonymically, and they epitomize the most horrifying type of weapon: one that unexpectedly brings inevitable pain.

The claws make up only a small part of modifications which Molly has purchased for her body. The list also includes a pair of mirror lenses covering her entire eye sockets, and considerable changes to her neural system to ensure quicker movement and response to impulses. Even if she provokes frequent

curious reactions to her appearance, Molly Millions is certainly not the only one sporting radical body modifications. They are commonplace and vary depending on the socio-economic status of the receiver. In Chiba, organs can be bought illegally from street dealers (Case works as a middleman for such transactions) or obtained in surgical boutiques. Because of this, Case's pancreas and liver are customized in order to eliminate his drug dependency.

Therefore, as the narrator explains, ugliness is a matter of choice in a world of easily attainable beauty and youth. Indeed, the 135-year-old Julius Deane resets his DNA annually, while Peter Riviera and Armitage (a.k.a. Colonel Willis Corto) have received facial reconstruction surgeries with varying effects: Riviera's beauty seems stunningly perfect, whereas Corto's primitive and dull. At the same time, the Panther Moderns show a particular penchant for aesthetic modifications which make them look rather freaky, to say the least.

However, possible beautification and disfiguration impress less than the ubiquity of neurosurgery, a science developing so quickly that clinics compete in offering the latest modifications, from the simplest ones, which just improve the wiring of the brain, through ones which implant sockets into the cranium (much like today's USB ports) and facilitate the transfer of electronic data, to the complex ways of mutilating the brain, of which Case's story is a prime example. It is the technology for the reversal of this process that awarded the undercover clinic seven pending patents. Nevertheless, the most spectacular and unsettling example of brain modification proves to be the skill of performer Peter Riviera, who is able to broadcast his deviant fantasies onto the retinas of his audience so convincingly that he keeps causing disturbance wherever he appears.

Him and Corto are the two characters suffering from mental illness: the former is a psychopath, the latter a schizophrenic. Remarkably, two separate traumatic events which have triggered the illnesses were related to modern warfare (nuclear and cybernetic). Corto experienced it first-hand as a military officer and a pawn in a conflict of superpowers, and Riviera as a child or young man, having lived in the ruins of Bonn. Yet even though they are the only ones with well-articulated diagnoses, most or all other characters must have undergone traumatic events and suffer from different sorts of mental instabilities.

The prevalent drug dependency and the availability of narcotics all over the world suggest the population's inclination for escapism. The characters, including Case, his ex-girlfriend Linda Lee, new acquaintances Cathy and Bruce and Peter

Riviera, keep chasing a high whenever they get a chance. Case's and Linda's hustler lifestyles, Cathy and Bruce's partying and Riviera's performances are designed to feed the habit. The vast array of drugs of choice and modes of intake is disconcerting and resembles the serious drug problem of modern America. Similar to today's United States, people feel unhappy, dissatisfied, hurt or bored with their lives enough to develop an addiction to narcotics.

Moreover, the advancement of medicine allows for new ways of their use: dermal syringes and dermal band aids. Peter Riviera somewhat masochistically prefers the first method, and turns the intake into a spectacular ritual involving his visuals. Frequently, substances or signals enter the human body by osmosis through the skin. After surgeries, Molly and Case receive injections in this way, Molly incapacitates a Sense/Net guard with a derm, and betaphenethylamine, the only effective drug for Case, comes in blue square band aids. Gibson offers a closer look on future medical treatments when he describes Molly's condition after her leg surgery.

A transparent cast ran from her knee to a few millimetres below her crotch, the skin beneath the rigid micropore mottled with bruises, the black shading into ugly yellow. Eight derms, each a different size and colour, ran in a neat line down her left wrists. An Akai transdermal unit lay beside her, its fine red leads connected to input trodes under the cast (Gibson 2000, 76).

Despite the apparent innovativeness of the medical props, the image is no different from the ones seen in intensive hospital care even today. Molly is restrained by medical equipment, whose cold appearance contrasts with the very carnal injury and suffering she has sustained. This is yet another example of man being intertwined with machine, or – more accurately – man being overtaken by the machine. The development of medicine in recent centuries has turned treatment into an event more traumatic than ever before; in spite of its beneficial result, the process remains one of intrusion and debilitation, which only progresses with inventions of new and strange apparatuses. Patients might welcome those inventions with relief, but medical procedures still remain very unsettling.

Another example of such intrusion is the predicament of McCoy Pauley, nicknamed Dixie Flatline, the contents of whose mind (NB: not brain) have been transferred into an external hard drive after a fatal heart attack and made a cybernetic construct, a procedure done against his will by the Sense/Net corporation, conceivably wanting to obtain the skills of a legendary “cyber-cowboy”, who survived brain death thrice during his endeavours.⁴ Dixie’s mind is enslaved with no possibility of escape; his award for completing the mission is the deletion of the construct.

In *Neuromancer*, machines and cyberspace are very invasive, so much so that they penetrate the human body, almost like parasites. In order to participate in the modern world, humans must open up their bodies (willingly or not) to the intrusion of the non-organic. They must give up a part of their humanity and accept the physical penetration of foreign objects to obtain properties necessary to function in that world.

I would like to emphasize this phenomenon of penetration as a common feature of all things futuristic in Gibson’s writing, and the most traumatic one in essence. The division between the organic and the non-organic, taken for granted still today as the ultimate paradigm of human existence and the last bastion of innate human dignity, is dangerously blurred, causing disease and provoking the feeling of the uncanny. Out of all various singular fears touched upon in the novel, the fear of objectification by penetration, epitomized brilliantly by the shocking concept of meat puppets, whose bodily, mental and moral autonomy is eradicated by technology, could be ultimately deemed the Fear – the one of becoming absolutely inhuman, and I dare say, one universal to mankind.

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⁴ Called “mind uploading” or “whole brain emulation” today, it is a subject of theoretical debate between scientists, futurists and philosophers. It has appeared in literature since the 1950s.

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Why Would Wolverine Join in with Case and Wintermute?: An Investigation into a Relation between Cyberpunk in Novels and Comic Books

Oskar Lubiński

Abstract

Postmodernism in culture meant a significant change in the way the authors perceived the world and other works of culture. The distinction between the high and the low seemed no longer relevant. That is why postmodernist writers started combining high forms with the ones traditionally considered low. One of the most representative genres of the postmodern condition is cyberpunk. It managed to successfully mix the elements of pop culture with philosophy and reflection on humanity. The aim of this paper is precisely to seek relations between the comic books, which only in the 1980s became recognized as capable of representing the “higher” forms of art, and the cyberpunk genre in literature. By introducing comic book aesthetics I will intend to seek common ground between them and the style of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*. Moreover, I will focus on the construction of the characters which seems to be similar in both cases. With that I will attempt to argue that cyberpunk and comic books are, in fact, closely related.

Keywords: cyberpunk, comic books, superhero, narrative, character construction

Introduction

This paper is a direct result of a discussion on cyberpunk in the course of the Contemporary Anglo-American Literature module during which I asked about the relations between the comic book genre and the style of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* where some protagonists (especially Molly) and the dynamic visualization of many scenes seemed to me to be based on the comic book style.

Not having found any academic articles on the matter, I decided to investigate the problem myself.

Cyberpunk is considered a maximum representation of the postmodern condition (McHale 1997, 253), mostly because it manages to efficiently mix the high and low products of culture. By mixing science-fiction (a genre despised and considered low for many years) and the kitsch aesthetics it manages to produce an impression that even though it depicts hypothetical future, the reader feels its close connection to the present where you cannot form stable hierarchies anymore because all the products of culture are in constant interaction with one another, especially in the city space.

Undoubtedly the cyberpunk and other postmodern authors must take their inspiration not only from literature and arts, but also from other forms of expression. The 1980s is a decade when nobody fails to recognize the importance of the cinema and it clearly does influence literature

¹. What interests me more is the relation of cyberpunk and postmodern literature as a whole with comic books. Even though a handful of people nowadays doubt their artistic value, there are little to none works trying to seek the common ground between both genres.

Such investigation seems to me relevant given that in the same decade that cyberpunk and *Neuromancer* emerged, the comic book, a hybrid form between narrative and visual forms, experienced a radical change in the way it was conceived by the mainstream public and earned its rightful place among other arts. During the 1980s the graphic novel subgenre² developed, which served as a milestone for the comics due to its closed structure allowing for more complex stories touching on important, even philosophical issues. With Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980), Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and Alan

¹ Tatsumi (2006, 43, 44) argues that *Neuromancer* strongly resembles the imagery of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Though Gibson always denied its influence, you can clearly see that there are many things in common between both works, especially when it comes to the depiction of the urban space. Gibson himself says that the movie came out at the time when he had already written 2/3 of the book and was amazed to see that *Blade Runner* depicted the cyberpunk urban space better than he had been imagining it.

² Roger Sabin (1993, 94) claims that the graphic novel did not emerge as a genre in the 1980's but has its roots in the Classics Illustrated from the 1940's and the erroneous claim of its invention is due to the media hype produced by the popularity of *Maus* and other works.

Moore's *Watchmen* (1986) there was no denying that the mix of the visual and the narrative resulted in a redundancy of both, but managed to create another kind of language, impossible to recreate in other artistic forms.

Of course this is only an effect of the evolution that took place earlier and has its roots in the underground comix movement which started in the late 1960s, whose authors rebelled against the Comic Book Codex which strongly limited the freedom of expression of artists mostly by its impact on the actual market. Beginning as satirical pamphlets and psychedelic art, it managed to change the way the comic books were conceived by making them accessible to adults (Hatfield 2005, 7-8).

I intend to delve into the subject and analysis of some of the works which proved important not only for the whole movement, but had a larger cultural impact. It does seem important, especially because Gibson³ himself admits to being inspired by the movement, especially by the French magazine *Metal Hurlant* which featured many countercultural works and was later on published in the United States under the title *Heavy Metal*.

My principal aim will be to seek the common ground between *Neuromancer* and comic books as a whole, especially by focusing on the way the characters are constructed and the narrative techniques applied by Gibson. In my opinion, there is much to say on the matter and this paper is but a fracture of the actual influence of comic books on the cyberpunk aesthetics in literature, which seems not to have been properly investigated yet.

Comic books – an introduction to its visual and narrative style

The comic book as a genre differs markedly both from visual arts and literature. It cannot contain too many visual details and ornaments not to coincide with the narration while text is not supposed to dominate either. Therefore, authors have to intend to maintain balance between both. Primarily the text serves to give context to and explain what is happening in the pictures but these relations change with time, evolving to a greater contrast or ironic relations, as in Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen*. This necessity to seek equilibrium

³ Gibson, William, January 17, 2003 (11:51 a.m.) comment on *Blade Runner*, "OH WELL, WHILE I'M HERE: BLADERUNNER", *William Gibson*, January 29, 2013, http://williamgibsonblog.blogspot.com/2003_01_01_archive.html

between both aspects of the comics is one of the main reasons why they were considered inferior. But such limitations with time were overcome and authors invented many ways to turn such a disadvantage into an original and impossible to copy to other media form of expression.

One of the examples where you can see how artists manage to exceed the comic book limits is one of the scenes from the Chapter III of *Watchmen*. In it, at the same time as Dr Manhattan is interviewed in the television, Silk Spectre and Nite Owl have a fight with a group of bandits on the street. The dialogue between the reporter and Dr Manhattan becomes extended to the parts where fighting superheroes are depicted adding a commentary to what is happening in the scene, even though the topic of the interview is unrelated to the actions of the protagonists (Moore 1986, 13). Another limitation of this media is the format which has a lot greater impact on it than on any other artistic form. As they were originally intended for the mass reproduction they would generally consist of the same number of pages (in the USA 32 but this may differ depending on the country, as well as the frequency of their publication). At the same time every page (panel) forms a unity which cannot be easily transgressed to the next page as happens with paragraphs in books. Every panel must remain a separate unit in the comic and at the same time maintain logical (or other) relation to other panels in order to make a coherent story.

The narrative and style of *Neuromancer*

Although it is stating the obvious, Gibson in creating his cyberpunk vision of future draws heavily on the comic books style. One of the important sources of his inspiration is the comic book *The Long Tomorrow* drawn by the French artist Moebius which first appeared in *Metal Hurlant* in 1976 and was published a year later in the American *Heavy Metal*. This work is particularly important for us because many consider it to be the first cyberpunk piece in history. The whole story takes place in a futuristic metropolis built in the underground where social classes live in the different levels of the city and robots serve as a police force.

The underground complex seems enormous. The protagonists mention at least 199 levels, but there may be even more of them. The lower Pete (the main character) gets, the more crowded streets are while in the upper parts of town he finds high-class palaces and lots of free space. It does bear a resemblance to the Fritz Lang's vision of *Metropolis*, one of the last movies of the German

Expressionism movement which depicted a city where lower classes were forced to live underground, completely separate from the rich who had their palaces on the surface.

Although in *Neuromancer* cities are not underground structures, they share the same features; they consist of an enormous, almost unimaginable space – the Sprawl spans from Atlanta to Boston, 900 miles of longitude at the very least. Of course, they are bustling with people: “The mall crowds swaying like windblown grass, a field of flesh shot through with sudden eddies of need and gratification” (Gibson 2000, 46). People live in coffin hotels having little to no space and are unable to afford anything more convenient and comfortable. One difference is that there is no actual mention of the rich except for the Thessier-Ashpool in the orbit and the expensive hotels in which Armitage spends his nights. Such places exist far from the poor districts of the Sprawl or Chiba. Therefore, one can also notice a radical separation between the social classes, the same as in *The Long Tomorrow*.

Both Moebius (1987, 10) and Gibson put attention to showing filth in the lower or poorer parts of towns:

The junk looked like something that had grown there, a fungus of twisted metal and plastic. He could pick out individual objects, but then they seemed to blur back into the mass... (Gibson 2000, 48).

Moebius’ vision is not as overwhelming as Gibson’s: one can clearly see torn walls, homeless people sleeping on a bench and garbage covering the floor.

But what I reckon makes both aesthetics closer to each other is the way Gibson structures his whole novel and his way of describing the surrounding of the protagonists. Every chapter consists of normally rather short units which are not always directly related to each other and it is up to the reader’s imagination to fill in the gaps between them. In my opinion, they bear close resemblance to the mentioned earlier panels which every comic book consists of. Of course, there are obvious differences and they are not as strictly organized, but it is possible in the comic book to contain more or less action in every one of the panels, which in Gibson’s narrative is shown by a different longitude of these units.⁴

⁴ I do not give a specific name of them, since some parts of the chapters are divided by

The only parts where these units are less brief and tend to contain more information are final parts of the books and fragments where *Case flatlines*. It may be because of a difference between the real world and cyberspace, especially one where you are able to meet personalized AIs, both *Neuromancer* and *Wintermute*. By doing this, Gibson may as well emphasise the fact that the *flatlined* world does not span in real time: a few days are only five minutes in the *real* world (Gibson 2000, 236-237). That is why Gibson applies a narrative style that more closely resembles the classic, realistic narrative.

Another aspect of the author's style which seems to have something in common with the comic book style is the brevity but at the same time vividness of the descriptions. The reader may notice it just at the beginning of the book, with one short sentence: "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (3), one instantly imagines the whole picture adds details which are not necessarily included in the description itself, but are within the cultural codes transmitted by the sentence itself.

All in all, the visuals and narrative applied in *Neuromancer* seem to be closely related and inspired by comic books. The brevity of the descriptions and short, not always directly related unities inside of chapters do feel as if they had something to do with the panels from comics. But what I think is a very important aspect of the book and may even more interestingly bring it closer to comic books are the protagonists. I will focus mainly on Molly and Case, as they, as the main characters, receive a lot more attention from the author or narrator.

The Protagonists

Molly aka Steppin' Razor

Molly is in my opinion a protagonist who has very much in common with well-known mainstream superhero characters, especially a somewhat different form the rest, one of the mutant X-Men: Wolverine. Molly is a professional killer who dedicated her life to enhancing her body and becoming a killing machine. Although working for the *Wintermute* and without any *special* motivation (such as mycotoxin sacks in her bloodstream), she manages to stay independent to a far greater degree than Case. At the same time, although still in her twenties, she

*** markings which in my opinion are subchapters.

seems to be very experienced both in what she does and in her view of the world as a whole.

Molly has her own *uniform* which consists of black leather and black shoes. Her vision is enhanced by silver lenses and has augmented hands, from her fingers come out scalpel blades 4 centimeters long. As such, she much resembles Wolverine, a character who first appeared in 1975 and was one of the typical antiheroes with a sense of contempt to authority who appeared after the Vietnam War (Wright 2001, 265). Just like him, Molly keeps many facts about her life close to her, does not tell anybody about them, and reveals the cost of her augmentations to Case only before their attack on Villa Straylight. She also distinguishes herself by her physical prowess. Molly possesses extraordinary agility and strength and has almost no match when it comes to fighting.

Her disregard to authority is clearly seen in the Thessier-Ashpool part when she ceases to follow Wintermute's orders and ends up killing Ashpool. Molly is somewhat fond of violence or accepts it as a means of achieving certain ends, she says: "Cept I do hurt people sometimes, Case. I guess it's just the way I'm wired" (25). But it does not make her a cruel person, bereft of feelings. What primarily starts as a flirt with Case, becomes something more, probably even love - although they never commit themselves to each other in the novel. This contradiction between the appetite for sometimes unnecessary violence and deep care for the loved ones is another feature that Molly shares with Wolverine who never stopped loving Jean Grey even after she had become Dark Phoenix and started devouring worlds⁵.

There are two other aspects which seem to be in close relation to comic superheroes. The reader never actually gets to know her true identity. We know her primarily as Molly but she appears also as Rose Kolodny in the hotel in the Freeside. There is also the way the Zionites call and treat her. It seems as if she has her own *superhero* name, Steppin' Razor. Despite being radically different from them, the Zion Elders accept her as some kind of Messiah, a *scourge on Babylon* (Fair 2005, 96). On the one hand, her role seems to be close to the one of Paul Atreides from Frank Herbert's *Dune*, but considering her being so radically different from the only male, ganja inhaling society, she becomes closer to those

⁵ see: "The Dark Phoenix Saga", *The X-Men #101-108*, Marvel Comics: 1976-1877

superheroes who were hated or at least very distant from humanity they sworn to protect - like the X-Men (Wright 2001, 263).

Despite all these similarities which in my opinion do serve as a kind of homage to the comic book superheroes, the biography of Molly contains some details that would never appear in a typical superhero life. First and foremost, she may become injured and her injuries do not magically disappear after some time. Having broken her leg during the Sense/Net infiltration she has to try not to overburden it during the rest of the story. Even professional medical intervention does not make the wound wholly disappear and, in the end, her performance in the final mission is to a certain point compromised by it.

Moreover, Molly is not the main protagonist of the story. Although she plays a crucial part in it, the reader perceives the whole world only through the perspective of Case (on whom I will elaborate in the next part), which is typical mainly for the sidekick heroes who accompanied those who received the most attention. But this seems not to be the case here, because how can she be a sidekick to a drug-taking hacker antihero?

Despite all that, I think that Steppin' Razor is Gibson's reinvention of the superhero archetype. Being the most important female character in the novel, she manages to make a statement and clearly distinguishes herself from other protagonists. Her physical prowess, care for other people and at the same time, a taste for violence make Molly a superhero the postmodern world deserves. She comes in a moment of redefinition of them, as was done in the aforementioned *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* where they lost their splendour and moral purity. To this we can also add the earlier rise of such anti-superheroes as Wolverine who as I have stated before, shared lots of features with Molly, even physical abilities.

Case – the antihero

Although Molly seems to be the true superhero and the strongest individual in the story, the main focus is put on the antihero – Case. When the reader meets him for the first time he does not even seem to be worthy of mentioning. A very young person, who by committing one mistake lost the possibility of using his greatest talent, he seems to be on a very straight road to being killed and forgotten in the gutters of the Night City. He despises himself; it seems that the only reason for him to live is to be connected to the cyberspace, which because of the

mycotoxin is impossible. His former world consisted of “bodiless exultation of cyberspace (...). In the bars he’d frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh” (6).

The Fall (as Case himself calls the mycotoxin incident) did not make him reconsider his way of living the life. Instead it turned him into a person whose only drive is his own death wish. Living in the Night City, he becomes reckless and accepts every possible contract: “He no longer carried a weapon, no longer took the basic precautions. He ran the fastest, loosest deals on the street, and he had a reputation of being able to get whatever you wanted” (8). Having been recruited by Armitage and recovered from the mycotoxin changes, Chase can again be a cyberspace cowboy, leave his body and become his true self. Cicseny-Ronay goes even as far as to define him as “part computer and part man” (1992, 230). What does not change though, at least at the beginning, is his death wish. The whole novel for him is somehow a search for enlightenment, for transcendence which makes him change his ways.

Such a biography does not seem to bear resemblance to the typical superhero or another comic book biography. Maybe only his drug experiences seem to have a thing in common with the early underground comix which frequently depicted people taking drugs and their impressions after (Sabin 1993, 37). On the other hand, the whole plot of *Neuromancer* seems as a kind of a preparation for Case making him a more mature and responsible person. The death wish is replaced with both hate and love:

“Hate will get you through” the voice said. “So many little triggers inthe brain, and you just go yankin’ ’em all. Now you gotta *hate* (...)

“Hate,” Case said. “Who do I hate? You tell me.”

“Who do you love?” The Finns voice asked (Gibson 200, 252).

This hate/love juxtaposition makes him similar to the superheroine of *Neuromancer*, Molly. Her most important drive is hate for Riviera and possibly Hideo. Case himself hates the AIs and this is precisely what makes him defeat *Neuromancer* in the end. His love relationship with Steppin’ Razor makes him care not only for himself, but also for the other person, which may be seen just

before the decision to enter the Straylight Villa when Molly gets defeated by Riviera.

The mentioned dependence on hate is also the drive of many superheroes, especially the darker ones, such as Batman who fights crime because of being haunted by his parents' death in his early childhood. In the 1982 another violent vigilante makes his return – The Punisher who exacts justice with guns, knives and other lethal weapons, contrary to the non-killing, only-violent-when-necessary earlier heroes (Wright 2001, 273).

All in all, both Case and Molly, although having some features contradictory to comic book characters, seem to serve both as two different redefinitions of superheroes. Molly is almost fully shaped from the beginning, she just needs to find an object of love (Case) and hate (Riviera) while Case goes through a radical evolution of his character. From suicidal tendencies and passivity (which is clearly depicted in the fragments where he enters Molly's body), he becomes a self-aware and active individual with extraordinary abilities.

The fact that in Coda they both part ways does not seem to contradict the comic book reference either. As most of them form a continuous structure where groups part ways, sidekicks in the end receive their own respective series and act on their own, it seems as if Coda was actually an introduction to another possible adventures of both protagonists, right now acting separately as they both came to a point where they have become independent.

Conclusions

To sum up, cyberpunk, with *Neuromancer* as its prominent specimen, is a postmodern genre which has strong roots not only in literature, art, cinema and music, but also in a hybrid between the literary and the graphic – comic books. This may be seen on many different levels – the brief, yet poetic style of descriptions and applied aesthetics seem to have a lot in common, especially with the underground comix, such as Moebius' works from *Metal Hurlant*.

This may also be seen in the construction of the protagonists, especially Case who is more of an antihero than a heroic figure of former science-fiction literature and mainstream comic-book superheroes. His dedication to the virtual reality where he himself bears the power and frees from the flesh (or *meat*) is also a feature of some underground comix main characters. Molly, on the other hand seems to be closer to the mainstream superheroes, especially ones that appeared

after the disillusionment of American society with their government, such as Wolverine or The Punisher. Still, she remains different from them and is not a pure, non-critical copy, but serves as certain homage to them.

Of course, there are many more fields of investigation which I have omitted in this paper and can even deepen the relationship between the cyberpunk in novels and comic books. One could analyze the way the villains are created and whether they resemble the ones that are commonly known, such as the Joker. Although my investigation focused only on the *Neuromancer* I hope it serves as a good example of how cyberpunk is a genre full of references to different manifestations of culture. Therefore the way to understand the work and sources behind many of these novels should be realised by a thorough research of a variety of works, those usually considered high and, more importantly, those that are “low” in the eyes of many.

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Forsaking the False Gods: Philosopher's Analytic Approach to Cyberpunk Literature

Wojciech Mamak

Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to look for a valid philosophical background for analysing cyberpunk literature. There is a strong bond between literature and philosophy, which has been cynically exploited by barren postmodernism. The core of analysis and comments rests firmly on highly questionable notions and purely textual methodology reconciled with its cognitive failure. Such approach is criticised not only as unfounded and arid, but also as a self-propelling drive into epistemological cul-de-sac of art for art's sake. A search of a promising framework encapsulating identifying new yet rudimentary questions is being advocated instead. Cyberpunk, on par of philosophy, as both try to analyze real scientific discoveries and its possible outcomes, can be treated as a form of thought experiments, creating technologically-enhanced imagined worlds to question certain boundaries of traditional philosophical reflexion. On this ground, there is an important assignment for philosophy and literature to set up and enquire these possible worlds as a sort of mental laboratory for testing various notions, ideas and experiments - both technological and philosophical with their possible consequences. Philosophy and cyberpunk literature, while having radically different aims, tools and techniques, share this feature and can complement each other in the task of understanding modernity.

Keywords: cyberpunk, literature, philosophy, mental laboratory, antipostmodernism, scientific discoveries, thought experiment

Rumour has it that philosophy and philosophical writing is only a mere literary genre, no more a sub-branch of literature than an entirely separate discipline altogether. Whether one can agree with such a statement or not, it is generally accepted that both fields seem to have much in common and often try to tackle similar problems, although in different manners and with different tools. Then, the task of finding an accurate philosophical perspective to speculate about problems emerging in the new trends in literature seems even more important. Science-fiction taken in its broadest spectrum appears to be a model example of a literary movement that begs a thorough philosophical investigation and thinking through for the sake of finding a proper way of excavating deeper problems that it tries to take into consideration. The two main qualities of sci-fi that might best characterize the specificity of this type of works are its liberating ease of creating parallel worlds and bravely futuristic and scientific direction, which not only legitimizes even the most insane furniture of the pictured world (through some quirky, cutting-edge technologies fuelling and maintaining its functioning) but most of all ties it very closely to the problems of technical progress, modernization, cybernetization and so forth – this whole myriad of shifts and changes that are concealed under this gargantuan and long-lasting project called Scientific Revolution. Liquid and ungraspable as this revolution may appear to be, it does not diminish or nullify the utmost importance of questions and philosophical doubts it imposes on us as both architects and recipients of this grand cultural transformation.

When we keep in mind this close bond between a piece of art and new technologies, we can sensibly suspect that it evokes some absolutely novel *aporiai* – that traditional, antiquary philosophy cannot bear on its arms. Speaking of philosophical inclinations of sci-fi novels, one cannot elude mentioning Stanislaw Lem – a writer so deeply involved in philosophical debates that many started calling him a philosopher (Jesiólkowski 2002) and his works - tractates in disguise or the new robes of philosophical fiction – a genre of its heyday long gone (maybe even since Voltaire). To bring a strikingly vivid example of stuffing literature with philosophy without surplus *entourage*, I would mention *Futurological Congress* and its personethics [other notable examples are *Solaris* with its ocean concept of mind or the structural memethics of *Golem XIV*]. In this short story the protagonist Ijon Tichy visits to the most odd professor's lab in which he simulates human lives enchanted in massive steel-and-brass magnetic-mechanical chests (Lem

1977). Such an experiment is a marvellous depiction of one of the most classical philosophical problems. In the European philosophy known best as *Descartes' Demon* (but also known even to ancient Chinese – vide Zhangzhi's butterfly dream), in other words a question of solipsism – this very disturbing notion if we are not accidentally dreaming all of it (i.e. our lives / *our* world) altogether. This ancient-old debate is still ongoing, finding its new facets also in modern philosophy – the most interesting and fresh reformulation of the problem was proposed by Hilary Putnam in his well-acclaimed paper *Brain in vats* (2002). Bizarrely enough Putnam's idea bears huge resemblance with Lem's while being published actually later than its literary counterpart. This ought to prompt a sceptic into taking philosophical attempts in science-fiction even more seriously.

This particular problem, contrary to what was said beforehand, belongs to the traditional philosophy – but it has a purpose of illustrating the third feature of science-fiction that makes it so stunningly interesting for a philosopher. Since a creation of a science-fiction literary universe (no difference if it is a macrocosm or a microcosm) is much akin to one of their sharpest tool in the box – a thought experiment, an operation so beloved by philosophers both long-gone and contemporary, it is no wonder this genre could be exceptionally provocative for a philosophical mind. In both acts of thought, having it said plain and simple, one creates an imaginary situation according to some set of rules and tries to see what is likely to happen. It is not a philosophical clairvoyance, though, as it yokes the author by the boundaries of the projected situation/world. The author no longer acts as an omnipotent *demiurgos*, as it is not the point of the whole endeavour. The aim is rather to design an environment and behold how things go. If one pleases (and his/hers theological knack), it might would be more of a deist Great Clockmaker – the designer, who sets the mechanism off and then ceases to watchful observation. Of course, with regard to more complicated narrative constructions, the interference of author is necessary and visible; it is still fiction. But such optics does not usurp to be a proper description of the narrative structure; it is not aimed at stipulating formal nuances. Rather, I argue that viewing a conjuration of the imaginary world as a sort of mental experiment might serve as a useful interpretative framework for finding new dimensions in literary text. In this case, perceiving it as a sort of abstract cognitive laboratory. It is an attempt of squeezing the text by a philosopher rather than literary critic.

However, there are the cases even more enticing for an inquisitive sci-fi loving philosopher. The ones which uncover some new problems unforeseen by the giants on whose shoulders the philosopher is standing (i.e. the Classics) – to paraphrase a cliché ‘they have not dreamt of’. A glowing example of such a thing can be found in cyberpunk, the genre so up-to-date, so deeply rooted in modernity that some spanking new paths have to be beaten. Due to these facts one can realize how burning is the need for an interpreting tool which could allow to identify what questions and answers the cyberpunk genre can offer us – either in ready-made ideas or some stubs waiting for expanding. As cyberpunk clearly evades the forms of philosophical interpretation applicable to any previous trends – realism, modernism and even its step parent – futurism, it is no wonder then that postmodernists, as self-proclaimed new prophets of culture, tried to use their own formulas to try mining out this newly-emerged field. With its haughty conviction in its all-explanatory power, postmodernist critics assumed that they can successfully reach the philosophical core of cyberpunk. What is startling, it is to be done without. It is a flight from any scientifically-oriented reflexion in respect to the most scientifically-oriented literature ever written. A scientophobia? A lack of competence? Cowardice? A real enigma, certainly. Instead, a reader is being fed with regular tricks of trade: symbol-hunting, discourse-scanning and hair-splitting. All of which would not be perhaps so bad, unless it lacked any rigour, clarity or at least honest reference to actual hard science (while traversing the world moulded by it like any before).

Thus, they offended against cyberpunk by committing the same ancient cardinal sin of postmodernism: obfuscation. Using their ample arsenal of bogus and opaque notions, they tried to convince the readers that the philosophical value of, say, Gibsonian *Sprawl* trilogy is mostly constructing heterotopias and blending in countless pop-cultural pastiches and parodies. All of it deeply sunk in a thick sauce of mannered style of French provenence (not as zesty as other French sauces one might be accustomed to). A final effect of such grinding is a jargon-stuffed monstrosity – lackadaisical at best - available for anyone on opening pretty much random postmodern-reading article concerning cyberpunk. Ploughing through a jungle of ill-defined terms in order to grasp author’s intentions makes reading Swedenborg an effortless stroll. An amassment of double-talk and wordy musings effectively overshadows not only scraps of genuinely original ideas, but also, even more worryingly, the analyzed text itself. Overload becomes overkill.

Such a strong opinion might seem to be over-generalized and unfounded at first glance. It is so because it touches the much broader problem of validity of postmodernist reading *sensu largo* – which is not and cannot be (because of spatial and topical reasons) the problem of this paper. I will not try here to discredit any bigger or smaller chunks of theoretical postmodernism (vide: Sokal 1966) as a well-disguised hoax, this once-called *fashionable nonsense* (Sokal 1999), although it might be fair to admit that the author generally allies himself with such a position. It would do no good to attempt to remonstrate with postmodernism defenders' clamour not only for technical reasons, though. I argue for deserting the postmodern notions and apparatus in reading cyberpunk not because of Sokal-esque points – I simply imply that regardless of how sensible or senseless they are, the chief reason to absolve ourselves from using them is that they are cognitively uninteresting. What do I mean by that? I think that the problems that are offered to the reader in those interpretations are secondary or tertiary at best to what is hidden inside cyberpunk universe. Taking the wrong perspective blurs the vision so one can easily overlook how cyberpunk tries to undermine or redefine some principal notions governing our philosophical inquiry. I posit that what cyberspace's interconnectedness says about a thing we call *a mind* or what impact such resplendently blossomed transplantations system might have on the problem of identity of Self is infinitely more promising than trying to enumerate as many juxtapositions as one can find. I do not blame those who want to do the reverse thing, I just think it should not be what a philosopher should do. Postmodernist reading is not entirely philosophically worthy as a philosopher should pursue more important questions. He would rather yearn for the meaty parts than stay content with digging for bare bones. A postmodernist can do as s/he pleases, as long as s/he is not pretending to be doing philosophy. And it is the philosophical stance which I would prefer to take.

Now I will try to generally identify some key points found in cyberpunk that can turn out to be most revolutionary as regards our ways of thinking about rudimentary notions or ideas. As a minefield I would be using mostly *Neuromancer*, as a model of its genre and probably the most widely-renown book of its kin. One of the apparent focal points of the book is the problem of transhumanism. At the very beginning of *Neuromancer* a reader meets people who are not people in our traditional meaning of the notion (not what our already-given intuitive categorizations were tailored for). Or are they really? How should

one classify a bartender Ratz whose hands had been exchanged for much more handy tongs? Should we silently acknowledge this kind of empowered humanity and ascribe them to the label ‘human’ or should we rather look for another categorization for such entities? In Gibsonian world this kind of human tuning is pushed to the limits of absurd – human body (how significant it is disdainfully called ‘flesh’!) is almost boundlessly formable – making a corporal side of humanity a mere patchwork of upgrades (Gibson 1984). The technology is so advanced, one can even speak about Theseus’ Ship touching our very selves. Theseus’ Ship is a philosophical problem of identity of objects – in its basic formulation it is an enquiry about what differentiates two objects; or another way round, if we substitute every plank in the ship, is it still the same ship? The problem was considered for ages but with the arousal of transhumanism (a movement supporting free access to transplanted upgrades improving the potency of human body and mind) the problem earns new depth for the so-far distant and unanimated things can be ourselves. It makes one ask how much biotechnological engineering interference can we stand without losing identity? What constitutes this state? Is it just reformulation of our language scheme that needs to be done or is there a serious qualitative leap? And most of all, should we be concerned if that is indeed so?

When searching for indications given in Gibson’s works, one ought to keep in mind the pessimistic, dystopian climate of cyberpunk: it influences how it presents the problem of augmented humanity. In *Neuromancer* and even more in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* – the omnipresence of transplants, ease of modification is one aspect of the world’s degeneration and corruption (Gibson 1988). With its gloomy atmosphere and sharply critical tone, Gibson tries to expose the dark side of the moon. Transhumanism as a movement occupies reverse positions. It is much more idealistic, perceiving human-enhancing engineering as an avant-garde of evolution, eugenics tamed and put into good use – soothing and redemptive to human nature. In cyberpunk augmentation serves not as refinement but contamination of the very core. Cyberpunk is not technophobic or neo-luddist by any means (Cadigan 2002); it does not discard technology but shows the problematic situation of utter disorientation. No wonder a human being is lost in such a world as he cannot draw the clear lines even of him/herself–; of what he really became in this world of technological enthrallment.

The axis of this argument is the problem of human contention of form and limits of the species. I think one of the hidden conceptions of transhumanism (humanism+), which cyberpunk poignantly refutes, is a general feeling that our species is fundamentally flawed and needs to be fixed in order to cope with the world on higher levels of complexity. To stay within the sci-fi canon, I will use quote from *Battlestar Galatica's Cavil* as this particular idea's porte-parole:

I don't want to be human! I want to see gamma rays! I want to hear X-rays! And I want to - I want to smell dark matter! Do you see the absurdity of what I am? I can't even express these things properly because I have to - I have to conceptualize complex ideas in this stupid limiting spoken language! But I know I want to reach out with something other than these prehensile paws! And feel the wind of a supernova flowing over me! I'm a machine! And I can know much more! I can experience so much more. But I'm trapped in this absurd body! (IMDb 2014).

The last sentence calls for commentary as it should prove to be very revealing for yet another philosophical problem looming over cyberpunk: the so-called Cartesian mind-body problem. As such, it is a concept assuming the existence of two separate and mutually irreducible substances in human – mental and fleshly. Amongst many solutions to the problem, *Neuromancer's* *Sprawl* is an environment which promotes the stance of subjecting matter to mind, this is a fraction, as called sneeringly by Gilbert Ryle, of the *ghost in the machine* (to make use of another famous metaphor). To elude delving into philosophical descriptions, it might be clearer to exploit the literature's major strength in philosophical inquiries – its demonstrative power of simplifying intellectual constructs and use an episode from the cyberpunk novel. When rethinking the episode from *Neuromancer* during which Case and Molly steal Dixie Flatline who is no more than a hard-drive on which his consciousness has been uploaded, one can easily notice that the vision of the human self, enthymematically trafficked there, is the prevalence of mind taken as immaterial data, this very ghost in the machine. Surprisingly light integrity of self is abandoned – somehow a man dead and buried can be still saved on ROM and stored on some distant servers. It can be treated as a kind of thought experiment– it may be useful to think of

consequence of agreeing with such a vision – Gibson offers them aplenty. If the body is a container no better than a silicon graveyard in Switzerland, the entire idea so fundamental for the novel as such how the cyberspace operates can be better understood. A natural outcome of this reduction is also, at least partial, equalization of humans with computers. This opens the door for another prolific philosophical idea – which is a ‘computer metaphor’. Proponents of this idea state that human mind does not essentially differ from a Turing Machine – basically a kind of computer. The environment of Gibson’s *Matrix* is equally friendly to Wintermute as it is to Case. This is no kind of sorcery, just precisely what a reader should expect to stumble upon in the mental laboratory of cyberpunk. Gibson’s creation is consistent and the vision of humanity’s future presented with all its logical consequences. The overwhelming pessimism might also have its roots in computerization of environment as it clearly puts human beings in an inferior position against much more powerful machines. A man is thrown into the environment he created but found himself exceeded by his own artifacts. What irony this is! In Gibson’s books the scent of this irony is rather bitter, though. Gibson avoids clear-cut disavowal of technology but simultaneously but stays open-eyed so he is far from naïve acceptance of technology’s hydroponically-grown fruits. Anyway, he creates the world which is both tremendously inspiring and highly unlikely.

What is philosopher supposed to do with such a project? Firstly, he should ask himself why it is so unlikely after all. Well, it uncompromisingly adopts philosophical theories that are no more than doubtful in contemporary arguments, such as computer metaphor and ghost in the machine ideal. Does it make it utterly barren and uninteresting? Surely not, but it should rather indicate a way of simulating philosophical projects in convincing, riveting literary wrapping than marking out a finite class of ready-made solutions.

Where is literature in the midst of a crossfire of contemporary philosophical inquiries then? This question seems to be most urgent for a literary critic after the whole cannonade of philosophical doubts. The tie with modernity, understood as a burden of the most recent technological progress, means coping with the flurry of novel technologies unfolding new possibilities unpredicted by previous theoretical concepts. Is cyberpunk still valid as an interpretative framework in the teens of the 21st century? In certain chunks, indicated in this paper this might be so, but still there are the obstacles it cannot overcome. It turned out to be a victim

of its own up-to-dateness in the means of technological developments and no wonder so. When the blossom of complex neuroscience or cybernetics outstrips the naiveté of Gibsonian world (deduced by many from a formal ignorance by the very writer, which is not so important at this point), it simply calls for a more sophisticated fiction of its time (technologically-based prose is often prone to accusations of being outdated as, say, yoghurts, call it a 'dairy theory of science-fiction'). And it finds its executors in new waves of sci-fi literature such as *post-cyberpunk*. Neal Stephenson's books might be more up-to-date with current scientific knowledge, but they surely will go out of the paradigm in a few years. New will come for its place and then become equally quickly outdated with a wave of new discoveries. And that is precisely what sci-fi literature is bound to, a participation in the mad pursuit of scientific adequacy it can never fully achieve. Are we thence any closer to the questions of value of the piece of art? What is the relation between the author and the narrative? Do we still need any kind of well-described and easily discernible genres? Any of them? Not even close. So it seems that once again the old master will have the final word against all the new saints and simply the show *must go on*.

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Interpretation of Michel Houellebecq's *The Map and the Territory* in the Context of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*

Filip Rak

Abstract

The idea of a map preceding a territory is a problem of the precession of simulacra. The aim of the work is to look for common points between the thought of Jean Baudrillard, manifested in his philosophical essay *Simulacra and Simulation*, and the world described in Michel Houellebecq's novel *The Map and the Territory*. Why is the vision of human and art in contemporary Western, "globalized" world, portrayed in the novel's main character, the artist Jed Martin, so deeply pessimistic? What are the sources of this pessimism? Can one look for them in Baudrillard's idea of simulation and its ubiquity in all spheres of the modern social life? The main problem of *Simulacra and Simulation* is the confusion of a model of reality with reality itself – the one of how the real is little by little replaced by its representation or even (since the representation stems from the equivalence of a sign and its reference) by its simulation, which does not refer to anything but itself. The phenomenon is observable also in Michel Houellebecq's fiction. Reconstruction of the philosopher's thought could be a key to an interpretation of the novel.

Keywords: pessimism, simulation, simulacra, reference, representation

Walking through the big city's streets one has a schizophrenic impression of being attacked by the voices from the world that does not exist. Billboards, images, words – what do they summon? Where do they lead our thoughts? Perhaps one could answer it, if he or she had a chance to consider each of them separately. But

they occur as a multitude, each of them calling us to follow its own meaning. There is no sequence of them, which would be the *punctum* about which Roland Barthes wrote in *La chambre claire*, no striking point which would bring us to the reality of the symbol. We live in the condition of the permanent overproduction of signs. As Barthes wrote: “Here I am, before the sea; it is true that it bears no message. But on the beach, what material for semiology! Flags, slogans, signals, sign-boards, clothes, suntan even, which are so many messages to me.” (Barthes 1972, 160). What kind of a world signs refer to?

The answer to this question is fundamental when the crisis of the modern society is concerned. And it is not about economic crisis in the least. Existential emptiness in life of the artist Jed Martin, M. Houellbecq's novel's *The Map and the Territory* main character, culminates at the same time when he reaches the highest level of welfare in his career. Economic growth is not the issue here – overaccumulation of goods is rather the sphere where we would look for the sources of the bad human condition nowadays. We should rather ask: are we still able to reach the meaning these times? Or is the territory irrevocably covered by the map?

The idea of a map preceding a territory is a problem of the precession of simulacra. The main problem of Jean Baudrillard's philosophical essay, *Simulacra and Simulation*, is the confusion of a model of reality with reality itself – the one of how the real is little by little replaced by its representation or even (since the representation stems from the equivalence of a sign and its reference) by its simulation which does not refer to anything but itself. How does this phenomenon work for M. Houellbecq's novel? Are we allowed to look for the sources of the novel's pessimism in J. Baudrillard's idea of simulation and its ubiquity in all spheres of the modern social life? How does the plethora of simulated meaning constitute the position of the individual in the globalized world?

Simulation

M. Houellbecq's world is one of simulacra. It is structured around artificiality – projected pleasures, directed experiences, programmed sense of security and needs constructed by the global corporations' marketing policies. What is the mechanism driving this phenomenon?

According to J. Baudrillard's quotation of Émile Littré, while separating notions of “pretending” and “simulating”, “whoever fakes an illness can simply

stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms” (Baudrillard 1981, 3). What is endangered here is the reality principle. “What can medicine do with what floats on either side of illness, on either side of health, with duplication of illness in a discourse that is no longer either true or false?” (1981, 4). This very mechanism works for almost every semiological system. In its pure form we observe the phenomenon in photography. The object that one takes a picture of ceases to exist at the very moment of taking it. We only deal with a representation ever since. But do we? Representation is only possible when there is equivalence, or reference between the object and its symbol. In this sense photography is a death of the real (Barthes 1972). What can the picture refer to, if its object is already dead? What floats on either side of representation, on either side of abstraction is the simulacrum: “The era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials – worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning” (Baudrillard 1981, 2).

In order to present the overwhelming scope and power of simulacra Baudrillard summons the mechanisms observable in religion. What happens if a simulacrum of God is brought into being? “What becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra?” (4) Icons and images refer to the pure construct of God, to the idea that has no reference to His real countenance – whatever the form He actually existed in (or not existed). And then the whole system is built on this construct. One sign – the one which pretends to represent the idea of God – is a material which other signs (interpretation, text – faith) use to create the whole organisation of the meaning: a myth. According to Barthes' conception of the phenomenon, the myth is a derivative semiological system – a sign which takes as its signifier the other sign's signified (Barthes 1972). But it must not be forgotten that the signified, as F. de Saussure already postulated, does not have to refer to the object – it can refer only to the concept, idea, mere notion. Therefore, when the whole system emerges as a representation without the object, it “becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference” (Baudrillard 1981, 6). Fyodor Dostoevsky revealed the paradox of simulacrum already in *The Brothers Karamazov*: it is the Grand Inquisitor now, who takes

Jesus Christ's place. People do not need salvation anymore, since they got used to tolerable state of welfare and built the system of meaning, which does not recognize its object any more.

The proximity of the idea of simulation as Baudrillard formulated it and Barthes' conception of the myth will prove helpful once again later. Yet, being conscious of the great range of influence that simulation may have on our culture, we will try to answer the following questions: what is left out of the experience, when it is programmed and organized in order to render it predictable? What is the need, if it does not emerge from the deficiency? Where do we actually live if no place belongs to us? And finally, what do we need the art for in the era of the crisis of meaning?

Tourism, product and the modern sense of space

One has in mind an important role that touristic guides play in *The Map and the Territory* (and some of the other M. Houellbecq's novels too – *The Platform* would be the best example). Jed Martin uses them to orient himself even in his own city. He needs an instruction on how he should feel in certain situations or what opinion he should shape about it. When he wanted to take his father to a Christmas dinner, he skipped through the cultural guide first in order to find something appropriate, although he knew “it was pathetic and vain to want to establish a gastronomical conviviality that had no *raison d'être*” between them [...] But it was Christmas, and what else could you do?” (Houellbecq 2012, 14). On a “romantic trip” that Jed and Olga had in the Massif Central - “a very French region; it doesn't remind anything but France at least” (...) - every single experience that was to take place, was carefully studied through a guide prism first. The trip turned out to be a directed drama, structured around elusive qualities like “originality”, “regionality”, “tradition”.

The touristic experience must always have a pointed object, with an affirmation as to its epistemic value as “traditional”, “original”, “regional”. Assumptions like “This dish here is original for the region” or “The house that we are visiting was Schubert's place of birth” always have to occur, since a tourist always needs the affirmations like these in order to be sure about what he should pay his attention to and what to remember as a souvenir. That is the guide's function: to set everything up, organize it and formulate it in symbols. But following its instruction, one is realizing an image that has no reference to the real

– a denaturalized phantom of a place that one is visiting. That is also symptomatic to any simulation – it needs to be confirmed, certified as “natural” etc.; in fact, what is real and authentic does not need any confirmation at all. Tradition, authenticity are beside their nature when multiplied on demand, for money. Just as the ritual is not sacred anymore when it is used as a commodity.

The touristic optics has become a dominant perspective in a globalized world. Every city, every region can potentially become a touristic destination now. A new dimension of experience, with a simulation as its means, spreads all over the world. Through the global thoroughfares newly born masses of touristic subjects travel from one place to another, a home of each one of them being possibly a touristic destination of the others as well. In this sort of deterrence, using Baudrillard's notion, where every place can become the model of a touristic phantom, and everyone can become the actor of a touristic spectacle, one is wanting in activity. Having the guide that organizes everything before, discovery of the world does not belong to us any more. That is one of the reasons why Jed Martin is so disaffected. He condemns himself to the false image of the real, passively confining himself to follow the guidelines.

But the deterrence is not only one of people and places, but also one of products. And both are complementary to each other. The passiveness is not only the touristic personality's main component – although hidden under the semblance of action – but also the consumer's one. The consumer does not decide, the initiative does never belong to him. People buy products in response “to all the questions they may ask themselves; or, rather, they themselves come in response to the functional and directed question that the objects constitute” (Baudrillard 1981, 67).

The deterrence of the products rests here on the polyvalent voices that the products call us with. On entering a hypermarket one is attacked by them. They are not voices of the needs that emerge from deficiency, but of the needs that are artificially called out, constructed in order to arrange a social demand. Together with the globalization of the production, this ubiquitous simulation has been successively gaining a domination over the social life, until the whole social space became structured around one object – the hypermarket. As Baudrillard puts it, the hypermarket “centralizes and redistributes a whole region and population”, organizes all life functions of the inhabitants and rationalizes their time, “creating

an immense to-and-fro movement totally similar to that of suburban commuters, absorbed and ejected at fixed times by their work place”. The circulation “centre-peripheries” is carried on automatically, within the blazed trails, realizing the paradox of the moving passiveness (Baudrillard 1981, 75).

In *The Map and the Territory* the consumption is one of the main motives. A very specific bonds tie all characters' existence with the products. One could risk saying that the products gain autonomy of a character themselves. The author gives them the privileged position in the narration, describing scrupulously their features. During the conversation with Jed Martin, Houellbecq the character confesses: “A perfect and faithful relationship had been established, making me a happy consumer. I wasn't completely happy in all aspects of life, but at least I had that: I could, at regular intervals, buy a pair of my favorite boots” (Houellbecq 2011, 125). The words are uttered with a nostalgic sincerity.

Why do Jed Martin and Houellbecq-character feel so comfortable in the hypermarket? Perhaps the contact with the commercial products lets them experience their world's absence of depth. And they both seem to draw inspiration from it. Jed Martin's complete artistic ouvrage – photographs of the steel devices, pictures of the most important crafts of the modern civilization – is sacrificed to the industrial production. His work is even perceived as a monument for human production. And what about Houellbecq? The tricky game that the writer plays with the reader by making himself one of the novel's characters, never lets us differentiate between the Houellbecq-writer and Houellbecq-character. But the fact is that what is the important part of Houellbecq-character's life – the commercial products – is the artistic material for Houellbecq-writer.

Baudrillard perceives the hypermarket as a space without a depth: “No relief, no perspective, no vanishing point where the gaze might risk losing itself, but a total screen where, in their uninterrupted display, the billboards and the products themselves act as equivalent and successive signs.” (Baudrillard 1981, 75). The hypermarket is a sphere of a double simulation: the one of a need and the one of a meaning. But here in the novel, what is meaningless and depthless – the products as meaningless signs – becomes a source of inspiration and creation. But the result is even more terrifying. What was the barren sign without reference, here is reproduced – just as the products are recycled – in the new product: the one of art. We reach again a semiological crisis which Barthes defined as myth. In this context, a deep despair that Jed Martin ends up in could be explained in the

terms of deficiency of meaning. The work of his life, and all motivations that drive him through it, derives from the matter with no depth. The metaphor of façade that hides nothing but an unfillable void.

The touristic deterrence of places and societies, as well as the unified domain of the hypermarket that organizes the arrangement of the settlements all around the world, gives us a clue as to the present-day sense of space. One that is constituted by unification and standardization.

The post-industrial landscape is homogenous all around the world, since it stems from the same origin. Since the global structures of the communication and transport both with the influences of the global corporations made our image of the world a net of links, the equalized “spots” in the space linked with each other by the global tracks (which make getting from one place to another easy and rapid whatever the distance) occurred as totally alike. The world is full of transferal places, like trade galleries or airports. The global space itself is structured by what is purely transferal nowadays. These places can never keep the individual for long enough to settle down and since there are more and more of them, there are fewer places where one can feel at home. In consequence, the social life is not enchained to the place anymore and the nations cease to be entities tied up with the soil. The world is full of places that do not “enchain” anymore, not even draw; they attract at most – just like the images in the touristic guide that attract the spectator.

The space without the depth is the territory that has been covered by the map. Nobody can reach the hidden sense on the surface that covers no lower layers. Where the globalized production and thus global market constitutes the social and economic life, everything happens in isolation from the roots. The members of the uprooted societies cannot meet each other on their own ground. As Peter Sloterdijk states in the *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals* that the world market is the idea which serves to claim (and demand) the every bidder and client to meet in the common exteriority (2005) - we live in the “Grand Interior” of the globalized world, where it takes couple of hours to get to whatever far destination but still we cannot reach a common understanding or nearness. The “Grand Interior” turned out to be a sphere of exteriority

Living in the transferal space, uprooted and atomised, the characters of *The Map and the Territory* experience the exteriority and isolation. They do not find love, nor family, nor even other people anymore. The society they live in has been

producing goods for ages, so the modern men and women could safely realize their needs. But it turned out that goods were overproduced so widely that what was supposed to be realized, vanished slowly from their lives. What remains is an empty activeness without a purpose.

Houellbecq's characters live in the society that cannot appear as a collective entity with its common background anymore. Contemporaneity forcing them to solitude revolve around the anonymous masses as the elementary particles of the community that ceased to exist. Their only way to find the sense of their being is to rotate in the domain of the simulation that gives a promise of the meaning. But since they expect that the promise will not be kept they rotate in the world of empty signs without motivation to arise, without motivation to give up, dooming themselves to never-ending passiveness.

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Spectres of Posts- and -Isms

Adrian Hunter, Pawel Wojtas

Abstract

The following piece is conceived as a scholarly interview with dr Adrian Hunter (University of Stirling) held by the editor with an eye to providing timely recapitulation of the condition of contemporary literature and theory. The questions asked by the editor are largely inspired by the insightful remarks and reflections collected in collaboration with the volume's contributors throughout the undergraduate course "Contemporary Anglo-American Literature in Context" run at Faculty of Artes Liberales of University of Warsaw by dr Paweł Wojtas in 2012.

Keywords: Literature, Reading, Cultural Studies, The Canon, (Post)Modernism, transgression

PW: The contributors to this volume consist of interdisciplinaries completing combined undergraduate modules in arts and humanities (e.g. Social Science, Philology, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Law Studies, to enumerate but a few). Interdisciplinarily-trained reading veers dramatically from the received, somehow fossilised, traditional modes of approaching a literary text. This opens up a vast spectrum of contextual slants via which to dissect the literary text. Configured as such, however, the text becomes answerable to the culture at its broadest - much in the vein of Literary Studies these days being gradually absorbed by Cultural Studies. To get down to brass tacks, what is the condition of literature nowadays in this respect? Does the literary still have to stoop down to the dictates of Cultural Studies (in institutional terms or otherwise) in order to live to tell the tale? Or are we perhaps beginning to recant postmodernist creed, tipping the balance to Leavisite "great tradition", with capitalised Literature on its banner?

AH: I don't accept the premise that Cultural Studies is, or ever has been, absorptive of the "Literary", so called; which is to say, I don't separate these concepts except at an abstract level, in the way one might separate "content" and "form". That said, it is true that professional contemplators of writing, at least in universities, have been in flight from the aesthetic for some years, for better and for worse. The New Yorker book critic James Wood has suggested that the principal distinction between academic literary criticism and book reviewing nowadays is the unwillingness or inability of the former to address itself to questions of aesthetic function or value. I take Wood's tone to be lamenting: academic criticism impoverishes itself, and impoverishes the text, by failing or refusing to speak about "art" while dilating excessively on "context" and "function". Such an approach allows academics to get away with simply not reading, so that it becomes acceptable to dismiss, say, Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* as a "handbook of toff sociology," as Wood puts it, rather than wrestle with its resistant actuality. Fair enough; true enough. Of course, we laundered "judgement" out of academic criticism for good reason; and if there has been a cultural "turn" in our approach to writing, then it reflects a transformation in our understanding not just of "culture" in the narrow sense, but of language itself -- language as "discourse" and all that that entails. Seeking to "recant", as you put it, on such articles of faith would be nonsensical. Still, there are reasons to worry, reasons to agitate, if not about the articles themselves, then about their professional incarnations, in Cultural Studies and in Theory more broadly. Wood has a nose for sociological thick-wittedness. So, too, do Valentine Cunningham (see his *Reading After Theory*) and Derek Attridge, to name a couple of recent recanters from within the fold. Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* takes against the sort of "instrumentalist" readings that cultural studies, in its less distinguished forms, seems designed endlessly to produce. By way of an alternative, Attridge stakes out an approach that is reassuringly difficult to grasp, and thus presumably less susceptible to cack-handed imitation and grad school sclerosis. Actually, to call it an "approach" at all is to miss the point, which is that an interest in the text's "singularity" should always guide us (Cunningham's version of this is readerly "tact"). Others contest instrumentalism on materialist grounds -- Walter Benn Michaels, for example, or the wonderful Thomas Frank, whose *One Market Under God* demonstrates how the canon-busting Cult Studs,

as he terms them, merely extend the logic of free-market capitalism, with its fetishising of anti-hierarchical thinking and permanent revolution, to academic praxis itself. None of these exemplary writers would take much to do with Leavisite “great tradition”, I don’t suppose. For all that they swim against certain powerful disciplinary tides, they’re the opposite of reactionary; they move us forward, but not by urging us to go back.

PW: This navigates us straight to the question of canon. Is it actually possible to speak of canon these days? Do literary texts have to depend upon institutional ‘canonisation’ for their legitimacy? If not - if the canon is as capacious and indiscriminating as to welcome such literary pariahs as Pulp Fiction or Torture Porn, etc. - are texts absorbed by the canon on the grounds of being just texts?

AH: In more than ten years of teaching and research, I cannot think that I have ever had reason seriously to contemplate the condition of The Canon, or even the composition of “canons”, which must say something about the generation to which I belong. The Canon as a de facto horizon of knowledge or legitimate expression is, obviously, a defunct notion; though I would say, pace Gerald Graff, that if we want to “teach the conflicts” in our discipline -- and we should -- then a grasp of canonicity is required. In general, I think that what finally did for The Canon, so conceived, was not the institutional gentrification of Torture Porn or Pulp Fiction, but the drive to research specialisation that Graff was, even back then, in the Eighties, worrying about. In the UK, the national exercise by which we quantify and assess research activity (the Research Excellence Framework, as it’s called) has produced literature departments populated by individuals largely uninterested in one another’s work, unless that work should happen to coincide with their own. It’s a bit like living in a city as opposed to a village. In the latter, you must eventually take to do with people whose biases are quite contrary to your own, whereas in the metropolis, you can get away with making a circle of familiars entirely in your own image, and ignoring everyone else. Fighting over The Canon at least forced colleagues into dialectical encounters not of their own devising.

What am I getting at? The loss of “The Canon” is no loss in itself. But the process does speak to some broader degradations. The first of these is the demise of scholarship in the sense of a broad-reaching disciplinary competence, and the rise in its place of a research-intensive monadism. When I talk to PhD students and even colleagues, I’m often surprised to find how little they read. I don’t mean quantitatively: they read all the time, but only, or largely, in a single corner of the woods. They consume texts in order to produce texts of their own -- a curiously self-limiting activity. The other worry I have relates to the way that Canon-busting is thought to be an inherently radical gesture, a defiance and disavowal of authority, and that to engage with the non-Canonical is somehow in and of itself politically edifying. This is the deepest laziness of thought. And again, it’s a failure of the dialectical imagination: a totalizing gesture (“margins are good, centres are bad”) routinely passed off by people who would define themselves as the enemy of all totalities.

PW: In one of your influential articles on Joyce’s and Beckett’s short stories,¹ you argue, if I got you right, that textual fissures in Joyce are interwoven into the narrative tissue; as such they “do not threaten the illusion of objectivity in the presentation”; whereas Beckett appears to self-consciously point the finger at the cracks of his narrative construction by “advertis[ing] what it leaves unsaid” (237). Is this, do you reckon, Beckett’s postmodernist gesture?

AH: It’s one of his gestures, for sure. But I was only referring to early Beckett -- the stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, to be precise -- and not to the later work, where the expressive impoverishment is much further reaching and sweeps away the little drooping flags that littered those first animadversions against Joycean modernism. The “Postmodernist” label just strips the work of its history, so I avoid it.

¹ Hunter, A. 2001. “Beckett and the Joycean Short Story.” *Essays in Criticism*, 51: 230-44.

PW: Brilliant diagnosticians of postmodern condition as they indubitably were/are, Jameson, Lyotard or Baudrillard could not, perforce, stand historically outside of the vortex of transformations they sought to define. Having perhaps acquired – or have we? - comfortable historical distance from postmodernism, has our most recent understanding of literature, culture and arts changed since the fat years of postmodernism? Is postmodernism dead anyway?

AH: We have a very different understanding of what postmodernism is, I see. I regard it (thanks to Jameson and others) as the unfolding logic of late capitalism, and, like the poor in Pound's poem, as unkillable. Your question supposes that we have achieved an historical distance from postmodernism; I think it's omnipresent and that at best we can achieve only a critical distance from it. Postmodernism isn't a thing that happened, it's what we're living through. So you see, I can't really answer your question in the terms on which you offer it. Indeed, I'm tempted to say that the belief that postmodernism is behind us shows just how completely it's done its work, how thoroughly folded into the texture of the everyday it has become.

In the context of the academy, I find it interesting how the radical work of postmodernism - deconstructing authority, challenging regimes of absolute value, and so on - is celebrated, while the obvious complicity between such deconstructive and transgressive practices and the dominant logic of the marketplace (the state of permanent revolution capitalism seeks to induce) is passed over. The oddity here is that academics, at least in Britain, are never done complaining about the "marketisation" of higher education. It must be that we in the humanities draw sufficient satisfaction from the blows we believe we're landing against hegemonic power not to notice that we are, by the same means, authoring our own demise. To put it crudely, the free marketeers are perfectly happy that we've abandoned The Canon and turned our brilliant minds to more populist matter, because *Harry Potter* and Torture Porn will always be an easier sell than *Paradise Lost*.

PW: In 2010, Stirling University held a postgraduate-led conference entitled “Transgression and Its Limits” which, as the title implies, aimed to include works covering a wide range of articulations of transgressive acts, poetics and practices over centuries in media, music, art philosophy, technology, and literature. One of the core arguments delivered by Fred Botting in his paper² - published in the collection of conference papers under the same title - was that since transgression heavily depends upon the limits it is defined by, there is no room for transgression in our (post-?)simulacrum age, granted that the latter - engrossed by consumer culture, proliferating homogeneity - is deprived of recognisable limits. With this in mind, do you think that we still live in the simulacrum age?

AH: To Fred’s comment on “transgression”, I would append the explanation that Terry Eagleton gives for the ubiquity of the body in postmodernist cultural work and critical theory -- the rise of the “new somatics”, as he calls it. The body is a hinge, Eagleton says, between Nature and Culture. It thus plays well to a wide constituency of intellectual interests: to those for whom everything now is “culture”, even the flesh we inhabit, as well as to those eager to rescue a damaged Nature from the clutches of an overly rational post-Enlightenment civilisation. The body is the darling of constructivists and essentialists alike, if you will. Its transgressive potential is thus considerable: it allows us to exceed the limits of both the given and the made.

PW: Lyotard once famously argued that Postmodernism paves the way, counter-clockwise, for the more experimental Modernism and not the other way round. Should this counterintuitive stance be taken seriously, are we to expect the return of Modernism as Neo-Modernism? After all, such acclaimed contemporary writers as Jeanette Winterson, Martin Amis, Michael Cunningham, Jonathan Safran Foer, to enumerate a few, are still in many ways toying with the modernist styles and tropes (mostly stream of consciousness). Should we be expecting a

² Botting, Fred. 2012. “After Transgression: Bataille, Baudrillard, Ballard.” In *Transgression and Its Limits*, edited by Foley, Matt, Neil McRobert, and Aspasia Stephanou. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

revolutionary revision of literary Modernism these days? Is it back and here to stay?

AH: Even Virginia Woolf thought the “future of fiction” a dreadful and a dreary subject. Let me fall back on what I know well and answer this with reference to the short story. A few of the modernists, Woolf among them, were fond of predicting that, in the future, as it came to accommodate itself more to the exigencies of technological modernity, fiction would inevitably incline to shortness, compression, intensification. The pressure of the visual (cinema was on their minds) would be too great for the longueurs of the novel to withstand. Early commentators on the short story continued in the same vein, declaring the genre to be the child of the twentieth century and modernity’s non pareil fictional form. Near the end of his career, Saul Bellow confessed to a “mania for shortness” in this, the age of distraction. Finally, and very recently, David Shields’ much talked about book *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* predicted that the future of fiction belonged to the glimpse, the sketch, the snatched moment, the pistol shot.

My point is not so much to note that they’re all wrong -- too early to say that about Shields -- but to note the repetition of the idea. Modernism’s legacy bears particularly heavily on the discipline of literary criticism, which it partly composed. As Nicholas Daly, Ann Ardis and others have pointed out, we often still unwittingly accept the terms modernism sets for us. We struggle to see beyond it. That is why, where the twentieth century is concerned, we’re more likely to encounter a modernist’s literary history than a literary history of modernism (Daly). Coming back to your enquiry, I’d suggest that it’s more a modernist’s question than a question about modernism, and that we might need to think about why we’re still looking through those lenses.

PW: Dr Adrian Hunter, thank you very much for your time, expert opinions and invaluable contribution to the volume.

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Katarzyna Bobrowicz is a student of the College of Inter-Faculty Individual Studies in the Humanities with the specialization in Psychology and Artes Liberales; particularly interested in ethology and philosophy, aims to introduce the biosemiotic thought by Jacob von Uexkull to the ethological studies. Previously the author of short works on the evolutionary origins of morality and language, now the keen advocate for the fusion of anthropology and biology in the ethological studies. The author and producer of the lectures session: "The Bedlamites Kingdom: worlds of animals and humans" on the perception worlds of man and animal; the author of the lecture: "Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen by Jacob von Uexkull. How do animals and humans create their worlds" for the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

Ryszard Bobrowicz is a student of the College of Inter-Faculty Individual Studies in the Humanities with the specialization in Law and Artes Liberales; particularly interested in normativity, ethics, philosophy of politics and law and theology. Willing to find golden mean between anarchism and legalism. Currently working on translation of "I am an Impure Thinker" by Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy and the relationship between sin, morality and law. Preparing the lectures session "The norm archeology: the individual, power and law".

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Adrian Hunter took his degrees at the University of Glasgow, and then worked at Trinity College, Dublin, before coming to Stirling, where he now acts as Senior

Lecturer at the Department of English Studies and Director of Graduate Studies for the School of Arts and Humanities. His research falls mainly in the late-Victorian and modernist periods, with a long-standing interest in the short story in Britain and America. His current work focusses on transatlantic literary exchange. *Amateur Emigrants: British Writers in America, 1880-1920* is a monograph project featuring Kipling, Stevenson, William Archer, G.K. Chesterton, Rupert Brooke, and others. He has edited Stephen Crane's *Maggie* and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and is currently preparing a volume of Hogg's periodical writings for the Stirling/South Carolina collected edition of his work. In the longer term, he will be co-editing (with Paul Delaney) the Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story.

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