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The Unseen in the Modern Image World

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Unseen in the Modern Image World

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The twentieth century is often characterized as an age of images. The majority of theories about technologies of vision in the twentieth century – photography, film, digital imagery – seize on the proliferation of visual stimuli and their desensitizing or liberating possibilities. In the always incomplete theorization of images, what we see and what sees us often defines and delimits us, but at the same time, we define and delimit what we see. The inherent limitations of vision that result from the capabilities of the visual mechanism and its technological extensions shape both individual perception and the broader realm of cultural vision. In an age dominated by the visible, the limits of vision either provide respite from the mass of images we are forced to perceive or they constrain how we construe the world visually. *The Unseen in the Modern Image World* reconsiders the complex and mutually constitutive relationship between visual perception and literary production in the twentieth century. This study resituates both literary and critical discourses on the boundaries of the perceptible in order to foreground the dependence of vision

on its limits. I recontextualize the most formative theories of novelistic production of the century alongside theories about the dominance of vision in modernity in order to suggest that the constraints rather than the proliferations of visual perception shape modern prose. I elaborate the predominance of the unseen through its clashes with the limits of visuality: Martin Heidegger's shadow through which modernity projects itself beyond the representational bounds of "the world picture," and Walter Benjamin's elaboration of the masses' distracted visual reception, brought about by film, which he argues profoundly alters perception. I ground subsequent chapters by demonstrating that the boundaries of perception not only elude the presumed dominating grasp of "the world picture" but also reduce our visual apprehensions of the world to mere extractions from the infinitely vaster realm of the unseen, a terrain that the modern novel—from Joseph Conrad and Henry James through Don DeLillo—grounds itself upon.

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INTRODUCTION

The 'Brain-Attic,' the 'Lumber-Room,' and the Horizons of Perception

> "I'm curious to know what it can possibly be that I see, with closed eyes, with open eyes, nothing, I see nothing, well that is a disappointment, I was hoping for something better than that"
>
> Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable*[1]

One can easily, and perhaps convincingly, characterize the twentieth century as an age of images. A majority of theoretical interrogations into modernity's technological instantiations in the twentieth century (photography, film, digital imagery, etc.), and their effects on human perception, seize on the proliferation of visual stimuli and their desensitizing or, on the other hand, liberating possibilities. In the always incomplete theorization of images, what we see and what sees us often defines and delimits us, but at the same time, we define and delimit what we see. Yet, as Beckett's "unnameable" indicates, within the overall range of possibilities, very little is ultimately seen. The inherent limitations of vision—the capabilities of human eyesight and its technological extension[2] —shape both individual perception and the broader realm of cultural vision. Within an age of overwhelming visibility, like the proliferation of images it somehow functions within and around, vision's limit lingers in a rather ambivalent position: it either provides respite from the mass of images we are forced to perceive or it obscures the world by subtracting from the image of things we construct through perception.

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[1] Samuel Beckett. *The Unnameable*. *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition, Volume 2: Novels*. New York: Grove Press, 2006, 385.

[2] Technologically extended vision obviously far exceeds the capacities of the human eye, it allows sight to penetrate the human body and gaze into abstract regions of the galaxy, among other generally unseeable regions it has the power to penetrate. However, the question of how these revelations fall within the bounds of sight remains pronounced. On this question, see Ian Hacking. *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*. Cambridge UP, 1983.

In 1938, Martin Heidegger writes that the "fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture."[3] In so claiming, Heidegger situates visual perception—albeit in the form of visual projection as product of scientific calculation—as humankind's central mode of entrance into and method for processing the world: we project the world as our picture of it and function within it as such. Two years earlier, in an ostensibly divergent sphere of thought, Walter Benjamin recognizes the primacy of visual perception, noting the overwhelming abundance of images inherent in film (and, of course, other processes of mechanical reproduction), and the massive increase in the size of the viewing audience, and hence visibility, through which "[q]uantity has been transmuted into quality." [4] While Heidegger and Benjamin both suggest systems of the image that, in a sense, dominate the world or at minimum our engagement with it, their claims, central contexts to numerous twentieth century theorizations, ultimately arrive at something that at least allows for the possibility of escape from or navigation through visual "conquest": for Heidegger the "shadow" projected beyond the "world picture" through which "the modern world extends itself out into a space withdrawn from representation," (Heidegger, 136) and for Benjamin the masses' "reception in a state of distraction," brought about by film, that marks "profound changes in apperception." (Benjamin 240)

Both of these potential evasions hinge on an absence of perception: Heidegger's "shadow" in excess of representation and Benjamin's "absent-minded" perception (or, as Jonathan Crary further develops it, "suspensions" of perception in which the observer must

[3] Martin Heidegger. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper Collins, 1977, 134.

[4] Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt; Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Shocken Books, 1968, 239.

distract himself in order to concentrate) that ignores, or shuts out, a portion of images.[5] What remains outside the perceptual field of visibility, what slips through perception without truly being processed or recognized, is what we will refer to as the unseen. The unseen terrain lingers within the thought of these two monumental figures (and their legions of influence) as something that must be addressed but not elaborated. For Heidegger, humankind will only know what eludes visual conquest (for him "the incalculable") through "creative questioning and shaping out of the power of genuine reflection"; as such, Heidegger's "incalculable" will remain for future confrontation and, at minimum, project thought beyond the enframing of the world picture. For Benjamin, distraction, "increasing noticeably in all fields of art," like the film that serves as its supreme object for interrogation, "requires no attention"; or, perhaps, cannot yet engage concentration, specifically that required for critical interrogation.

While Heidegger and Benjamin are clearly an unlikely pairing, they arguably form the two essential trajectories for approaching the image, and visual perception itself, in the twentieth century and beyond: namely, the calculation/"enframing" of the future into our image of it and the overwhelming proliferation of images that has come to represent the modern age. The conjunction of the two, perhaps, results in the arguably hopeless position of Horkheimer and Adorno's “The Culture Industry” in which the very proliferation of images is a product of rational calculation and rational calculation, potentially, a product of the proliferation of images. In particular, Horkheimer and Adorno identify "[t]he routine translation of everything, even of what has not yet been thought, into the schema of mechanical reproducibility."[6] Nonetheless,

[5] Jonathan Crary. *Suspensions of Perception*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999, 2-3.

[6] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr; Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford UP, 2002, 100.

what does it mean that Heidegger and Benjamin are both ultimately drawn to something that goes unseen within their elaborations of the modern age's dominant visuality?

In *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Martin Jay suggests that "a great deal of recent French thought in a wide variety of fields is in one way or another imbued with a profound suspicion of vision and its hegemonic role in the modern era."[7] Jay does not restrict his claim to 20th century French thought (American Pragmatism, German Hermeneutics, and Ludwig Wittgenstein are listed as "other examples of a similar attitude") but instead, arguably due to its vast influence on American academia, chooses French thought as a terrain of which he can conduct "a synoptic survey of an intellectual field at some remove from it"; although, clearly, "there is no privileged vantage point outside the hermeneutic circle of sight as perceptual experience, social practice, and discursive construct." (Jay 17 & 587) Nonetheless, Jay maintains that an "essentially ocularphobic," or "antiocularcentric," discourse developed over the course of the 20th century in France (seeping, of course, outside of it), which he derives from the aforementioned "suspicion." (18 & 588)

While compelling in many respects, Jay's tracing of the "antiocularcentrism" of French intellectuals ultimately reveals a desire to reinforce the "power of visuality" and demonstrate that "vision and visuality in all their rich and contradictory variety can still provide us mere mortals with insights and perspectives, speculations and observations, enlightenments and illuminations, that even a god might envy. (594) Indeed, considering Jay's observation that these same intellectuals "were extraordinarily sensitive to the importance of the visual," his sweeping study is potentially reducible to the following phrase: 20th century French thinkers were suspicious of

[7] Martin Jay. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: California UP,1993, 14.

ocularcentrism. (588) Suspicion of vision and visuality, however, does not necessarily equate to "denigration," and, on the contrary, is potentially symptomatic of an acknowledgment of their unparalleled hegemonic status (pointing back to the speculations of Heidegger and the Frankfurt School discussed earlier). Consequently, this suspicion that Jay identifies has often functioned to demonstrate the very "power" of vision and visuality that he seeks to maintain. As such, perhaps the realm of the unseen, and by extension the potentially metaphysical sphere of the unseeable, as it emerges in 20th century thought, does not contribute to a "denigration" of vision, but instead, provides ground for navigating, both in thought and vision, the modern image world.

Moving forward in French theory, the problematic of the unseen remains, to the point of predominance, well into the twenty-first century and into a realm of philosophy far more suspicious of the last hundred years of French discourse than Jay is. In *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux, excising the questions of culture and society that always accompany the interrogation of perception, attempts to think a world (extending outwards into a galaxy, a universe, etc.) before and beyond human perception: the "ancestral," in his terms.[8] Meillassoux, following Alain Badiou's claim that mathematics is ontology—"the science of being qua being[9] —attempts to situate philosophy as a discourse which recognizes that science and mathematics think the unthinkable through calculation's ability to access the primary qualities of things.[10] This

[8] Quentin Meillassoux. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans. Ray Brassier. London and N.Y.: Continuum, 2008, 10.

[9] Alain Badiou. *Being and Event*. Trans. Oliver Feltham. London and N.Y.: Continuum, 2005, 3.

[10] These primary qualities are the inaccessible "thing-in-itself"—referred to with some variation as the *noumenon* and the "transcendental object"—that Kant positions beyond human perception. Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*. For Meillassoux, the Kantian critique of thought within human perception restricts the world within the limits of that perception. He refers to thought enmeshed within the Kantian critique as "correlationism" since, within his reading of the Kantian framework, humans and the world only exist in relation to one another; hence, Meillassoux's attempt to remove subjectivity from thought. Badiou's construction of the subject in generally non-human terms, or perhaps without reliance on or interest in subjectivity, precedes and informs Meillassoux's work.

reality is utterly contingent for Meillassoux, but it is a fact nonetheless. Perception, the horizon within which human being has been bound (at least since Descartes, but especially since Kant) becomes merely a question of secondary qualities that are wholly secondary to truth. One rather large question emerges in response to Meillassoux: what then happens to perception, and specifically visual perception (arguably the dominant sense and clearly the most extensively thought), if it is reduced to mere secondary qualities, and not the traditional secondary qualities that are our only real access to things but perceptions that are superfluous to the thing-in-itself that, according to Meillassoux, can now be thought? And furthermore, what does it mean that thought can exceed perception, the bounds along and within which it has long functioned, without recourse to it (despite the thinking being's restriction within the very perceptions that are thought beyond) especially if, as Rudolf Arnheim claims, "vision is the primary medium of thought"?[11]

—The "Brain-attic"

> "But what about if you're reading and the images are not under your control?"
> Nicholson Baker, *Vox* [12]

It is no surprise that literature and film, two major forces in projecting, framing, generating, and channeling human being's visual engagement with the world that surrounds it, should similarly fixate on and attempt to think what dwells beyond perception. This realm beyond perception, despite its unseen status, must nonetheless receive visual representation, however undefined, in order to become thinkable. Furthermore, it is inevitable that the attempt to

[11] Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*. California UP, 2004, 18.

[12] Nicholson Baker. *Vox*, N.Y.: Random House, 1992, 73.

represent the unseen, which in a sense must always be unrepresentable, results in an endless striving after representation, a demonstration of the fact that something exceeds or escapes representation, a dialogue between the two alternatives in which each results in the other, or, perhaps more adequately, a simultaneity of the two in which both communicate the other. Historically, but especially since the invention of the printing press and its massive increase of read material, literature has always produced visual images in the mind out of a writing that consists of symbolic characters printed/written on a page in which the mental images are not present.[13] To process and think the writing on the page, we conjure mental images in order to represent what the text of characters in combination produce.

A rather odd example of this phenomenon occurs when we read a novel of which we have previously seen, or are aware of, a film adaptation. For example, it is nearly impossible to read either *The Maltese Falcon* or *The Big Sleep* without visualizing Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe, despite his utter incompatibility with the two characters' physical descriptions advanced in the novels.[14] Since we have previous knowledge of or from the films, we already have a mental image of Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, regardless of the relevance of our mind's representation to the text. If such knowledge does not exist, we must construct our own mental image to accompany the words we read. Depending on the range of our imagination and memory, the characters, locations and objects in the texts we read will tend to resemble things and people with which we are already familiar from prior perception of the world around us. These readily available images lurk in our memories like stock photos in a file, filling in for

[13] As Niklas Luhmann suggests, modernity, or at least an observation of it, must "reach[] back to when the printing press came into its own." *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Trans. Kathleen Cross. Stanford UP, 2000, 8.

[14] Hammett describes Sam Spade in his novel's opening paragraph: "He looked rather pleasantly like a blond satan." Dashiell Hammett. *The Maltese Falcon*. New York: Vintage Crime/Black Lizard, 1992, 3.

the image that our mind searches for, and quite possibly, they are already situated in a place from which they can be easily grasped. Sherlock Holmes suggests that "a man should keep his little brain-attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the rest he can put away in the lumber-room of his library, where he can get it if he wants it."[15] As such, the immediately retrievable visual "furniture" stored in the "brain-attic" may very well delimit the boundaries of our imaginative faculties. Indeed, why would the cognitive process exhaust itself by constructing new images, or make the effort of browsing through a "lumber-room," when there are myriad visuals already on hand, however inadequate, from which it can select to represent whatever the text on the page demands that it depict for itself? [16]

The preceding clearly provides a rather reductive account of the functioning of mental imagery, specifically when the mind works in isolation from perceivable objects or engages with abstract concepts. Such a distillation is necessary to illustrate the process through which the mind represents narrative and visual images to itself when they are communicated through a medium that is not perceived pictorially. If the mind thinks visually, even if the process often resembles "hints and flashes," as Arnheim suggests (following Edward B. Titchener), the written words still must produce, or at least align with, some form of image to result in comprehension. (Arnheim 107) [17]

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[15] Arthur Conan Doyle. "The Five Orange Pips." *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. New York: Tor, 1989, 96.

[16] While the functioning of the mental faculties in reading fantastical genres (sci-fi, fantasy, horror, etc.) may appear to contradict our example of the brain-attic, the very same process is nonetheless at work. New imaginative worlds are constructed through the same process of mental visualization out of the same cognitive materials, the difference in thought, if there is one, lies in the combination of images and, perhaps, metaphoric and metonymic association. Unreal worlds are often a mere metonymic slip (through image association) from the presumed "real" world the mind constructs for itself.

[17] The same clearly occurs in everyday verbal communication, but for the present context, we must restrict speculation regarding mental imagery to that produced by the representational phenomenon of the written word, specifically as it traditionally functions within literary production and, to risk generalization, within the sphere of

Two textual techniques for exploiting the unseeability inherent in the transition from the written word to the mental image emerge in the production of Samuel Beckett's *Unnameable* (prominent among other similar occurrences in Beckett) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's construction of the "body without organs" in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Both create an unvisualizable mental image, "the body without an image" as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, through the very process of description in which the mechanism of analogy (or metaphoric or metonymic association), always involved in the correlation of the words we process with the stock of images in our minds, continuously searches for images upon which it can affix the description.[18] Beckett's *Unnameable* toys with the subject/object distinction, and our ability to think either, through the "unnameable's" inability to describe itself as a visualizeable object and, hence, its inability to name itself as either object or subject. This inability nears inherence, as the act of naming itself is presumably contingent upon an anterior description that would affix the unnameable to some type of image, however vague, that would warrant nomination. [19] Therefore, the unnameable must commence its ramble by asking, "Where now? Who now? When now?" [20] Since it cannot relate itself to an image, the unnameable

philosophy that relies on the visualizing mechanism of the cognitive function through revealing itself in the construction of an image.

[18] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minnesota UP, 1983, 8.

[19] Both the unnameable and the body without organs counter the Lacanian primacy of language in unconscious mental functioning. In particular, Deleuze and Guattari deliberately construct the body without organs to resist the symbolic structuring of the imaginary (the realm of images) that Lacan situates in its initial "mirror stage" encounter, while simultaneously disavowing the Freudian organ-based phases of psychosexual development. For Lacan, language structures mental images and their function in thought, for this project, mental images potentially provide the basis for thought and, by extension, language, as in the visual thinking Arnheim theorizes.

[20] Beckett's unnameable also situates itself metaphysically without place, language, or time like the "personal God... outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly" that Lucky "thinks" about in *Waiting for Godot*. N.Y., Grove, 1982, 45. Lucky's "thinking," and by relation the unnameable's ramble, points towards apophatic theology—emerging from Plotinus' Neoplatonism in Pseudo-

remains unnameable and decides to “Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on,” approximating its situation through words selected from the range of possibilities, and concludes by continuing to “go on” describing how it cannot describe itself. (Beckett 285 & 407) Similarly, the “body without organs,” a sort of all-encompassing production of images that escape visualization, “a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid,” emerges as a continuous sequence, or perhaps a simultaneity, of analogies that demand affixation to images that are not among the range of mental images through which we comprehend what we read and see. (Deleuze and Guattari 9) The body without organs functions within the mind as an image without visualization and, as such, we must either represent it to ourselves, somewhat falsely, in correlation with a range of images already possessed within the mind or, perhaps also inaccurately, only think it as something that forever eludes representation. Yet, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, “the body without organs is not the proof of an original nothingness, nor is it what remains of a lost totality.”

While the deployment of both the unnameable and the body without organs deliberately communicate the unseeability inherent in processing the written word into mental imagery, their posturing as unseeable potentially obscures the actual inherence of the unseen in the very process of reading and thinking. The construction of an imageless image partially distracts from the possibility that all writing, specifically literary, prompts the visualization of unseeable images, or, at minimum, images that bear no relation to the words that produce them. Returning to the question posed in the epigraph by the male party in the phone sex dialogue of Nicholson Baker's *Vox*—a text that deliberately presents itself through the production of mental images, both in the

Dionysius and Augustine, but also Aquinas' scholasticism—in which the deity dwells beyond human comprehension.

conversational partners and the perceiving mind outside of it—read images are never wholly under our control; the mind itself constructs them in a manner partially independent of the text and partially independent of the being that thinks.

Arnheim suggests that “[i]t is as though, for the purpose of imagery, a person can call on memory traces the way he calls on stimulus material in direct perception. But since mental images can be restricted to what the mind summons actively and selectively, their complements are often 'amodal,' that is, perceived as present but not visible” (Arnheim 105) We can read Arnheim's claim two ways: first, the image the person calls upon to comprehend the words they read is the unseen "complement" that is "perceived as present"; that is, the "complement" completes the construction of the mental image by pairing the words that are read with the un-visible "memory trace." Or the "amodal" "complements" are the overall range of background images required to perceive the mental image. The "amodal" images emerge relationally in order to situate the primary mental image in context as an image and, as such, are "perceived as present but not visible." The amodal complements would then lurk in the periphery of the seized-upon image, filling in the background through which the object is contextualized as present. The amodal complements populate the perceivable world within the mind, filling out the perceivable world outside of it. Nonetheless, for the present purpose, we must simply observe that both versions of Arnheim's complementary structuring of the mental image are perceivable but unseen, and that the mind "summons" the complement matter, potentially without thought, in the same way the world presents its physical corollary.

—The “Lumber-room”

Friedrich Kittler theorizes that the functioning of mental images in relation to the written word underwent a massive transformation around 1880, when, for him, "poetry turned into literature."[21] Prior to 1880, "[i]t was the passion of all reading to hallucinate meaning between lines and letter: the visible and audible world of Romantic poetics. And the passion of all writing was (in the words of E.T.A. Hoffmann) the poet's desire to 'describe' the hallucinated 'picture in one's mind with all its vivid colors, the light and the shade,' in order to 'strike the gentle reader like an electric shock'." (Kitler 10) Nonetheless, Kittler argues that the harnessing of electrical energy into a functional tool brings about the "media revolution of 1880," following which technology supplements the "hallucination" induced by the written word with mechanically-reproducible recording capabilities. (16) For Kittler, this “media revolution” not only brings about a transformation of the function and cognitive processing of the written word, but also marks an augmentation of the very construction and storage of memory. If, as Kittler suggests, the new recording technologies to some extent supplant the internal mnemonic faculties of the mind, would the workings of thought, previously bound within the same world of mental images as memory, also undergo this transition to externalization in recordings?

The question of the externalization of memory, so essential to formulations of thought concerning new media technologies, and more specifically its presumed replacement of internal memory as imagistic hallucination, is easily traceable to its probable root in the discussion of *hypomnesis* in Plato's *Phaedrus*. While Phaedrus suggests the possibility of a written prosthetic memory that will exceed the capacities of the internal, mental memory, Socrates is quick to point

[21] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Wichael Wurtz. Stanford UP, 1999, 14.

out that such a prosthesis will provide not “a potion for remembering, but for reminding.”[22] For Socrates, the external memory resembles the “lumber-room” of the library where Sherlock Holmes stores information not of immediate necessity to the “brain-attic.” Clearly, new technologies, or new "extensions of man," as Marshall McLuhan puts it, prompt increasing speculation about the supposed reality—whether intentional or, as it appears for Kittler, unavoidable—of recording processes as superior receptacles of human memory.[23]

In 1925, Sigmund Freud in "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'" sets out some of the limitations inherent in such attempts at memory replacement through recording technologies that supposedly function in excess of the capacities of the human mnemonic faculties. While Freud's text arguably precedes the moment, if there is such a thing, of the advent of Heidegger's world picture and the continuous proliferation of images that has often come to mark the 20th century after Benjamin, it nonetheless dwells within the period framed by Kittler's "media revolution of 1880."[24] Yet Freud merely mentions the rise of new media technology, "spectacles, photographic cameras, ear-trumpets," in order to redirect his focus to the functioning of the

[22] Plato. *Phaedrus*. Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995, 275A.

[23] Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 2003.

[24] While photography emerges in the mid-nineteenth century and film follows in the 1880s, Freud's observations appear in 1925, thirteen years prior to Heidegger's world picture" and eleven years prior to Benjamin's theory of mechanical reproduction. Historical perspective on technology, along with its evident developments over time, clearly underlines the seemingly belated appearance of their reactions.

human mental apparatus and its recording of perception.[25,26] He returns from the supposedly exceeding and supplanting capacities of recording technology to the mnemonic faculty that has allegedly been exceeded and supplanted, from the extensions of man to the man who has been extended. In so doing, Freud redirects attention from the spectacle without to the mechanism that must process the spectacle. Freud's reaction indicates that externalized memory, and perhaps by extension externalized perception, must nonetheless display itself within the perceptual and mnemonic faculties that it has supposedly overtaken, and which, consequently, cannot process its mass. In which case, the prosthetic memory, by bringing about an increase in recordability, and hence visibility, would also prompt, in a curious addendum to McLuhan's "fragmenting" of man, a further dissemination of unseen perceptible material wherein the additional capacity of recordability merely expands the range of perceivable content. The widened range of recordability, and hence perceivability, consequently intensifies the gaps between the content that is perceived and the mass of unperceived perceptible material from which it is extracted. Albeit taken from a different context, Benjamin's claim that "[q]uantity has been transmuted into quality" again presents itself as a reality: the quantity of perceptible material far exceeds its

[25] Sigmund Freud. "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'." *General Psychological Theory*. Ed. Philip Rieff. N.Y.: Touchstone, 1997, 208. Thomas Elsaesser has recently reexamined Freud as a "media theorist" in relation to "Mystic Writing Pad" and "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" from 1895, suggesting, "He qualifies as such for a number of reasons, the main one being that he thought of the body/mind as a storage and recording medium as well as an input/output device." Thomas Elsaesser. "Freud as Media Theorist." *Screen* 50:1 Spring 2009, 102. The version of Freud that Elsaesser identifies in these texts, and the Freud examined above, relate well to the discussion of Norbert Wiener that appears below in which perception functions as a feedback system.

[26] Jacques Derrida's analysis of Freud in Archive Fever performs the same operation, delving into the archiving function of the human mind, and the death drive, through the then relatively new phenomenon of email. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago UP, 1996. Heidegger performs a similar maneuver in "The Thing" in which the "shrinking" of "distances in time and space" through technological advancement (airplanes, radios, film and television serving as examples) directs his analysis into humankind's ignorance of what is "[n]ear to us," namely being. *Poetry-Language-Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. N.Y.York: Perennial Classics, 2001, 163-4. Derrida also engages with Freud's "Mystic Writing Pad" in "Freud and the Scene of Writing." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago UP, 1978.

qualitative perception. We then arrive at the reductive and inadequate basis of attempts to posit an externalization of memory—through the pseudo-dialectical, quasi-binary relation between its internal and external components—and the overwhelming visibility of recorded objects that we associate with it. This dyadic birth of technology, and its presumed augmentation of human being's perceptual faculties and mnemonic capabilities, does not necessarily mark a supplantation or addition, but instead furthers the limitations of the visual through its expansion of the realm of the unseen image world out of which the seen must extract itself and on which it must base itself.

Must representational and recording technologies, as a supposed externalization of memory, mark a replacement, or at least an extension, of the mind's traditional mnemonic functioning? Furthermore, does the often theorized proliferation of images in the twentieth century (and following the invention of photography and film more broadly) necessarily bring about the staggering increase in visibility that generally accompanies such theorizations?[27] These two questions are clearly too massive to allow for an adequate answer; the bodies of work which prompt them are so ingrained in thought and all-encompassing in scale as to remain potentially unnavigable, and our current historical perspective far too enmeshed within their framing to even feign temporal or spatial distance. Nonetheless, the problematic of the reality of mnemonic and

[27] Theorizations of the proliferation of images in the twentieth century, arguably, emerge from the Frankfurt school, from Benjamin to Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Englightenment* and Siegfried Krakauer, especially *The Mass Ornament*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Harvard UP, 1995. However, subsequent works in the area are wide ranging, from Susan Sontag's *On Photography* to Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, Fredric Jameson's speculations on the postmodern stimulus world that we must navigate through "cognitive mapping" in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, and W.J.T. Mitchell's elaboration of the "pictorial turn" in *Picture Theory*, among others. Even Michel Foucault's delineation of the "carceral" realm in *Discipline and Punish* largely structures itself as a sphere in which human being conceives of itself as an observed visual image.

visual extension provides an option, through its analysis in defining literary texts of the extended era that raises it, for situating oneself within the question of visual culture.

—This dissertation will explore the proliferation of the unseen in a wide range of novels and short fiction produced within the last hundred years or so, from its localization within specific unperceivable objects to its functioning in the world that surrounds us and the mental apparatus through which we work towards encountering it. Since the written word itself, especially within the context of literature, relies on the image-making processes of the mind, the majority of writers, it would seem, endeavor to construct a visual world—"to make you *see*," as Joseph Conrad proclaims. The history of this image-producing literature is vast and, perhaps, beyond the scope of summary, but we can safely suggest that it enters into the twentieth-century world through the nebulous movements of realism, impressionism, symbolism, and imagism (to name a few) and that the desire to create a visualizeable world permeates the majority of twentieth-century writing (from the most characteristically banal to the most characteristically artistic, and from works generally classified as modern to those generally classified as postmodern). Nonetheless, as elucidated above, the process of visualization operates through the twofold extraction of the seen from the unseen world and the recombinative process of mental image production. This tension is further problematized through the mediation of the two in the written word.

To proceed towards the frontier of the unseen we will examine a range of texts that register and communicate the inevitability of the unseen, not as a mythological or metaphysical transcendence of the visual domination of modernity, but instead as an inherent reality of ontological, phenomenological, epistemological, and technological being-in-the-world. These

texts, furthermore, reveal the world itself—our construction of it and its receding horizon—as something that evades the projecting mechanisms that attempt to structure and construct it, whether the enframing of the world picture, the doubling of mechanical reproduction, or the production of mental images. As we progress through the twentieth-century, from the realm of modernism to that of postmodernism (two fairly nebulous terms), focus shifts from the inevitable unseen object to the recorded visual object that similarly evades the field of vision and the technological doubling of the world that merely extends the terrain of the unseen instead of rendering the world as visible. The mental depiction of the world must necessarily move forward to the world's depiction of itself through visual media.

As the twentieth century began, the production of literature was delineated as the production of the image. In his famed preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Joseph Conrad posits his intent as a writer of narrative fiction: "My task, which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything."[28] Fredric Jameson refers to Conrad's claim as "the declaration of the independence of the image as such," and the image, in this case, is the perceptually prompted mental visualization produced by the written word.[29] Yet, as Jameson observes, the images that Conrad constructs, within the mind of the "you" that he will inspire to "*see*," are reconfigurations of perceptible material, internal "objects of perception" collected from the "objective fragmentation of the outside world." For Jameson, these "transformations of

[28] Joseph Conrad. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* N.Y.: Doubleday, 1914, 14. While Conrad's declaration precedes the dawn of the twentieth century, it clearly frames his twentieth century visions, specifically *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, that interest Jameson and, perhaps, most adequately embody the visualization of the unseen that will proceed.

[29] Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornell UP, 1981, 232.

the world into images must always be marked as the reunification of data which were originally chaotic or fragmentary." (Jameson 233) Conrad's assemblage of mental images then involves collecting fragments of the objective world and recombining them into his image which, to "make you *see*," must result in a similar process of reconstruction in the mind of anyone reading his texts. This process requires a "reunification" in the perceiving mind, through which the previously perceived fragments of the objective world cohere into the object that is Conrad's projected image. These images emerge from the merging of presently perceived material with the wealth of material stored in the brain-attic. Jameson further suggests that, through the image-making process of "Conrad's sensorium," "the senses become foregrounded as a theme in their own right, as content rather than as form." (Jameson 239)[30] Yet, as we will determine in Chapter One, the very "foreground[ing]" of the senses ultimately functions to examine the limitations through which they operate.

In his preface to *The Ambassadors*, Henry James remarks that the "business" of his novel is a "demonstration" of the primary character Strether's "process of vision," a manifestation of the reality that "he now at all events *sees*."[31] While the "process of vision" to which James refers indicates Strether's realizations regarding the "mistakes" of his life up to the present of the text, James insists on the visual component, or perhaps the visual basis and functioning, of this realization to the point of identifying it as "the image," an "image" presented nearly as a physical object, that he "take[s] ...over" from a friend "exactly as [he] happened to have met it."

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[30] Jameson transitions to Conrad's elaboration of the "theme" of the auditory realm, particularly as it emerges in *Nostromo*. Nonetheless, the visual remains of primary concern in the present work for reasons previously developed: namely, the visual makeup of thought and its inherence in all perceptual processes. The visual also remains indispensable to Jameson's analysis, since the very perceptual mechanism of "Conrad's sensorium" remains in visual terms throughout his articulation of its audibility.

[31] Henry James. *The Ambassadors*. N.Y.: Penguin, 2003, 34.

Nonetheless, "the image" of *The Ambassadors*, as James comes into possession of it, emerges verbally through the friend as "a thing or two said to him by a man of distinction." James constructs his mental image of the "process of vision" from a second-degree verbal relay entirely devoid of objectively perceptible visual content. From this relayed "image," in order to unfold the "business" of his novel, James will "project upon that wide field of the artist's vision—which hangs there ever in place like the white sheet suspended for the figures of a child's magic lantern—a more fantastic and more moveable shadow." (*Ambassadors* 236-7)

Yet, as we well know, the works of both Conrad and James are seldom characterized as productive of the exuberant, enlightening visions the two describe. Rather, both writers are known for their obscuration of events and, hence, their obscuration of the "process of vision" or, more precisely, of the image-making construction of perception itself. Chapter One, "The "Task" and "Business" of Seeing: Conrad, James and the Unseen World of the Novel" engages with Conrad's *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* and what is generally considered "Late James," specifically from *The Spoils of Poynton* through the trilogy that concludes with *The Golden Bowl*, to suggest that the mind's visual functioning—which Conrad and James set out as the goal of narrative fiction—constructs itself in response to feedback from the phenomenological horizons that ground it. As such, these two major novelists suggest that the modern novel functions to explore the limits of perception.

Chapter 2 "Ice-bergs and Other Moments of Exception" explores how the unseen shapes two more theorizations of modern writing: Ernest Hemingway's "ice-berg" of omission and Virginia Woolf's "moments of being." Hemingway elaborates a theory of writing, and the construction of a cognitively perceptual world, through which the extant matter of the text is merely the focused-upon frontier beyond which remains an unperceived territory that far exceeds, both in scale and significance, the grasp of the realm that the writer somewhat

arbitrarily grapples to delimit. This unseen world beyond the text falls away from it like the world that surrounds an object focused on in visual perception. By omitting the ice-berg, in reality, a writer omits everything that surrounds his text, everything unknown and unperceived out of which it forms itself. Therefore, the construction of the text itself is contingent upon everything it has, by selecting its focus, chosen not to see and not simply by what the writer, out of his range of knowledge, has chosen to omit. The visualization that the text produces is merely one volume selected from an unquantifiable lumber-room of the unseen. Similarly, Woolf reveals the contingency of the perceptual construction of prose (in the mind of the writer and, subsequently, in the minds that visualize it through reading) in her well-known formulation of "moments of being."[32] Woolf suggests that, "[t]he real novelist" must communicate both being and non-being. In doing so, she must also represent the perceived and the unperceived, within both direct and mnemonic perception. Although Woolf, in relation to her own status as a novelist, claims "I have never been able to do both," in the "Time Passes" section of *To The Lighthouse* and in much of *Jacob's Room*, she comes as near to inhabiting non-being and approaching the bounds of perception as any other writer of modern literature.

The following chapters function as case studies of three different ways in which the unseen factors in major twentieth-century novels: obscenity, fraudulence, and unseeable films. Chapter 3, "The Unseen and the Obscene in *Ulysses*," rethinks obscenity in modernism through the term's derivation from the Greek theatrical *skene,* meaning "off -stage" or, by extension, unseen. Instead of approaching obscenity through the excess of visibility commonly associated with it or through its sociohistorical framing, this chapter explores a pronounced inability to

[32] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*. Sussex UP, 1976, 69-70.

visually perceive the genitalia (the objects on which censorship tends to focus) in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Classified as obscene in his day, Joyce demonstrates the distance of the immediate, the farness of the near that eludes the eye's focus, in the well-known urination scene that precedes Stephen Dedalus' departure from *Ulysses*. The inability to perceive Leopold Bloom's genitalia, "rendered invisible by manual circumposition," unhinges Stephen's theologically constructed perceptual apparatus and inscribes the limits of his visual world.[33] For Joyce, the imperceptible bounds of and terrain within the immediate are an inherent qualification of the "ineluctable modality of the visible," and Stephen's failure to recognize this ineluctabilty marks his need to move on—out of the novel (*Ulysses* 3.1).

Chapter 4, "Nabokov's Caged Apes," takes Stanley Cavell's claim that "'the threat of fraudulence' [is] endemic to modern art" as its starting point in order to delve into the question of authenticity, and its visual manifestation, in Vladimir Nabokov's mid-century novels *Despair*, *Lolita*, and *Pale Fire*.[34] Cavell suggests an interplay between "fraudulence" and "trust" that troubles both the creation and reception of modern art. This chapter explores how a large percentage of Nabokov criticism is heavily invested in trusting Nabokov's intentions as a writer, specifically in relation to morality and a perceptible strand of cruelty in his works. Such criticism often reads Nabokov's novels through interviews and anecdotes in order to provide clear, perceptible truths that the texts themselves largely deny: in essence, constructing a fraudulent version of Nabokov and his work. To counter these readings, this chapter examines how the very structure of Nabokov's novels functions to investigate the problem of distinguishing between

[33] James Joyce. *Ulysses*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler. N.Y.: Vintage, 1986, 17.1186-90 & 17.1203. (citation by chapter and line number)

[34] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge UP, 1976, 188.

false representation and some assumed, and abstract, realm of authenticity. His works force us to contemplate how we distinguish the "real" from the "fake" when we are unable to see the difference between them without providing any sort of solution to this quandary. "Nabokov's Caged Apes" examines Nabokov's presumably fictitious "inspiration" for *Lolita* to suggest that the respective "caged ape" narrators of these three novels, in part through their shared claims to photographic, or eidetic, memory, communicate a visually fraudulent picture of the worlds they inhabit.[35] These fraudulent pictures are similarly reflected and refracted in the *doppelgänger* motifs that Nabokov himself claimed to have found "a frightful bore."[36]

Chapter 5, "The World Outside the World," explores the topic of the unseen film—whether in the context of the novel itself or in the mind that encounters it from outside the text—that permeates many of the often massive "postmodern" novels that emerge in the last thirty or so years of the twentieth-century, specifically Don DeLillo's *Underworld*.[37] Perhaps as an attempt to save itself from obsolescence, the novel acknowledges the possibility that vision presented by film and other recorded media carries with it the possibility of a lack of vision. In *Underworld*, DeLillo constructs unveilings of previously unseeable films—a fictitious "lost" Eisenstein film called "Underworld" and the legally unwatchable-in-reality Rolling Stones film *Cocksucker Blues*—as unsuccessful attempts to recover suppressed (and repressed) history

[35] Vladimir Nabokov. *The Annotated Lolita*. N.Y.: Vintage, 1991, 311.

[36] Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*. N.Y. Vintage, 1990, 83.

[37] The unseen (and unseeable) film is featured in classic "postmodern" texts, such as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Joseph McElroy's *Lookout Cartridge*, and Don DeLillo's *Running Dog*, as well as more recent works including David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, and James Ellroy's *The Cold Six-Thousand*. This incessant preoccupation with the limitations of visual recording suggests that while the novel's communication of the unseen remains pronounced into the twenty-first century, the novel continues to grapple with its inability "to make you *see*," a quality that, in itself, allows it to represent film's inadequacy.

through the contingency of its recording. DeLillo contrasts these unwatchable films with the randomly captured on video "Texas Highway Killer" murders interspersed throughout the novel (ostensibly evidence of the impossibility of the world escaping its recording). This contrast suggests that the visual world of film and other recorded media carries with it an inevitable lack of vision and, in effect, expands the territory of the unseen instead of increasing our visual apprehension of the world.

CHAPTER ONE

The "Task" and "Business" of Seeing: Conrad, James and the Unseen World of the Novel

"As to seeing anything it was out of the question"
—*Nostromo,* Joseph Conrad[38]

"I must add that while I resorted to such measures not to see I only fixed what I *had* seen, what I did see, the more in my mind."
—*The Sacred Fount,* Henry James[39]

As the twentieth century began, Joseph Conrad and Henry James both defined the production of literature as the production of images. In his famed preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus*," Conrad posits his intent as a writer of narrative fiction: "My task, which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything."[40] In his New York Edition preface to *The Ambassadors,* written around 1906, James—seemingly continuing his visual elaboration of the artistic process that dates at least back to his 1884 essay "The Art of Fiction"—remarks that the "business" of his novel is a "demonstration" of its protagonist Lambert Strether's "process of vision," a manifestation of the reality that "he now at all events *sees*."[41] Despite their claims to produce enlightening visions, whether in an assumed audience or

[38] Joseph Conrad. *Nostromo*. N.Y.: Penguin, 1983, 237.

[39] Henry James. *The Sacred Fount*. N.Y.: Penguin, 1994, 55.

[40] Joseph Conrad. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus*." N.Y.: Doubleday, 1914, 14. While Conrad's declaration precedes the dawn of the twentieth century, it clearly frames his twentieth century visions, specifically *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, that, perhaps, most adequately embody the visualization of the unseen that will proceed. Bracketing off the area of inquiry with the dawn of the twentieth century is both arbitrary and essential. The essentiality of this arbitrariness, however, rectifies itself in the shifts deeper into obscurity—in form and content—through which these two enter the century.

[41] Henry James. *The Ambassadors*. N.Y. Penguin, 2003, 34. In "The Art of Fiction," James asserts that a great literary artist possesses "The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things," a claim that arguably finds its inverse in James' late works, in which one, it seems, must attempt to extract the seen from the

the novel's protagonist, both Conrad and James continuously obscure the visual process and, in addition, confound the production of knowledge through visual perception.[42] Seeing, as these two describe it, will appear in Conrad's entrance into the twentieth century—specifically *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*—and in what we traditionally refer to as "Late James," as he begins the twentieth-century with *The Sacred Fount* and his three large novels that conclude with *The Golden Bowl*. If seeing is a "process of vision," it is, in most basic terms, the visual apprehension of the world as a perceiving being moves through space and time and, as James appears to suggest, a sequence of perceptions that leads to a realization. Conrad and James, however, in two of their greatest works, situate perceiving beings against blank horizons that confound the capabilities of visual perception. In *The Wings of the Dove*, James' Milly Theale will "turn her face to the wall," refusing sight itself along with the visual observation of the novel's social world.[43] Whereas in *Nostromo*, Conrad abandons Charles Decoud on an island where he is "swallowed up in the immense indifference of things," overwhelmed by his inability to see anything in or on the expansive horizon of his visible world (*Nostromo* 416). We will return to these two images that deny sight near the chapter's conclusion to find that the orienting vision of the novel itself proves unable to situate itself in relation to its limits and that these two monolithic writers, despite their pronouncements, attempt to communicate where sight ends.

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unseen. *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers.* N.Y.: The Library of America, 1984, 53.

[42] Conrad and James are well known and well developed as obscure writers. For example, Allon White identifies them as two of the main figures in the transition from nineteenth-century realism into what he characterizes as the obscurity of modernism in *The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism* London: Routledge, 1981.White identifies the obscurity of Conrad and James mainly on a linguistic level—semantic and syntactic. In contrast, the present study moves their obscurity into the realm of vision, towards what we refer to as the unseen: what remains outside the perceptual field of visibility, what slips through perception without truly being processed or recognized, and the distinctions the mind makes for itself that determines whether or not it has seen.

[43] Henry James. *The Wings of the Dove*. N.Y.: Penguin, 2008, 436.

Following his pronouncement that he will "make you *see*," Conrad adds that "If I succeed, you shall find there . . . all you demand; and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask."[44] Furthermore, his "task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes and in the light of a sincere mood." Reading the Conrad that follows *The Nigger of the "Narcissus*," however, one finds it difficult to imagine if he himself could enter into this "sincere mood," offer a "glimpse of truth," or provide the sort of clarifying vision he suggests that he intends to furnish for his audience.[45] Conrad's work itself clearly complicates the seemingly obvious pronouncements of his oft-quoted preface.

Fredric Jameson refers to Conrad's "task" of "mak[ing] you *see*" as "the declaration of the independence of the image as such," and the image, in this case, is the perceptually prompted mental visualization produced by the written word.[46] Yet, as Jameson observes, the images that Conrad constructs, within the mind of the "you" that he will inspire to "*see*," are reconfigurations of perceptible material ("rescued fragment[s]" in Conrad's terms), internal "objects of

[44] Ian Watt nicely sets out the critical history that surrounds Conrad's pronouncement, its relation to the Jamesian narrative strategy, and the various meanings of "see" inherent in it: "The force of the word 'make' is worth nothing; one of the characteristics of Conrad's fiction is the sense we get of a steady narrative pressure to make us look from a particular point of view. The later renown of Conrad's formula, however, probably arose in part because it chimed with the post-Jamesian emphasis on narrative as showing rather than telling, and in part because of the formula's note of resonant finality which derives from the richly persuasive connotations of the word 'see'; these obviously include the perception not only of visual impressions, but of ideas, as in 'to see the point,' and even of spiritual truths, as in 'a seer'." *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. California UP, 1979, 83

[45] As Janice Ho suggests, "Instead of making the reader hear and see as he claims to want to do, Conrad seems to be systematically preventing us from hearing and seeing through a style that eschews concrete sensory experience in favor of the abstract, the paradoxical, the negative, and the indistinct." "The Spatial Imagination and Literary Form of Conrad's Colonial Fictions." *Journal of Modern Literature* 30.4 (2007) 6.

[46] Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornell UP, 1981, 236. "The declaration of the independence of the image as such," as Jameson reads it, potentially echoes the Declaration of Independence in projecting the historical and sociopolitical bounds of the novel as it enters the twentieth-century which are Jameson's main concern in his chapter on Conrad.

perception" collected from the "objective fragmentation of the outside world." For Jameson, these "transformations of the world into images must always be marked as the reunification of data which were originally chaotic or fragmentary" (233). Conrad's assemblage of mental images, then, involves gathering perceptible matter from an "outside" world of diffuse fragments into a coherent vision. If he is to "make you *see*," a similar process of reconstruction must take place in the mind that perceives his text. This process requires another "reunification" in the perceiving mind, through which previously taken in fragments of the "outside" world are again "rescued" into Conrad's projected image. Perception itself, it would seem, is an act of redemption: a construction of data arbitrarily extracted from an unquantifiable world of perceptible material from which it is indistinguishable. In this sense then, Conrad's unenlightening vision aligns with Joseph Vogl's characterization of the post-Gallilean visual world in which "every visibility is surrounded by an ocean of invisibility. Everything visible remains contingent, forever encompassed by the imperceptible and the unknown."[47] Jameson further suggests that, through the image-making process of "Conrad's sensorium," "the senses become foregrounded as a theme in their own right, as content rather than as form" (Jameson 239). Yet, as we will subsequently determine, the very "foreground[ing]" of the senses ultimately

[47] Joseph Vogl. "Becoming-media: Galileo's Telescope." Trans. Brian Hanrahan. *Grey Room* (2007) No. 29, 18. Vogl compelling argues that Galileo's invention of the telescope reconfigures thought on visual perception, and, perhaps, produces modernity itself through the "becoming-media" of vision: "Since Galileo, changes in vision cannot be understood in terms of given, natural vision: what the eye sees is now itself understood to be a construction. The eye is no longer the reliable organ of Aristotelian world-disclosure. What the eye sees is deception as much as it is truth. Vision has lost its status as natural evidence. The telescope is more than an auxiliary instrument. To the extent that it becomes a theoretical object, to the extent that it presents itself as constructed theory, it cracks open the world of natural vision. From now on, vision is denatured." In their recent collection *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media*, Robert Mitchell and Jacques Khalip indicate that we should "understand images as something other than simply representations, simulations, or copies of other things, and interpret them as aesthetic modes of manifestation that can be understood only with reference to both that which becomes visible in the image and that which is simultaneously rendered invisible," and insist on a phenomenologically derived "common conceptualizing of the image as that which contains the unseen in what is visible" (4).

functions to reveal the limitations through which they operate and that vision is always, in Vogl's terms, "encompassed by" the "imperceptible and the unknown."

Returning to James, we find an equally complex version of the image. The "process of vision" that catalyzes *The Ambassadors* is Lambert Strether's realization that he has largely wasted his life as he takes in the artistic qualities of the Parisian lifestyle from which he initially desires to rescue his future son-in-law, Chad Newsome. James refers to the centrality of this realization as "the image" of his novel, a phrase which situates the realization, ostensibly, as a visual perception (albeit one communicated verbally). In his preface, James presents this "image" nearly as a physical object that he "take[s] ...over" from a friend "exactly as [he] happened to have met it." This "image" presents itself to James in a manner similar to that of "the germ of a 'story'" and "the virus of suggestion" that he claims to receive and expand into *The Spoils of Poynton*.[48] Although, in the case of *The Ambassadors*, he does not situate the object of the text as a metaphoric contamination, or a "mere floating particle in the stream of talk," but presents it as simply "the image": an object of perception. "[T]he image" of *The Ambassadors*, as James comes into possession of it, emerges verbally through the friend as "a thing or two said to him by a man of distinction."[49] James constructs his mental image of the "process of vision" from a second-degree verbal relay entirely devoid of objectively perceptible visual content. From this relayed image, in order to unfold the "business" of his novel, James

[48] Henry James. *The Spoils of Poynton*. N.Y.: Penguin, 1987, 23. The germ of *The Spoils of Poynton* is "a good lady . . . at daggers drawn with her only son . . . over the ownership of the valuable furniture of a fine old house just accruing to the young man by his father's death (23 -24)." Since this is Henry James, the daggers, of course, are wholly verbal. James also refers to "the image" of *The Ambassadors* as a "germ" and the basis of *The Wings of the Dove* as "the image" in its preface. In that instance, beyond the image "would be all the picture of the struggle involved (3)."

[49] The association of "the image" with William Dean Howells is well known and not of particular interest in the present context. The transmission of "the image" is important in that James' prefaces often characterize the text itself as if it originates outside of him.

will "project upon that wide field of the artist's vision—which hangs there ever in place like the white sheet suspended for the figures of a child's magic lantern—a more fantastic and more moveable shadow" (*Ambassadors* 36-37).[50] The reworking of the intricacies of Plato's cave here is nearly too obvious to mention: the "artist's vision" is a "field" in which "moveable shadows" are displayed before the cave-dwelling reading public, delighted like children by the entertainment moving across the screen of its mind.[51] While James seemingly desires an enlightening "process of vision" to emerge through Strether, his articulation of his "artist's vision" suggests that this very "process of vision" might consist of nothing but "moveable shadows" from which only a pale projection of the world is visible.

—Evacuated "Moments of Vision" and the Horizons of Perception

Instead of enlightening visions, then, Conrad and James both obscure events and, hence, the image-making construction of perception itself. Their works more adequately embody a process of obscuration than a "process of vision." Jameson identifies Jim's leap from the *Patna*—the central event in *Lord Jim*—as an evacuation of the "moment[] of vision": "The 'event' in *Lord Jim* is the analysis and dissolution of the event" (Jameson 257). In this

[50] "The artist's vision," as James describes it, also inevitably relates to his numerous attempts to align the novel with painting, both in terms of technique and product, and discussion of his works in relation to impressionism. Though essential to thought on James and visuality, his thought on painting—particularly the specifics of his metaphoric alignment of it with the novel—only pertain to the present work in that they provide another perspective on James' insistence on the novel as a visual process. The static, representational status of painting, despite the intentions of impressionist and post-impressionist painters, relates to the visual functioning of the mind in a manner that diverges from the process of perception we elaborate: painting provides an object of perception or a projection of it.

[51] Plato's Cave is not an uncommon reference in James. For example, in *The Sacred Fount*, the narrator, in the midst of discussing his speculations, remarks to his friend Ford Obert, "Your image is splendid. . . your being out of the cave," suggesting that he has properly grasped the reality beyond appearances. Furthermore, he later observes that Mrs. Brissenden, presumed feeder at a sacred fount, referencing Mrs. Server, a presumed sacred fount depleted by another's feeding, "relegate[es]" her "to the realm of dim shades" (*Sacred* 131 & 144).

unencounterable event of *Lord Jim*, Conrad does not "make you see," he removes the possibility of vision by "dissol[ving]" the event itself. Yet, the absence of perception functions to generate the narrative that inevitably fails to approach the evacuated moment, the unperceivable itself producing Conrad's "sensorium." We will refer to this "dissol[ved]" event, and others like it, as the unseen core of the modern novel.[52] The text lacks an essential component of its narrative world, around which it pivots and through which we must comprehend it, as Ian Watt notes: "the mystery of the event is made vividly real to us." [53] Consequently, *Lord Jim* is unperceivable as a totality, but largely as a result of Conrad's moment of obscurity. Whereas in James' elaboration of Strether's "process of vision," what Strether "at all events *sees*" is that, in truth, he has not seen anything. He recognizes his place in Plato's cave, but he does not emerge from it, and even if he did, the world, presumably, would remain obscure and, perhaps, he would find himself in yet another cave. That Strether has failed to see becomes clear in retrospect, for although, during Strether's supposed instance of seeing, the narrator observes "all vagueness vanished. It was the click of a spring—he saw the truth," we subsequently learn that he most certainly has not (since at this point in the narrative he sees a relation between Chad and Jeanne de Vionnet instead of her mother, Marie; he, of course, subsequently discovers that relationship) (*Ambassadors* 217). Unless, of course, the truth that he sees is the truth of the limits of what he can see.

[52] Following Conrad, who also constructs *The Secret Agent* around a similarly obscured event (and even *Nostromo* as to some extent a sequence of inadequate retrospective accounts of events), examples of the technique abound. From the Marabar Caves of Forster's *A Passage to India* to the presumed emasculation of Jake Barnes that precedes Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (see Chapter 2), the unseen event grounds numerous wide-ranging texts. Yet, the present work will subsequently demonstrate that this textual lack functions as a convenient structural technique instead of as an adequate method for describing the world.

[53] Watt adds that Conrad's technique of creating the event as mystery "is really a case of decoding doubly delayed and doubly denied. This ostentatious denial of our expectation . . . prepares us for the ultimately inexplicable mystery of how the occurrence affected the rest of Jim's life" (272).

The truth of the limits of perception is what Jameson articulates that Conrad depicts to such great effect in *Nostromo* in which "the entire sensory apparatus has been fore-grounded, and the very experience of perception itself heightened to the point at which it touches its own outer limit and causes its own outer edge in the nonperceivable to rise before us" (Jameson 241). Furthermore, Conrad's sensorium presents "the figure of that contrary of perception against the background of which alone perception can be vivid and upon which it can inscribe its intensities. The realm of nonperception must be a heightened form of perception in its own right, a realm of heightened yet blank intensity." While Jameson suggests that Conrad's elaboration of the "theme" of the auditory realm most fully reveals the bounds of the sensible, particularly as it emerges in *Nostromo*, the visual remains of primary concern in the present work since Conrad's engagement with it extends far beyond the thematic by dictating the novel's form and content. The visual register is further indispensable since the very perceptual mechanism of "Conrad's sensorium" that Jameson elaborates remains in visual terms throughout his articulation of its audibility.

Conrad's depiction of the auditory in *Nostromo* generally functions to expound the absence of vision, as evident when Martin Decoud awaits the return of Nostromo prior to their attempt to smuggle the Gould Concession's silver off the coast of Sulaco (the central event, or more accurately, non-event around which *Nostromo* revolves). Decoud—"the man with no faith in anything except the truth of his own sensations"—observes something manifest from nothing, sound initially marking its visual absence:

> Looking out of the window, Decoud was met by a darkness so impenetrable that he could see neither the mountains nor the town, nor yet the buildings near the harbour; and there was not a sound, as if the tremendous obscurity of the Placid Gulf, spreading from the

> waters over the land, had made it dumb as well as blind. Presently Decoud felt a light tremor of the floor and a distant clank of iron. A bright white light appeared, deep in the darkness, growing bigger with a thundering noise (*Nostromo* 209).

As the train appears, and passes, from and into the "darkness so impenetrable," Decoud perceives the sound of the train initially and then the "grow[th]" of light out of it. Sound without vision drives the mind to form an image of what produces it, reemphasizing its position beyond the bounds of sight: the sonic "tremor" and "clank" ground the train's image in Decoud's mind before it arrives. In Conrad's world, the imperceptible horizon of the sensible intensifies the perceptual functioning of the sensory apparatus, providing the "background" upon which the mind can construct its impressions. The "nonperceivable" unveils itself, already "hang[ing] there ever in place," like "the wide field of the artist's vision" that James projects upon, providing a basis on which the perceptual process of the text can take place. In its inability to project beyond its horizons, the sensorium focuses itself within them, situating itself somewhat arbitrarily on its unperceivable surroundings, intensifying its sensation within the range of focus. For, as Vogl, suggests, "every visibility is surrounded by an ocean of invisibility."

Nonetheless, vision also constitutes itself on its limits on a much smaller scale in the very attempt to absorb the ostensibly perceptible world of its immediate surroundings. Norbert Wiener delineates the essentiality of boundaries to the image-producing process of the "visual-muscular feedback system" that functions through positioning itself in response to its limits and redistributing them.[54] Wiener explains the workings of peripheral vision in the "orientation" of visual stimulus for the construction of mental images: "we tend to bring any object that attracts

[54] Norbert Wiener. *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. M.I.T. Press, 1961, 134-5.

our attention into a standard position and orientation, so that the visual image which we form of it varies within as small a range as possible." Yet, as he elaborates," the chief function of the peripheral fibers is not so much vision itself as a pickup for the centering and focusing-directing mechanism of the eye." The peripheral "pickup[s]" reorient the visual field, shifting focus to what was previously its periphery, driving the previous object or space of perceptual attention into a newly receding periphery, placing it as an unseen background context for the present range of vision, a boundary that it distinguishes itself from. For Wiener, these peripheral pickups, like the boundaries of the sensible Jameson identifies in Conrad, are heightened regions of perception in which nebulously visual feedback, largely unseen, directs the eye to vision: "We thus find that the eye receives its most intense impression at boundaries, and that every visual image in fact has something of the nature of a line drawing" (Wiener136).

If the visual image, as Wiener suggests, functions similarly to a "line drawing," the frame that delimits the image is largely what we see, what we think of as the actual image the product of its frame. Wiener's metaphoric depiction of visual impressions aligns with his observation of the eye's heightened perception at its boundaries, emphasizing the necessary relationship between the seen material within the frame of focus and the unseen material outside of it. While the line drawing presumably appears on a blank page, which ostensibly suggests an absence of perception, the blankness itself reveals the indistinguishable status of perceptible matter prior to the focusing work of the peripheral nerve fibers. Visual perception, then, is a process of distinction: a distinction that focuses the eye—a continuation of previous processes of focus that have filled out the mental context through which the eye perceives—further delimits the bounds of the seen world, not in relation to actual perceptible matter (or the world itself from which it is seemingly extracted), but in its own construction of the world that the perception in question

expands. In this sense, our visual perception supports Niklas Luhmann's claim that "the world is not an object but is rather a horizon, in the phenomenological sense. It is, in other words, inaccessible."[55] Beyond phenomenology, this continuously retreating visual world surrounds human being as it attempts to ground itself cognitively, ontologically, and socially through and in relation to its perceptual faculties. It is precisely this inaccessibility of the world that James' late works and the Conrad of *Nostromo* work towards approaching. Both, however, appear to reach the conclusion that human existence itself is dependent on its situation on the horizons of others' perception, suggesting that the phenomenological and ontological are contingent upon social observation. The respective fates of Milly Theale and Charles Decoud indicate that without being seen we cease to be, or, more specifically, we cease to orient ourselves in relation to the world. Before approaching this conclusion, we must first sketch out a trend in modern novel writing that, in these two instances, Conrad and James move beyond.

—The "Dissol[ved] Event" and the Banality of Events in Novels

In general terms, the modern novel tends to reduce the "blank intensity" that Jameson identifies to an unexperienced event. In these texts, the unseen world is not an inaccessible horizon, as Luhmann indicates, but rather a gap within a largely accessible world (or, perhaps, merely something unrecorded in the midst of everything else that has been recorded). While these sorts of lapses in accessibility often result in what we think of as the obscurity of

[55] Niklas Luhmann. *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Trans. Kathleen Cross. Stanford UP, 2000, 6. Luhmann elsewhere suggests that "In order to observe the world as an object, one would have to *indicate* the world as distinguished from something else; one would have to presuppose a metaworld containing the world and its other. What functions as world in each case resists observation—as does the observing observation." *Art as a Social System.* Trans. Eva M. Knodt. Stanford UP, 2000, 57.

modernism, they instead falsely indicate that the world is in fact a perceptible continuum, excepting, of course, a few minor omissions. On a purely structural level, Conrad's *Lord Jim* functions in this manner: if we could experience Jim's leap from the *Patna* (a "moment of vision" instead of an unseeable moment), we would understand how Jim, as Marlowe several times repeats, "was one of us."[56] Jim's elusiveness, therefore, emerges not from a continuous, or even a transitory unperceivability, but from a mere absence—a brief gap—within the narrative. Jim's obscurity surrounds and grounds itself upon this "dissolved event" and, potentially, distracts us from the "blank intensity" that pervades not only Conrad's text, but the entirety of perceptual, and hence visual, being.

The unseen core of the modern novel provides the basis for a wide ranging psychoanalytic and quasi-deconstructionist interpretations of texts in which the revelation is the lack of a revelation. As such, it appears that the representative modern novel,[57] *Lord Jim* or E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* for example, forces us to encounter it around this supposed "hard kernel of the Real"[58]: Jim's leap from the *Patna* and the occurrence in Forster's Marabar Caves (what is perceived as sexual assault) construct the narrative world around their unperceivable centrality. The event that structures the novel, in its reality in the text, however, was not always inaccessible. Jim, the *Patna's* captain, and several other crew members were all present for the "hard kernel of the Real," although Jim alone knows the intent of his actions. Only in retrospect

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[56] Joseph Conrad. *Lord Jim*. N.Y.: Penguin, 1995, 100.

[57] "Modern novel" is clearly a rather vague term. In the present context, the term encapsulates novels that we consider modern, or even modernist, but not, it would appear, high-modernist (another vague term) as they maintain a structural coherence that, presumably, positions them beneath its bounds.

[58] See Slavoj Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. N.Y.: Verso, 1989, 47. Žižek's elaboration of the "hard kernel of the Real" is obviously more complex than its literary deployment alluded to above, but the present work calls into question the Lacanian emphasis on lack and, consequently, its association with the Real. The "hard kernel of the Real" functions as an easy tag for this Lacanian fixation on the irreducible remnant.

is the event dissolved through the crew's dispersal prior to Jim's trial. When approaching *Lord Jim*, we often forget that the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* informs us that "to [Marlowe] the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illuminations of moonshine."[59] It would seem, therefore, that Jim's leap, such an obvious "kernel" in both the production and consumption of the novel, reveals far less that the "misty halos" that manifest the imperceptibility that surrounds it. Similarly, Adela Quested's recognition of her own incapability to perceive the echo of Forster's Marabar Caves positions her absence of perception, and all of its effects in the narrative world, as the dissolved event around which the text builds itself. The emphasis on a residue or remainder—the absent yet defining component of the textual realm—obscures the possibility that perception itself potentially appears like a residue on the world of the unseen, or specks of vision plucked capriciously from an unperceivable background. It is not missing fragments of an otherwise accessible world that obfuscate our perception of it, but the flickers of the senses that manifest the illusion that the world (both in and outside of the novel) is in fact perceptible.

Unperceived events, in James, are precisely what the text does not build itself around. In fact, the event itself, or what a novel would ordinary construct as an event, is not worth dissolving since, in a sense, if presented, it would be perceivable. An event in the Jamesian world, it seems, merely reveals itself in its banality, undeserving of register in the novel's functioning. This sort of banality, unremarkable in its inessential absence while strangely accessible through its status as convention, populates James' oeuvre. Marriage, only deserving of

[59] Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. Peterbororough, Ontario and New York: Broadview, 1999, 70.

approach through the manipulations—perceptible and imperceptible—that precede and follow it, emerges as the supreme event of banality within the arguably banal world that James constructs. While beyond our historical scope, *The Portrait of a Lady* includes within itself the ineffectual absent event of marriage, passed over in silence because it is so easy to speak of and, more importantly, visualize.[60] James scatters these passed over marriages throughout various works, including those that begin and end his late period, *The Spoils of Poynton* and *The Golden Bowl* which ignores the ceremony of the two marriages it revolves around. Death, the classic producer of mystery in human life and literature, similarly inserts itself in late James through its inexperienceable banality: James does not omit Milly Theale's death from *The Wings of the Dove* to shroud it in mystery, he passes over it nearly unremarked because the event of death, surprisingly representable in literature, lacks the interplay of observational faculties through which his textual world builds itself.[61] The collision of these two supreme banalities, never depicted in the bounds of the text due to their representability, is the seeming ur-banality of church—where people force others to go when they die or get married—an institutional event that James continuously focuses on people not attending.[62]

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[60] In contrast to the concluding demand of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*—"What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence"—James must always pass over what he can speak of in silence. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. London and New York: Routledge, 1975, 89.

[61] Death, philosophically speaking, emerges as a horizon. It, quite obviously, bounds the perceptual world, especially in the twentieth century, in which the perceptual world is often figured as boundless. The characterization of death as an imperceptible horizon frames much of the theoretical world of the century we focus on, from Heidegger through Derrida, Blanchot, Bataille, and beyond. Yet, in the literary world, death, as stated above, remains describable to the point of banality. The death scene is among the most labored of literary conventions, and twentieth century James (as opposed, perhaps, to the James of *Portrait*, who provides Ralph Touchett's deathbed musings), accordingly, passes over it without interest. Allon White observes James ' avoidance of the conventional, emotive moment of the death scene: "When Milly Theale quietly turns her back upon the reader and upon her friends, it is to preserve them, as well as herself, from all taint of the mawkish, sentimental or vulgar" (White 162).

[62] For example, two of the appearances that the governess witnesses in *The Turn of the Screw* directly surround her decision not to attend church. While these appearances potentially mark events in the text, in that something ostensibly happens, the reverse is also possible since it remains unclear if anything actually does happen. Even "The

—Perception and Extraction

In contrast to the grounding around an unseen core we identify in Conrad and many other modern writers, Luhmann's suggestion that "the world is not an object but is rather a horizon" helps to characterize the textual worlds that James and the Conrad of *Nostromo*—despite the latter's evident taste for the "dissolved event"—construct: the novel delimits the terrain within which it operates and its relation, or lack thereof, to any world that may remain on the horizon. Perhaps the clearest example of this distribution of the textual world's boundaries lies in what is typically considered James' most obscure work, *The Sacred Fount*, in which the first-person narrator depicts a world of his own construction that continuously brackets itself off from the world he models it on and attempts to represent. As such, the reality of the novel's world dwells inaccessibly beyond the bounds of the narrative.

At a train station en route to a weekend party at a country estate, *The Sacred Fount's* nameless narrator encounters Gilbert Long, a man he considers boring and dull-witted, and Mrs. Brissenden (Mrs. Briss), a woman he has previously found prematurely aged. However, upon interacting with them, he finds Long amusing and intelligent and Mrs. Briss youthful for her years. Their respective transformations, he assumes, must result from the sacred fount of romantic relationships through which these two feed off of others. As a result, the other parties in the relationships must inevitably appear less intelligent and older than he has found them on previous occasions. The narrator never provides any real justification for his theory, but he proceeds throughout the novel as if it were fact. Mr. Briss, we find, seems to have aged

Altar of the Dead," which largely takes place inside and around a church, only enters the church when it is largely unoccupied, and the altar and the interactions it prompts have almost nothing to do with the purpose of the place itself.

significantly, despite the fact that he is ten years younger than his wife, ostensibly verifying the sacred fount idea, but the narrator can only speculate (often in communication with Mrs. Briss and his friend Ford Obert) as to the fount from which Long leeches. Consequently, all of the perceptual feedback—visual, verbal, etc.—that he receives and reacts to over the course of the weekend merely functions to verify his presumptions. As he remarks early on, "we were apt to be carried away in currents that reflected new images and sufficiently beguiled impatience. I recover, all the same, a full sequence of impressions, each of which, I afterwards saw, had been appointed to help all the others" (*Sacred* 10).[63] Since his perceptual apparatus operates in and constructs a world in which there is indeed a sacred fount, his "impressions" are all "appointed" to establish that there is one. What he sees only informs him as to who is not a sacred fount instead of allowing him to register that there may not be one. Since his theory has already established what he must inevitably see, every potential perception that does not register within that theory slips by him unnoticed.

It is not insignificant that James himself considered *The Sacred Fount* an inferior novel, going so far as to omit it from The New York Edition of his works. Consequently, it arrives without the accompaniment of one of his famous prefaces. His distaste for the novel, perhaps, results from his disapproval of first person narrative which he allegedly voiced in reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. James reportedly, "objected to the narrator mixing himself up with

[63] Analyzing visual perception in Late James in relation to the functional psychology of his brother William, Susan M. Griffin explains that "We may direct our attention and thus select and compose our perceptions, but the potential objects of both attention and perception are limited. Our pasts, our bodies, and our environments work together to present us with a range of possible perceptions." She adds that "In fixing our attention for even a second, we determine the direction of our next associations." *The Historical Eye: The Texture of the Visual in Late James*. Northeastern UP, 1991, 16. Clearly, the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* chooses his associations long before the novel begins.

the narrative."[64] To all appearances, what we think of as the Jamesian model, specifically in his late work, is precisely a narrative voice that does not intermingle with the world that it describes. Instead, as J. Hillis Miller notes in reference to the prefaces to *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, the narrator is a "'historian'" of a realm "outside of James's creating or concocting consciousness," and "the novel . . . refers to an entire world to which James alone has access, but which he has not invented, except in the sense of discovering it." [65] This "discover[y]" generally emerges through the nearly unnoticeable Jamesian narrator that reveals what it discovers at a remove yet with an intimacy that defies any logical explanation unless we surmise that its world is solely an artistic creation, an assumption that, as Miller indicates, the texts themselves never allow us to make. Furthermore, the world that James discovers—as his fondness for metaphors of exploration suggests—always remains beyond full comprehension and description: it is a world that the narrator stumbles upon and observes, and what the narrator extracts from it amounts to miniscule fragments of a much larger, inaccessible realm.

The Sacred Fount clearly upsets this sense of world-discovery, in the sense that Miller describes it, since the narrator attempts to act in the world, overstepping the position of the observing "historian." As a result, the Jamesian narrator, embodied as a man in the world of the

[64] Watt explains that James' reaction to *Heart of Darkness* worked its way, through an intermediary, to Elsie Hueffer (with of Ford Madox Ford). However much stock we can put in this "mere floating particle in the stream of talk," it provides a possible explanation for James' perspective on *The Sacred Fount* while also wholly obscuring his reasons for writing the novel due to its publication two years after *Heart of Darkness* appears in *Blackwood's Magazine* and one year prior to its publication in book form (Watt 206). Thomas C. Moser. "From Olive Garnett's Diary: Impressions of Ford Madox Ford and His Friends, 1890-1906." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 16 (1974) 525.

[65] J. Hillis Miller. *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James*. Fordham UP, 2005, 159. Miller adds that "[t]he evidence for this is the way he says he fails to bring all of it to light. Or, to put this more precisely, it is impossible to know whether James has invented or discovered that world, since all he says in the preface may be a ruse or a false lead, and since no criteria exist for distinguishing between one and the other" (162). Given James' fondness for extended metaphors of both creation and exploration it's likely the case that he invents and discovers the world.

novel—not lingering on its bounds as a detached, yet intimate, observer—finds that his world, communicating through the voice of Mrs. Briss, one of the few who seemingly indulges the possibility of his sacred fount theory, potentially finds him "crazy" and "put[s]" him "altogether nowhere" (*Sacred* 187).[66] That he is "crazy" suggests that he sees both too much and too little and that he is "altogether nowhere" reveals that he lacks a position from which to observe and, by extension, the ability to reflect on his observations. Without a proxy in this position, the narrative itself proves unable to establish whether or not it is a world in which sacred founts are possible.

In contrast to *The Sacred Fount's* narrator, the "historian" of James' late trilogy, it would seem, is marked by an ability to reflect on the possibility that its characterizations of the world are assumptions and, therefore, potentially inaccurate. Many times, in fact, it is precisely these moments of reflection in which it calls attention to itself and the limits of what it can observe and surmise about the social world that it depicts. If not "mixing [itself] up with the narrative" defines the Jamesian narrator of *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*, it also drives us through Conrad's *Nostromo* in which the nearly unnoticeable narrative-delimiting "I" describes a world to which it has rather limited access while simultaneously extracting glimpses beyond the capacities of its observation. Conrad's narrative provides us with the babblings of the wholly oblivious Captain Mitchell, who spouts "complicated information

[66] Karen Jacobs sets out the ultimate predicament in which *The Sacred Fount's* narrator enmeshes himself: "The subjective excesses peculiar to the narrator, really only extreme versions of those by which all subjects are constructed in the novel, deluded him into believing that the visible world was openly available to him; upon his dethronement, he, like the reader, must confront the layers of mediation which keep the possibility of a stable, objective knowledge of that world always at arm's length." Karen Jacobs. *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*. Cornell UP, 2001, 66. The present essay takes the narrator's detachment from the world further by removing the question of subjectivity since the novel itself provides no possibility criteria for distinguishing between subjectivity and objectivity, or for stepping outside the narrator's viewpoint to suggest that there is in fact such a thing as a subjectivity. The world of *The Sacred Fount* is only the inaccessible horizon that the feedback loop of his perception constructs.

imperfectly apprehended" (*Nostromo* 394). Mitchell's questionable perspective is further filtered through the relays of unnamed "distinguished strangers visiting Sulaco" before its narrative rendering. The narrative voice also dwells for an extended period in the unobservable end of Charles Decoud, an attempted entrance into the limits of human perception that is inexplicably communicated to us from beyond the bounds of structural coherence (*Nostromo* 405).

In the diegetic world of his late works, James most often situates the bounds of perception in the social interaction through which the observing mind of one being attempts to comprehend—whether through mere visual appearance or its conjunction with the spoken word, both already incorporated into the mental apparatus that comprehends—another, the relation between others, the relation of others to itself, or the relation between others in relation to itself. The social interaction, in James, hinges precisely on an inability to comprehend, in effect to see, what one sees. Kate Croy identifies this crux to verify her beloved Merton Densher's claim to the limited nature of his "charming impressions" of Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove*: "You're right about her not being easy to know. One *sees* her with intensity—sees her more than one sees almost anyone; but then one discovers that that isn't knowing her and that one may know better a person whom one doesn't 'see,' as I say, half so much" (271). While Kate may simply allude to a certain inscrutability that surrounds Milly, largely a product of her wealth and unspecified illness (though her inscrutability expands itself far beyond the diegetic realm of the text), she also identifies a discrepancy between "see[ing]" and "knowing." While "to see" is not "to know," James, as indicated in the aforementioned discussion of the preface to *The Ambassadors*, often situates "seeing" as a mental realization achieved through the combination of visual observation and cogitation (conducted through the accumulation of previous conjunctions of the two). Therefore, seeing and knowing are wholly interrelated, yet wholly distinct since what one knows

is a construction of what one sees—which, of course, tautologically entails that what one sees is a construction of what one knows—and what one sees and knows, respectively, may differ greatly from the object of observation and cogitation. While this formulation appears rather obvious, it becomes less so in the present context since seeing and knowing in James are ostensibly the same thing, regardless of any actual relation between what we see, what we know, and the unseen world we extract it from.[67]

Much of the action of late James, or much of what happens in texts in which nothing much happens, produces itself through someone or something seeing what others see or, in effect, observing observations. Nonetheless, these observations function within a feedback system in which one sees what others see one see (or thinks one sees what others see one see and reacts as such). A scene from *The Golden Bowl* exemplifies this looping of perceptual feedback through the narrator's observation of Adam Verver. After his attempt to find privacy in his billiard room is thwarted by the intrusion of Mrs. Rance (who reminds him of the possibility that someone could potentially desire him for a husband, even though she herself is already married and, hence, cannot), his daughter Maggie, Fanny Assingham, and the rest of their party, after returning from church (as usual, unattended by the current object of the narrator's focus, Adam), discover Adam in a relation to Mrs. Rance in which she has placed him:

> He became aware himself, for that matter, during the minute Maggie stood there before speaking; and with the sense moreover of what he saw her see he had the sense of what she saw *him*. This last, it may be added, would have been his intensest perception hadn't

[67] Mark McGurl draws out this tension within "'seeing' as either physical sensation or conceptual understanding," approaching the golden bowl as "text-object" in *The Golden Bowl* through the "text-object" of Poe's "The Purloined Letter," noting that "to see is to know" with all the complexities that it implies when the texts in question hinge on the distinction between those who see and those who do not." Mark McGurl *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James*. Princeton UP, 2001, 34.

> there the next instant been more for him in Fanny Assingham. Her face couldn't keep it from him; she had seen, on top of everything, in her quick way, what they both were seeing.[68]

In this interaction—if we can determine that Adam, Maggie, and Fanny in fact interact—the distinction between seeing and knowing remains indistinct: seeing for Adam is dependent on his knowledge that Maggie and Fanny have also seen and, further, that they are aware that he has. The convolutions through which the Jamesian narrator registers the observational process catalyzes the convolutions of the novel (the plot or action, on a structural level) and the senses, in a somewhat different way than Jameson suggests in relation to Conrad, emerge as the novel content of the novel.

Yet, immediately following this ostensible exchange, the narrator partially revokes its implications, muddying the clarity through which we see what each participant sees (and that they have seen): "So much mute communication was doubtless all this time marvellous, and we may confess to having perhaps read into the scene prematurely a critical character that took longer to develop" (139). The Jamesian narrator, overly invested in the significance of its observations, "prematurely" reads the narrative it has yet to develop into the narrative it is in the process of developing. A corrective strategy of feedback, in response to the interplay of the nebulously visual exchange between Adam, Maggie, and Fanny, allows the narrator to qualify its observations so that they can subsequently develop along the lines it delineates. The fact that the narrator has "read into the scene" corroborates itself in the process through which it assumes Adam Verver reads into his perception of Maggie's perception of him and, ultimately, his

[68] Henry James. *The Golden Bowl*. N.Y.: Penguin, 2009, 138.

observation of Fanny's observation of the interchange of perceptions between the two of them. Scenes of this sort abound in Late James and reveal the self-corrective process through which the narrative perceives the world that it produces textually. Like a true historian, the Jamesian narrator abstracts the fragments it extracts of its objective world into a coherent form, leaving behind the immensity of its surroundings. It is a truism that a novel's narrative cannot fully capture its diegetic world and, further, that narrators do not select their material from a pre-existing real world. Nonetheless, James consistently takes great pains to call attention to the fact that his narrators provide restricted views of the fictional events they depict.

—Withdrawals from Observation

The visual limits of the social relation delineate our analysis of the reflexive world of observation in which James enmeshes us. In his preface to *Roderick Hudson*, James articulates a somewhat arbitrary method of delimiting the bounds of relations and, hence, the bounds of the novel (while not explicitly social in this context, the relation in James is almost inevitably social): "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so."[69] This "exquisite problem" takes us back to Wiener's description of the visual image as similar to a "line drawing." The "business" of the artist is to produce "the circle" in which the system of the text produces its relations and the images they construct, obscuring the

[69] Henry James. *The Art of the Novel*. N.Y. Scribners, 1962, 5.

endless material that it distinguishes itself from by distinguishing itself (the relations "happily *appear*" to end where the circle is drawn). In a sense, then, the text cuts off the possibility of relations in order to turn to the relations it establishes. Mark Seltzer lays out the turn away from the larger social world (the larger system of relations) that propels modern social life: "A self-distancing or avertedness is a condition of modern sociality in that reflexivity and second-order observation are the defining conditions of modernity. This is a sociality premised on reciprocal distance, one that . . . takes the form of a doubling of reality (the presupposition of self-registration)."[70] James enacts this "avertedness" through his historian that encounters the world of the novel as removed from our world, and in the sense of what Seltzer refers to as "the turn turn" the text "stages and exposes the reflexivity that is at once the self-condition, and predicament, of the second modernity."[71] James, and the narrator that delimits his late novels, "stages and exposes" this reflexive gesture in moments in which the text enacts a turn away from the visual domain of the social world, doubling, on a micro-scale in the diegetic realm of the text, the drawn circle of the novel that James describes. We will briefly examine two instances of this aversion from reflexivity in *The Golden Bowl* and, terminally, *The Wings of the Dove* before returning to Conrad's *Nostromo* in which the reflexive mind, distanced from the social world, is "swallowed up in the immense indifference of things" it is unable to adequately perceive (*Nostromo* 416).

[70] Mark Seltzer. "The Official World." *Critical Inquiry*. 37. 4 (2011) 728.

[71] Much of James' thought on realism relies on the transmission of the real world into the world of the novel, a world that situates itself as a model of what it attempts to represent. Seltzer mentions *The Turn of the Screw* specifically in his discussion of "the turn turn." The term "second modernity" in the present context will refer to reflexive modernity, though it obviously implies additional complications.

In *The Golden Bowl*, the social interaction is specifically interrupted and furthered through the turn away of one of its participants. When Fanny Assingham questions Charlotte Stant as to her arrival at a public event with Prince Amerigo (her former lover, now son-in-law), Charlotte responds that she "can carry out" the "conditions" of her married life "alone" (meaning without assistance from Fanny or her husband, Adam Verver) as "she turned away," ostensibly ending the conversation and terminating visual exchange (*Golden Bowl* 218).[72] Charlotte denies Fanny the perception of her realization but also denies herself the observation of Fanny's reaction. With this turn away from Fanny, a turn that the Jamesian narrator follows and reflects, Charlotte "turned to meet the Ambassador and the Prince," knowing with satisfaction that "[s]he had made her point, the point she had foreseen she must make; she had made it thoroughly and once and for all; so that no more making was required; and her success was reflected in the faces of the two men of distinction before her, moved to admiration by her exceptional radiance." After "watch[ing]" her "reflection" in the two men, Charlotte follows out the operation of her turn and "tak[es] no note of any less form of it possibly presented by poor Fanny—poor Fanny left to stare at her incurred 'score', chalked up in so few strokes on the wall." The writing on the wall has arguably never been less legible, since when drawn away to still more important business, Charlotte "know[]s without looking that Fanny's bewilderment was called to a still

[72] Allon White suggests that "the linguistic obscurity in James has its precise counterpart in visual presentation, and it is above all in the 'turned back' that both the desire for security and the pathos of exclusion find their perfect image" (White 159). White, however, reads James' obscurity largely in terms of an avoidance of vulgarity; his assessment is fitting, but to some extent evades the complexity of the modern social relation as James communicates it. Vulgarity, as White phrases it (namely the sexual act), may simply mark another sort of banality that James finds unworthy of representation due to its glaring visuality. James himself complexly calls attention to the avoidance of vulgarity in Charlotte Stant's "Bowdlerized hat," in which she subsequently meets the Prince, "that seemed to make a point of insisting on their time of life and their moral intention" (*Golden Bowl* 244). The quasi-symbolic weight of the hat, made quasi through James' acknowledgement of its absurdity, indicates the banality of flashy, yet prudish, vulgarity.

larger application." (219) The turn away that Charlotte enacts cements an image of Fanny in her mind, regardless of whether or not the image corresponds with Fanny herself.

In effect, Charlotte turns from Fanny in order to turn to others (including the object of her dispute with Fanny, the Prince) in order to return to Fanny without looking at her. Her return to Fanny, and her assumed triumph over her, marks a further interaction in the precision of its noninteraction.[73] She concludes that she says more—both verbally and visually—by not saying anything, though the turn itself registers in the frequency of communication about the vision it presents. Nonetheless, Charlotte's turn from the visibility of social interaction proceeds only as a turn to the visibility of social interaction (her "radiance" to the Prince and the Ambassador and her glimpse of its reflection). This turn to and from the visual encounter continues when the Prince "turn[s]" to Fanny, herself still turned towards the interaction of Charlotte and the Prince that Charlotte has now exited. Inevitably, after an exchange somewhat similar to the previous exchange with Charlotte, Fanny "turn[s] away" from the Prince: "She had never turned away from him before, and it was quite positively for her as if she were altogether afraid of him" (227). While the context, indeed, is a bit more complicated than we can address at present, Fanny fears, most basically, that the Prince will do as he says and visit her at some point in the future (or present himself for her to see).

Both Charlotte and the Prince, prior to these turns, ask Fanny the same question: "You give me up then?" To "give someone up" in James' social world means to stop seeing them, and the proper indication of giving up is turning away, refusing to see. Charlotte responds to Fanny's impending "desertion"—that she has "foreseen"—by giving her up first. Fanny responds

[73] "Noninteraction" refers to Seltzer's discussion of Erving Goffman's *Forms of Talk* in "The Official World."

accordingly with her own foresight and is more than prepared to turn away from the Prince, which results in her reentry into the narrator's focus, as the narrative follows her home, away from the set of exchanges. Shortly thereafter, Fanny remarks to her husband, Colonel Assingham, that she "saw" that he "had received [his] impression" of Charlotte and the Prince—his "plain vision" "recorded" so that "she should have it at hand for reference"—and that her observation of his seeing is what allowed her to see: he provides "a *point de repère*" that she can observe in the process of observation (233-34). The Colonel, almost inevitably, responds by not responding, lingering "conscious of a reason for replying to this address otherwise than by the so obvious method of turning his back. He didn't turn his face, but stared straight before him…" In order to remove himself from the social interaction, and its precedent analogues that make up the evening, the Colonel can neither turn to or from his wife, since either movement would register as communication (though his inaction itself presumably does as well), and simply suggests that she withdraw herself from the relation and "Leave it . . . to *them* [Charlotte and the Prince]." Whether or not "Leav[ing] it . . . to *them*" manifests as a giving up, it is itself a turn and reveals the turn of inaction the Colonel has made in his refusal to turn.

Nonetheless, this turn from the social world has previously achieved a finality in the Jamesian oeuvre, and a seeming reality, in *The Wings of the Dove*, in which Milly Theale, ostensibly and then actually dying, withdraws herself from visual observation. After she hears of Merton Densher and Kate Croy's plot to inherit her money (Densher will marry Milly and then marry Kate after she dies), Milly, already nearly removed from the novel, removes herself from the novel. After days of attempting to visit Milly, Densher receives a visit from Susan Shepherd (Milly's closest associate) who informs him that "She [Milly] has turned her face to the wall" (*Wings* 436). If we were to grant Milly a certain grace (and level of maturity) that James'

historian (and perhaps James himself) potentially denies her, we could echo Heidegger's concept of "being-toward-death," and say that Milly's "turn[] . . . to the wall" marks an authentic removal of herself from the "They" of society which, of course, in some ways solidifies her place within it."[74][75] Milly has perhaps directed herself toward her end since her mysterious diagnosis—a diagnosis that never actually enters the world of the text—which could indicate that her turn to her death resembles the readiness that Heidegger sets out, an individual death apart from social observation and influence. Yet, Milly's turn may instead suggest that to turn away from sociality, to withdraw oneself from visual observation, is in fact to die: death died simply as a result of going unseen.

Milly, in a sense, "prefers" her way "not to" until the point of death in a manner that resembles Melville's Bartleby: she "turn[s] her face to the wall" as Bartleby stands, "his face towards a high wall," and "turn[s] away" from the narrator when he tries to ensure his wellbeing."[76] Unlike Bartleby, Milly manages to die in a place where the narrator is unable to locate her, as if James himself, to avoid the banality of death as described above, creates a character who gets tired of being in the novel, tired of the narrator's observation.[77] While Susan

[74] Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State UP of N.Y., 1996, 245-6.

[75] In his recent discussion of "The Ethics of Tact" through which James circumscribes his fiction—both structurally and linguistically, in the diegetic world of the text and outside of it—Samuel Cross suggests that the obfuscating language that surrounds Milly's "turn" indicates that "pronouncing any kind of diagnosis on Milly is to some extent to pronounce a moral diagnosis on oneself or at least to prove oneself ready to clothe one's own interest in supposedly altruistic terms." Samuel Cross. "The Ethics of Tact in *The Wings of the Dove*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 43:3 (2010) 407. While Cross makes a compelling claim, our current analysis approaches James in a sphere detached from ethical concerns, not due to the traditional divide between formalism and ethics that, as Cross lays out, structures much thought on James, but due to the possibility of a decidedly anethical approach to the perceptual functioning of his late works, one to which they certainly lend themselves.

[76] Herman Melville. *Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd Sailor*. N.Y.: The Library of America, 1984, 669-70.

[77] While this claim may appear ridiculously callous considering that James based Milly Theale on his deceased cousin Minny Temple whom he desired to "wrap[] . . . in the beauty and dignity of art," James' use of individuals as functions that operate in a system of his construction may have gotten the better of him, especially considering the

Shepherd, after nearly two pages of unremitting vagueness finally admits that Milly is dying and "doesn't want to die," her previous "I don't know *how* she is" and the ensuing conversation with Densher do little to reveal that she does (*Wings* 439 & 436). Densher later remarks to Kate that "She has given up beyond all power to care again, and that's why she's dying," but his claim is rather clearly speculation (472). After Milly grants him a visit, apparently refusing one to the narrator, Densher reveals what little she communicates to him "face to face": "If it was somehow for *her* I was still staying, she wished that to end, she wished me to know how little there was need of it. And as a manner of farewell she wished herself to tell me so (477)." Other than that she tells him "how little there was need of" him in town, Densher can only repeat of Milly that "she has turned her face to the wall." Densher repeats this phrase several times after Susan Shepherd pronounces it. In his first conversation with Kate after he returns to London, this turn provides the fullest description of Milly's condition and, consequently, it remains the only motivation for her death. Milly dies solely as a result of her withdrawal from visualization in the novel, and, as such, Susan and Densher communicate that she is dying—then dies. Therefore, she is dying, and then she dies.

If removal from the social world means death in James, it certainly also does in the sociopolitical game of *Nostromo*, a novel that includes, within the bounds of its narrative mode, a description of itself as "complicated information imperfectly apprehended." A revolution has taken place that, in the narrative world, is in the process of taking place that may, in part, result from the propangandistic efforts of Martin Decoud who, in the buildup to the moment we discuss, suggests that a revolution will take place. Decoud's knowledge of the revolution that he

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plot that surrounds Milly "wraps" her in things quite separate from "beauty and dignity." Regardless, James' inscribes his comment on the novel at some remove from its composition. *Notes of a Son and Brother*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1914, 479.

pre-labels as such results from a remarkable capacity for observation that, through the "sane materialism" that results from his education in Paris, views his native Costaguana (Conrad's invented model of South American sociopolitical warfare) at a remove and allows him to comprehend its system of relations as if it were a game with pieces to manipulate (*Nostromo* 205). Accordingly, Conrad removes Decoud from his social grounding, and ground itself, and places him on a boat with Nostromo the Capataz de Cargadores in an attempt to smuggle a shipment of silver out of Sulaco (the isolated economic heart of Costaguana) in the dark of night. Decoud, "the man with no faith in anything except the truth of his own sensations," finds himself, and his sensations, unanchored on the ocean at night, in a realm in which perception is wholly the "blank intensity" that Jameson describes.

The narrative explains Decoud's situation rather bluntly: "As to seeing anything it was out of the question" (237). Again Conrad lets this scene—the center of the novel, its central event in isolation from the larger sociopolitical events of *Nostromo* as a whole—revolve around the limits of vision and the auditory register's reminder of the unseen world that surrounds the attempt at perception. As Nostromo and Decoud float into the gulf, "The two men, unable to see each other, kept silent till the lighter, slipping before the fitful breeze, passed out between almost invisible headlands into the still deeper darkness of the gulf. For a time the lantern on the jetty shone after them . . . the big, half-decked boat slipped along with no more noise than if she had been suspended in the air" (230). As the lantern ceases to "sh[ine] after them," so do the spatial orientations of perception, and the lighter itself might as well be "suspended in the air." Furthermore, the darkness of night removes the orienting horizon, the limit of vision, making vision itself nothing but limit: "a great recrudescence of obscurity embraced the boat. The sea in the gulf was as black as the clouds above." Conrad presents us with a version of what Quentin

Meillassoux refers to as "the *great outdoors*," the world—or a world—as unperceived and unperceivable by us, utterly indifferent to us, itself, and any relation to it that we may have.[78] Most basically, it is a world not correlative to our perception of it. While Meillassoux's scope extends deep into time and space (the origin of the universe and the universe itself), "the *great outdoors*" can easily refer to the not so distant world that to us is incomprehensible. Even Nostromo, an experienced sailor, wholly familiar with the gulf and its surroundings, finds himself overwhelmed by incomprehensibility once the lighter passes out of the gulf: "In the featureless night Nostromo was not even certain which way the lighter headed after the wind had completely died out. He peered for the islands. There was not a hint of them to be seen, as if they had sunk to the bottom of the gulf."

Far more confused, Decoud's mind finds itself grappling to comprehend its position in a world beyond its comprehension: "He didn't even know at times whether he were asleep or awake. Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing. Even his hand held before his face did not exist for his eyes. The change . . . from the sights and sounds of the shore, was so complete that it would have resembled death had it not been for the survival of his thoughts" (*Nostromo* 231). His inability to position himself within the bounds of his senses, leaves him with nothing except the operation of his thoughts, which function without "even" the visible ground of "his hand" to anchor them: "He had the strangest sensation of his soul having just returned into his body from the circumambient darkness in which land, sea, sky, the mountains,

[78] Meillassoux writes that "the *great outdoors*" is "the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory—or being entirely elsewhere." Quentin Meillassoux. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans. Ray Brassier. London and New York: Continuum, 2008, 7. Seltzer also references Meillassoux in the context of the turn turn—more specifically the speculative turn—and further as he leads into a discussion of the realm of Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*, and the figures operating within, as "outside of everything." The situation of Decoud is, in its own way, outside of everything.

and the rocks were as if they had not been." Decoud's inability to perceive himself, and the world without himself in relation to it, makes the objects through which the world is comprehended—and through which human being comprehends itself in relation to it—"as if they had not been." "The man with no faith in anything except the truth of his own sensations," is left without recourse but to think of himself as a "soul": disembodied, floating in and out of its perceptual entry into things.

Nonetheless, darkness is transitory, while the inability of the mind to ground itself in a world in which it cannot ground itself is not. After "a blind game with death," a game that Nostromo and Decoud inadvertently win (243),[79] Decoud remains deserted on an island bounded by the blankness of day (as well as night), ungrounded in the social and perceptual world. Left alone on the island for twelve days, Decoud "die[s] from solitude" which "only the simplest of us are fit to withstand" (412). Decoud, armed only with a mind far from simple, finds himself, in the blank, silent world of ocean and sky, "not fit to grapple with himself single-handed" (413). Outside of the world he has constructed Decoud himself has not been constructed:

> After three days of waiting for the sight of some human face, Decoud caught himself entertaining a doubt of his own individuality. It had merged into the world of cloud and water, of natural forces and forms of nature. In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part. Decoud lost all belief in the reality of his action past and to come.

[79] The context of the game, and the game itself, would take a great deal of space to summarize, but suffice it to say that somehow undetectedly a ship, nebulously associated with the impending revolutionary government and, in a sense, in pursuit of the very silver they transport, runs into their lighter and nearly sinks it. Nonetheless, Nostromo and Decoud are able to maneuver to the island they seek and hide the silver.

Without the measure of himself to orient the world, Decoud finds it wholly beyond measure. Its boundlessness removes his bounds and, hence, his ability to perceive and comprehend. Decoud's attempts at vision align with Joseph Vogl's characterization of post-Galilean perception: "Everything visible remains contingent, forever encompassed by the imperceptible and the unknown" (Vogl 22). In a futile attempt to situate his surroundings in a thinkable structure, "[h]e beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images," inadequately endeavoring to process it in the spatio-temporal register of his cognition of perception. Ultimately, the imperceivability of the universe, and his lack of orientation within it, leaves Decoud with one option, to position himself where he can be "swallowed up in the immense indifference of things," bullet in chest, body spilling over the side of a rowboat drifting randomly in the ocean (*Nostromo* 416). Yet even then, he leaves a message for Nostromo to receive, a blood stained boat floating nowhere.

Nonetheless, in terms of narrative structure, Conrad's description of Decoud's end (and what leads up to it) is additionally incomprehensible. In some ways, the last hundred or so pages of *Nostromo* reveal themselves as if Conrad simply forgot how he structured those that precede them. The somewhat limited perspective that Conrad develops, at one moment going so far as to introduce a detached first-person observer in a vaguely Jamesian fashion, provides no basis for its knowledge of Decoud's death, nor the internal world of Nostromo that follows it. Decoud's encounter with the limits of perception—and its cognitive orientation—itself, despite Conrad's description of it, remains unseeable and the novel's attempted inhabitation of the absolute limits of the senses remains a construction of its exteriority. The ends of Milly Theale and Charles Decoud respectively enact the self-reflexive ends of the novel. Neither James nor Conrad situates these inaccessible horizons of the novelistic realm as obscured events that, if uncovered, would

retrospectively crystallize the meaning of the novels that surround them. Instead, through these scenes, the novel as such models its own visual limits and, by extension, the limits of perception itself. These two writers move fiction into the twentieth century by registering the contingency of the novel's world—the arbitrary distinction between what it sees and the unseen world that surrounds it—as figured in the visual delimitation of its own narrative functioning. Despite their pronouncements concerning the enlightening visual process of the novel, James and Conrad ultimately reveal that what it allows us to see is merely the limitations of what it can.

CHAPTER TWO

Ice-bergs and Other Moments of Exception

"The American lady pulled the window-blind down
and there was no more sea, even occasionally"
–Ernest Hemingway, "A Canary for One"[80]

Most approaches to visual perception in modern prose focus on how and what the novel allows us to see. Such studies suggest how modernist writing elucidates the discursive and sociological framings of vision in the modern world and how it is either enhanced or overwhelmed by technological advancement.[81] Vision, as figured in such accounts, is inextricably intertwined with knowledge, whether enlightening or damning, and, as such, frames what we know of the world. Modern writing, in this sense, either unwittingly channels the visual dominance of modernity or attempts to retreat from it into a realm of pure aesthetic experience. Therefore, as Michael North suggests, "literary modernism has come to be the last bastion of the purely visual," and while he critiques previous work that assumes a modernist aversion to recording technologies along with a retreat from the world into a depoliticized aesthetic

[80] Ernest Hemingway. *The Short Stories*. N.Y.: Scribner, 1995, 337.

[81] Such accounts hearken back to a split between the Heideggerian "world picture" and Benjaminian "shock" and "distraction" as responses to the ostensible glut of perceptible material that composes modern life, and tend to fall in line with what Martin Jay labels the "scopic regimes of modernity" or what David Michael Levin refers to as the "hegemony of vision" of modernity. See Martin Jay, *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1993, 114-133, and *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* California UP,1993, as well as Levin, introduction to *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. David Michael Levin. California UP, 1993, 1-29.

experience, he also points out the "privileged place" that the visual realm continues to maintain in modernist studies.[82]

Despite this centrality of vision in analyses of modern writing, some of the classic examples of modernist literature seize much more intensely on what lingers beyond the bounds of vision or slips through it undetected. This engagement with the limits of vision suggests that the world, despite its technological advancement, is no more legible in the twentieth century than before. At heart then, such works do not necessarily communicate a subjective experience of the world—or how visual impressions are discursively or culturally formed, notwithstanding the obvious phenomenological implications—in the mode of most ideas of modernism, and most accounts of vision's place in it, but instead attempt to register the contingencies that make up their visual world. For, as Douglas Mao points out, "it was only with modernism that the possibility of the utter contingency of everything (and every thing) became a major preoccupation of imaginative writing."[83] This chapter will analyze fixations on vision's limits, and the contingency of the perceptual world that results from them, in two essential modernist writers who, in the history of literary criticism, have had nearly nothing to do with one another. Approaching the contingency of modernist vision in two such seemingly disparate figures will highlight the predominance of the unseen, and the construction of perception we extract from it, in two major strands of modern fiction that are generally thought to be unrelated.

While ostensibly divergent in nearly all facets of literary classification, excepting of course the broad tag of modernism, Virginia Woolf and Ernest Hemingway situate their respective crafts, both in theory and practice, at the boundaries of the sensible. Hemingway has

[82] Michael North. *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word.* Oxford UP, 2005, 209 & 208.

[83] Douglas Mao. *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Text of Production.* Princeton UP, 1998, 17.

always stood as an exception to most generic classifications of modernist interiority, while Woolf has served as one of its most obvious examples. The classic distinction between masculine and feminine writing helps to heighten the already obvious contrast in this manner.[84] Regardless, both base much of their writing on what eludes visual perception. In "Modern Fiction," Woolf pronounces that, "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."[85] Rightly so, for the "halo" both illuminates and obscures the external world through which human being plods into what we think of as "consciousness." She continues in a manner that both supports and undermines her claims: "Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?" The problem, which this chapter will explore, lies in the fact that "the alien and external" are precisely what allows Woolf to delimit the boundaries of the perceptible world of her texts—in essence, circumscribe their "spirit" in relation to the "unknown"—regardless of whether or not she intends these terms phenomenologically or stylistically. Hemingway, on the other hand, mischaracterizes his "task" as a writer when he claims that in Paris he aspired to write both "one true sentence" and "one story about each thing that I knew about."[86]

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[84] Rachel Bowlby nicely associates and disassociates Woolf with *écriture féminine* in Hélène Cixous' sense and conceptions of feminism more broadly in *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh UP, 1997. Conceptions of Hemingway and masculinity are not of particular interest to this project.

[85] Virginia Woolf. *The Common Reader*. N.Y.: Harcourt, 1925, 212-13.

[86] Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*. N.Y.: Scribner, 1996, 12. Due to the controversy surrounding *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition*, all references are to the original publication. *The Restored Edition*, as A.E. Hotchner—the friend to whom Hemingway made his well known remark about Paris from which the title comes—indicates, modifies the text in ways that may not align with what Hemingway himself, as his preface suggests, chose to leave out of it. "Don't Touch *A Moveable Feast*." *The New York Times*. July 19, 2009, A19. Accessed August 22, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/20/opinion/20hotchner.html?_r=0

—Omission, Distillation, and Extraction

In his two famous maxims on writerly omission, Hemingway defines his works through the boundaries of what they contain and their relation to what lies outside of them. He sets out his "theory" of omission rather straightforwardly in *A Moveable Feast*: "It was a very simple story called 'Out of Season' and I had omitted the real end of it which was that the old man hanged himself. This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood" (*Moveable Feast* 75). To "feel," as Hemingway vaguely puts it here, need not connote some sort of affective response—and anything of the sort in Hemingway's assumed "people" or "reader" is utterly unrelated to our intentions at present—but instead indicates a nebulous palpability, a mere register that something subsists beyond the bounds of the text itself. Since the text does not let us see beyond its boundaries we cannot know what precisely lies outside them. This theory of omission also applies quite easily to modern novels like Conrad's *Lord Jim* and Forster's *A Passage to India,* which revolve around a central absence, or what we will refer to as the unseen core of the modern novel.[87] Though these novels—much like Hemingway's texts—are not simply "strengthen[ed]" by omission, they are defined by it. Hemingway further elaborates on omission in his "ice-berg" metaphor from *Death in the Afternoon*:

[87] Mark Hussey similarly claims that in Woolf's oeuvre, "The picture that emerges is of a world characterized by a lack, by a sense of an abstract 'gap' in being that cannot be directly referred to in language, but which is certainly a potential for human experience." Mark Hussey. *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction.* Ohio State UP, 1986, *xx*. He further suggests that her art operates in relation to (or around) an "empty center" (58). While the world of Woolf's fiction (and the world outside of it) may indeed be punctured by abstract "gaps," this essay suggests that the Hemingway and Woolf that we identify reveal that our perception itself is but a "gap" in the greater abstraction of the unseen world from which it is extracted.

> If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. [88]

Hemingway's claim remains relatively consistent between the two works and the thirty-some years that separate their publication; nonetheless, the "dignity" that he attributes to the ice-berg begins to point towards larger territory, whether or not that territory wholly overlaps with the qualities through which he characterizes his writing. The ostensible straightforwardness of Hemingway's maxims, and of his writing as a whole, has generally prevented critics from seriously considering how exactly such a theory might function beyond the rather briefly stated confines Hemingway sets out for it and, perhaps most importantly, the actual theory.[89] Similarly, and equally contradictorily, Hemingway himself is rarely granted the possibility of any deeper intent than the surface of the ice-berg and the specific absence that it exhibits.

The oddity of Hemingway's well known "ice-berg," and his theory of omission more broadly, lies in its assertion of authorial knowledge: he can apparently see the lower seven-eighths of the ice-berg, but withholds them. Since the ice-berg's nether-regions are submerged in the writer's mind, the modesty that establishes its dignity dwells beneath the text unobserved by

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[88] Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*. N.Y.: Scribner, 1996, 192. *Death in the Afternoon* proves a rather curious place for Hemingway to outline his ice-berg theory considering the book itself aims to provide a somewhat exhaustive explanation of bullfighting. In stark contrast to his famous endeavor to "make instead of describe," he devotes lengthy, wordy passages to depicting bullfighting and sarcastically didactic conversations with an "old woman." Furthermore, on the whole, *Death in the Afternoon* tends to look a lot like Hemingway's journalism which, as Michael North points out, is hardly the sort of economical prose one associates with him (North 188-89).

[89] One of a rare breed of writers in this respect, Hemingway is allowed the capacity for self-description and self-categorization. In part, since his claims appear so simple the works themselves are generally thought to fall within them (unless, of course, they accidentally, and not consciously, slip outside of their bounds).

its audience. The world beyond the text exists, but that world is only accessible to Hemingway, occasionally offering glimpses of itself in the visible tip of the ice-berg that simultaneously obscures it. Our perception of Hemingway's world, therefore, aligns with our perception of the world outside of it. Especially if, as Niklas Luhmann suggests, "the world is not an object but is rather a horizon, in the phenomenological sense. It is, in other words, inaccessible."[90] The world of the ice-berg, as much a metaphor for the world itself as its textual model, is a boundary we cannot see past, except to sense that something dwells beyond it. Hemingway's world exists, but since it dwells beyond the bounds of observation we must construct our own version of it based on the glimpses he provides.

Arguably the most extreme example of the ice-berg's obscuration of its submerged portion lies, strangely enough, in the very example of palpable omission that Hemingway provides in *A Moveable Feast*: "the real end" of "Out of Season," quite possibly, can only be "felt" by Hemingway himself, unless of course, alcoholism always results in hanging oneself or, even less probably, a few *liras* lost on a canceled fishing trip do. While the elderly Peduzzi's "old military coat" is clearly as out of season in the town with the "Fascist Café"—in which his own daughter turns back into her house when she sees him approaching—as the fishing trip he promises to take the "young gentleman" and "Tiny" on, his story would seemingly fall closer to the visible tip of the ice-berg than their world that its description conceals.[91] This instance of omission through which Hemingway theorizes omission is unthinkable without his indication of it, published around forty years after the story itself, and, as such, a wholly unforeseeable gap in a story in which he develops much more striking absences in the perceptual continuum that it

[90] Niklas Luhman. *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. Kathleen Cross. Stanford UP, 2000, 6.

[91] Ernest Hemingway. *In Our Time*. N.Y.: Scribner, 2003, 98.

creates. Since this chapter is not the proper place to list the legions of rudimentary questions that "Out of Season's" sparseness raises, suffice it to say that the world of the young gentleman and Tiny is fully intact in Hemingway's creative mind but wholly inaccessible within the story. Their relationship, and any tension between them, remains far more alien than that of the couple in "Hills Like White Elephants," the classic example of Hemingway's theory in practice: a story in which, common consensus would support, "the omitted part . . . strengthen[s] the story and make[s] people feel something more than they underst[an]d." That aside, "Out of Season" presents a collision of two ice-bergs, one in which, quite possibly, the "dignity" of both eludes grasp.

The danger that Hemingway faces in his procedure of omission lies in the assumption that what he leaves out of the story will, in a sense, remain in it, that "the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer has stated them." Hemingway's statement raises a rather curious question of scale, since there can never be a clear indication of what or how much has been omitted, as is especially obvious in "Out of Season," since what he himself claims to have left out of the story only accounts for one of the two ice-berg tips we get a glimpse of. The obverse also causes problems, as a story like "A Canary for One" makes abundantly clear. A random "American Lady" on a train babbles on and on about how "American men make the best husbands" to the American narrator and his American wife, interspersed with the narrator's observations of what he can and cannot see out of the train's windows and who and what has not eaten breakfast: "Nothing had eaten breakfast," he informs us, finding much more in common with the houses, walls, and windows that they pass than with the conversation. As he attempts to ignore the woman, the narrator, ultimately disembarking from the train, concludes the story with, "We were returning to Paris to set up

separate residences" (*Short Stories* 339, 40, &42). "A Canary for One" functions analogously to many of Hemingway's stories—nothing apparently happening with the assumption that something inaccessible yet nebulously perceptible floats along beneath it—but the final sentence reveals the analogue of Peduzzi's death, withheld in "Out of Season," providing exactly what one would expect Hemingway, based on his theory, to omit. The contrast between these brief tales, "A Canary" appearing especially spare and ephemeral, sets out omission as a decision which may be as arbitrary as any minor distinction: revealing the omission or not revealing it, even though that of "A Canary" arguably presents itself much more clearly before its revelation than that of "Out of Season." We will return to "A Canary" below to establish that omission itself in Hemingway's texts, tends to hide his deeper engagement with the limits of perception.

While it appears that Hemingway's dismissal of the "hollow places" that result from writers who omit things that they do not know applies to the "dissolved events" of novels like Conrad's *Lord Jim*—in which the central absence is "felt" but not in a comprehensible manner—the distinction between Jim's leap from the *Patna* that necessitates *Lord Jim's* progression and Jake Barnes' presumed emasculation that precedes and structures *The Sun Also Rises* is arguably negligible. Whether or not Hemingway knows what has happened to Jake Barnes, previous to his self-depiction in the novel, ultimately makes little difference in the functioning of the text itself. There remains an irreducible remnant that lingers beyond the bounds of Barnes' narration and Hemingway's novel. Something has happened—Jake remarks, "what happened to me is supposed to be funny. I never think about it,"[92] and neither does the novel—but we can only speculate as to what.[93]

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[92] Ernest Hemingway. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 1954, 34.

[93] While general consensus assumes that Jake was emasculated in the war, all readings to that account remain speculation. The inverse of Hemingway's ice-berg occurs in something like the pulp novels of Jim Thompson, such

Nonetheless, Hemingway's identification of the ice-berg itself points to a theory of writing, and the construction of a perceptual world, in which the text functions as the frontier beyond which remains an unperceived territory that exceeds, both in scale and significance, the somewhat arbitrary grasp of the writer. This unseen world beneath the text falls away from it like the world that surrounds an object focused on in visual perception. By omitting the ice-berg, in reality, a writer omits everything that surrounds his text, everything known and unknown, perceived and unperceived out of which it emerges. Therefore, the construction of the text itself is contingent upon everything it has, by selecting its focus, chosen not to see—not simply what the writer, out of his range of knowledge, has chosen to omit. The visualization that the text produces is merely one volume extracted from an unseen, unquantifiable library of potential material that surrounds it. While this aesthetic construction through omission may hold true for all works of art, its self-conscious theorization is nonetheless unique to Hemingway, and modern art. And though modernism is often characterized by its indeterminacy or open-endedness, Hemingway's art is determinate in that it self-consciously brackets itself off from the larger world as an exception. What we do not know is not merely something unknown that slips outside the text; instead, what we can see is a gap in what we cannot. If, as Brian McHale suggests, "the dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*," Hemingway's craft diverges by not interrogating the limits of knowledge or emphasizing the perspectival and discursive frames through which we know.[94] Hemingway registers the contingency of our phenomenological and

as *The Killer Inside Me* and *Pop. 1280*, in which the narrative process reveals the bottom seven-eighths and, for at least the majority of the novel, only the top eighth is visible to the world within the narrative. Brett Easton Ellis furthers this reverse ice-berg technique in *American Psycho* wherein we inhabit the bottom seven eighths of narrator Patrick Bateman but only the unsubmerged portion, presumably, functions within the bounds of reality.

[94] Brian McHale. *Postmodernist Fiction.* N.Y.: Methuen, 1987, 9. Hemingway's fiction also contrasts David Lodge's characterization of modernist fiction as "concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious and

physiological apprehension of the world, suggesting that what we know is an arbitrary construct of what we see.

Hemingway himself obliquely points towards the larger territory beyond the text immediately after sketching the theory of omission in *A Moveable Feast*. As is always the case with *A Moveable Feast*, assessing the temporality of any of Hemingway's claims proves unfruitful, especially considering he grants that "this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact" (*Moveable Feast* ix). Regardless, we will approach his observations on his fiction as if they corresponded with his thoughts at the time in question. After dealing with the fact that a trunk with most of his writings including a novel and many short stories has been stolen—a real occurrence that, in a sense, models the intentions of the writing—Hemingway acknowledges that a novel is expected of him: "I knew I must write a novel. But it seemed an impossible thing to do when I had been trying with great difficulty to write paragraphs that would be the distillation of what made a novel" (*Moveable Feast* 75). Hemingway, of course, attempts this distillation in several different ways, from the detached exteriority of "A Very Short Story," to the overheard dialog style of "Hills Like White Elephants," as well as "The Killers'" oblique observation of the near-climax of a crime story.[95] While the somewhat contradictory inverse of this process of distillation may result in the expansion and reversal of "A Very Short Story" into *A Farewell to*

unconscious workings of the human mind" as it rarely indulges in "introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie." David Lodge. *The Modes of Modern Writing.* London: Edward Arnold, 1977, 45.

[95] After accurately visualizing Hemingway's story in its opening scene, Robert Siodmak's classic film noir adaptation, *The Killers*, flashes back and creates the lead up that Hemingway has omitted. *The Killers*, directed by Robert Siodmak (1946; New York: The Criterion Collection, 2003). Curiously enough, despite its utter reversal of the presumed intent of the story (and Hemingway's theory of writing), biographer Carlos Baker suggests that *The Killers* "was the first film from any of his works that Ernest could genuinely admire." Carlos Baker. *Hemingway*. Princeton UP, 1972.

Arms, which through its conversational bulk, as Michael North points out, attempts "to reverse by sheer insistence the failure of 'A Very Short Story'," a process of distillation informs much of Hemingway's work, even when expanded into novel form (North 199).

Even if distillation suggests purification down to its essential substance, it nevertheless indicates an extraction that relegates the distilled object's surroundings to oblivion. In its own way, Hemingway's preface to *A Moveable Feast* suggests as much: "For reasons sufficient to the writer, many places, people, observations and impressions have been left out of this book. Some were secrets and some were known by everyone and everyone has written about them and will doubtless write more" (*Moveable Feast* ix). While Hemingway then proceeds to list some of what he did not include in the book, those items, through their mention, doubtless obscure the unquantifiable omissions that surround them. As such, his works often begin *in medias res*—we enter them at an unclear moment after anything and everything may already have taken place.[96] For example, *A Moveable Feast* commences with, "Then there was the bad weather" (*Moveable Feast* 3), *A Farewell to Arms* with, "In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village…,"[97] and with a little less vagueness which, consequently, suggests that even more is missing prior to our entrance, *To Have and Have Not* starts, "You know how it is there early in the morning in Havana."[98] A catalog of such openings in Hemingway would occupy at least a few more pages. These abrupt entrances announce that a substantial part of the story has already

[96] The same quality characterizes Woolf's works that we will discuss shortly though she, of course, weaves through time in a manner that contrasts with Hemingway's deliberate progression into it. While these *in medias res* openings align with Lodge's claim that "[a] modernist novel has no real 'beginning', Hemingway rarely allows us to "familiarize" ourselves with the context of his texts through references to what precedes them or through shifting viewpoints (Lodge 45-46). In this sense, Hemingway's fiction is both more and less conventional than Lodge's characterization of modernist writing.

[97] Ernest Hemingway. *A Farewell to Arms*. N.Y.: Scribner, 1995, 3.

[98] Ernest Hemingway. *To Have and Have Not*. N.Y.: Scribner, 1996, 3.

occurred, but Hemingway never moves backwards to fill in what is missing. The texts themselves reflexively indicate that they are aware that they are, potentially, arbitrary extractions that merely point beyond themselves at a larger inaccessible world.

Michael North and Walter Benn Michaels both rightly explain that Hemingway uses language of this sort to create a vaguely pre-established readership and act as an arbitrator of taste and linguistic meaning.[99] Further, both of these modes of framing further reveal that the conditions of the text in question, and the text itself, have been functioning prior to our entrance into it. The cryptic language, in which slightly divergent linguistic meanings already operate, indicates that we have been dropped into a world for which we lack most of the context. "The Killers," in particular, communicates our alienness both linguistically and diegetically. Hemingway seemingly ambushes Nick Adams, himself already marking a fragmentary snippet of a larger world, with what reads like an almost finished crime novel that resembles the contemporary works of Dashiell Hammett, registered in a hard-boiled style that Hemingway is in the process of either creating or imitating. In the world that Hemingway constructs, the killers mock George, working in "Henry's lunch-room," after he tells them that "the dinner" is not ready yet, and refer to him and Nick as "bright boys" before revealing that they are in town to "kill a Swede" (*Short Stories* 279, 80 & 83). The absence of descriptive content and the story's almost exclusive delivery through dialogue remove all visual indicators as to what precisely occurs, in a manner that reflects the absence of context. For example, our uncertainty as to whether those in the story ordinarily call dinner "the dinner" and if "bright boy" holds a commonly agreed upon meaning, reflect our uncertainty as to the location of Henry's and how

[99] North 200-201. Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism.* Duke UP, 73.

and why Nick Adams, last glimpsed fishing—if we follow Hemingway's chronology through publication date—in "Big Two-Hearted River: Part II," conveniently sits at the counter. The narrative of "The Killers," in Hemingway's typical mode, refuses to end when it ends: the Swede will presumably be killed, as Nick and George are aware, but in some deferred future world that never reveals itself. George tells Nick, to conclude the story, "you better not think about it" (*Short Stories* 289).

Hemingway's injunction to "make instead of describe" (*Moveable Feast* 156) furthers his strategy of omission somewhat strangely in the unexpectedly— in a curious manner—stiff and uncomfortable enema scene in *A Farewell to Arms*. The narrator, Frederic Henry's, wife to be/nurse Catherine Barkley prepares him for surgery with the procedure she describes as, "Not much. But quite unpleasant" (*Farewell* 103). Hemingway communicates the enema exclusively through incredibly stilted and repetitive dialog, a common quality when he deals with romance, that, beyond basic indications—such as, "Now you're all clean inside and out"—has nothing to do with the immediate context (104). Margot Norris argues that, "[i]nstead of describing the action, the enema he receives at Catherine's hands, Frederic doubles or repeats her interdiction [to 'censor his thoughts and words' as he undergoes anesthesia]: his censorship thus fronts itself with her censorship to shield the reader from an unaesthetic and unerotic image."[100] Yet, perhaps Hemingway's desire to "make instead of describe" leads him to evacuate both literally and figuratively the descriptive content that would ordinarily populate such a scene. He does not "shield the reader" from or "censor" unpleasant "image[s]," but instead communicates the banal surface of the scene, flushing away the visualizable qualities through which novelistic prose

[100] Margot Norris. "The Novel as War: Lies and Truth in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 40.4 (1994), 697.

often operates.[101] We feel the enema through the rigid, repetitious dialog in, arguably, a much more uncomfortable manner than if the "unaesthetic and unerotic image" revealed itself. Through this instance of doubled evacuation, Hemingway reveals that, perhaps, the descriptive content has been flushed from all relations between Frederic and Catherine, which explains why they can exchange banalities through any scenario, from his enema to her death.

Even so, beyond these well-known surfaces of omission through which Hemingway's texts tend to operate—whether heavy in dialog or devoid of it—lies his deeper, unstated, and generally overlooked, realization that perception itself is a process of omission. To demonstrate the perceptual functioning of Hemingway's texts, we return to "A Canary for One," an ostensible study in ephemera, and the epigraph that begins this work. The story opens in a manner wholly typical of Hemingway and wholly representative of his construction of landscapes through the utterly unembellished positioning of objects in relation to one another: "The train passed very quickly a long, red stone house with a garden and four thick palm-trees with tables under them in the shade. On the other side was the sea. Then there was a cutting though red stone and clay, and the sea was only occasionally and far below against the rocks" (*Short Stories* 337). At first glance unremarkable by virtue of its blandness, this passage stages the perceptual functioning of the text itself. Moving forward through space and time, the train reveals and obscures the world around it, a world that dwells wholly on the horizon. The sea "was" positioned across from the house and trees, but then it "was only occasionally," as if the sea itself disappears without its observation and, more importantly, its observation in relation to something other than itself: its

[101] In reference to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hugh Kenner suggests of Hemingway's "unemphatic blankness" that "style cancels 'style.' Leaking from the prose into the events the prose celebrates, style also cancels events and cancels time, asserting that the things men do are few things only, slight in variety, meager in result." Hugh Kenner. *A Homemade World*. N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975, 147. This effect is only intensified when descriptive prose gives over entirely to dialogue.

position “against the rocks.” The train, however, subsequently proves inadequate to sustain the sea as perceptible: “The American lady pulled the window-blind down and there was no more sea, even occasionally.”

A few pages later the narrator finally seeps, almost unnoticed, into the narrative, but it makes little difference, and neither does the American lady’s canary, since the narrator reveals that he “had not listened to” her remarks about the bird that he has just relayed (*Short Stories* 339). Whatever the narrator does observe, its sheer drabness is a meager extraction of the already limited world of perceptibility available to him. The train’s forward motion obliterates the external world that it traverses while jettisoning the content that dwells behind and beneath the narrative. Spatial and temporal motion merge in the removal of the objects and events that ground them from the visual world of the text. The text’s spatio-temporal encasement reveals itself as a product of its own contingency: nothing outside of the train enters into the narrative unless the train itself allows for its visualization. If “there [is] no more sea, even occasionally,” anything and everything is potentially includable in and excludable from the narrative world that the train passes through. The events leading up to the husband and wife separating (and those that follow) are as inaccessible as the depths of the ocean or the bounds of the universe—abstractions that Woolf’s fiction, as we will subsequently determine, drifts towards—and only enter into the world of the text through their sheer abstraction. The minimal text, already evacuated of the majority of its content, reveals how little of the world is in fact revealed to us. Jake Barnes briefly communicates as much in *The Sun Also Rises* when he observes that, “There is no reason why because it is dark you should look at things differently from when it is light” (*Sun* 150). Either way, looking at something does little towards allowing you to see anything, and whether or not Jake means looking at the relation between Brett Ashley and Robert Cohn or

staring into space makes little difference. While Jake immediately corrects himself by writing, "The hell there isn't!" (if we assume that he actually writes anything, which would be reaching into the blankness before and after the text), he does nothing to support this negation other than indicating that his attempt to prove otherwise was useless: "I figured that all out once, and for six months I never slept with the electric light off. That was another bright idea" (*Sun* 152).

—**Non-being and Exception**

Virginia Woolf's works, like Hemingway's, deliberately call attention to their extraction from some sort of larger realm that remains inaccessible. Woolf often begins, like Hemingway, with an *in medias res* jump into the text, such as the continuation of a dialog in progress of *Jacob's Room* ("So of course, wrote Betty Flanders…") and *To the Lighthouse* ("'Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow,' said Mrs. Ramsay"), to the well-known opening, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself," which allows the novel to commence on its cover.[102] Woolf also, more importantly, reveals the contingency of the perceptual construction of prose—in the mind of the writer and, subsequently, in the minds that visualize it through reading—in her formulation of "moments of being." In "A Sketch of the Past," she begins with a relatively simple question concerning memory: "Unfortunately, one only remembers what is exceptional. And there seems to be no reason why one thing is exceptional and another not. Why have I forgotten so many things that must have been, one would have thought, more memorable than

[102] Virginia Woolf. *Jacob's Room.* N.Y.: Penguin, 1992, 3; *To the Lighthouse.* San Diego and N.Y.: Harcourt, 1955, 3; and *Mrs. Dalloway.* San Diego and N.Y.: Harcourt, 1953, 3.

what I do remember?" [103] Quite rightly, in Woolf's phrasing, memory is an "exception[]" to forgetting and, by extension, perception takes in the outside world in order for the mind to dispense with it. And the novel, perhaps, provides one of the only possibilities for capturing these exceptions: "Often when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand—'non-being'. Every day includes much more non-being than being." Furthermore, "separate moments of being [are] however embedded in many more moments of non-being" (*Moments* 70).

Woolf's phrase "moments of being," similar to Conrad's "moment of vision" in its inadequate characterization of what it attempts to represent, presumably stems from a desire to avoid the less profound and exceedingly obvious "memories." Memories, nonetheless, are basically what she refers to: "moments of being" are essentially what one remembers, "moments of non-being" are what one forgets. Woolf specifies that "moments of non-being" are the portion of life, situated within the day that "is not lived consciously." Nonetheless, how can one recall that a moment was "not lived consciously," especially as time passes? More importantly, are conscious moments always remembered? Even moments "not lived consciously" are presumably experienced since they are not fully unconscious. Unremembered perceptions fade into the background of memory, a forgotten context for what we remember. Furthermore, most conscious moments, whatever those may be, doubtless wither into non-being as temporal progression displaces them. Yet, despite the relative obviousness of her theory of memory (i.e. we forget more than we remember, and the remembered is not always memorable), Woolf's claim that "[t]he real novelist can somehow convey both sorts of being" remains useful.

[103] Woolf, *Moments of Being.* Sussex UP, 1976, 69-70.

If, as Woolf seems to suggest, "[t]he real novelist" must communicate both being and non-being—or as established above, the remembered and the unremembered and the conscious and the unconscious—in doing so, it appears, she must also represent the perceived and the unperceived, within both direct and mnemonic perception.[104] Although Woolf, in relation to her own status as a novelist, claims "I have never been able to do both," in the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse*, which Woolf herself identifies as "Two blocks joined by a corridor," she comes as near to inhabiting non-being as any other writer of modern literature.[105] Yet "Time Passes" "convey[s]" non-being not merely as the unremembered or the unconscious, as Woolf characterizes it in *Moments of Being*, but ostensibly attempts to communicate the unperceived: the Ramsays' summer home, unoccupied and existing independently of their inhabitation of it.[106] Or, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, "Human agency is attenuated as the house is denuded of human occupancy."[107] This section of *To the Lighthouse* seemingly stages the main thrust of Mr. Ramsay's work as a philosopher, as his son, Andrew, pithily summarizes it to Lily Briscoe: "Subject and object and the nature of reality" . . . "Think of a kitchen table then…when you're not there" (*Lighthouse* 23).[108] The unperceived house in which Woolf represents time passing,

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[104] Woolf does not wholly elaborate on what defines "the real novelist." She does "think" that Austen and Trollope, and, "perhaps," Thackeray, Dickens, and Tolstoy may have attained the title, which makes her criteria both vague and obvious. The same applies to what Hemingway refers to as "writing truly."

[105] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, transcribed and ed. Susan Dick. Toronto UP, 1982, 11.

[106] Woolf's attempts here to move beyond what Quentin Meillassoux labels "correlationism" which he suggests plagues thought since Kant (and, perhaps, since Descartes) in which human being can only think of the world, universe, etc. in relation to its own perception of it. Quentin Meillassoux. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans. Ray Brassier. London and N.Y.: Continuum, 2008.

[107] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1988, 35. Spivak refers to "Time Passes" as the "copula" that links the "subject" of "The Window," Mrs. Ramsay, with the "predicate" of "The Lighthouse," Lily's painting, 31.

[108] Much work exists on Woolf's relationship to philosophy, and much of it hinges on Mr. Ramsay and *To the Lighthouse* more broadly, but in general, the bulk of such criticism focuses on establishing that Woolf, herself, was either interested in philosophy—in varied forms usually ranging from Russell to Bergson—or that her writings, themselves, are philosophical. See Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table*. Cambridge UP, 2000), Hussey, *The Singing*

however, does not fully escape perceptual conquest, nor does the table that one tries to think of without immediate perception (inevitably merging with whatever memory of the table remains in the mind and the general image of "table" through which the mind recognizes a table). The house's unseen state is rendered perceptible through juxtaposition with the living and dying of characters who have previously perceived the house. Its neglect and decline correspond with the deaths that plague the Ramsay family, Prue in childbirth, Andrew in World War I, and Mrs. Ramsay herself "rather suddenly" of unspecified causes (*Lighthouse* 128). While these deaths are reduced to mere mention in brackets, Woolf denies the house the dignity to subsist on its own, without them and without the intrusion of the housekeepers, Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, who further situate it in human temporality. Non-being as "Time Passes" sets it out, therefore, only exists in relation to beings, even if the lives of those beings come to an end. Non-being in this case ignores the reality of the objects (the house and everything inside and outside of it), and the

of the Real World, Penelope Ingram, "'One Drifts Apart': *To the Lighthouse* as Art of Response," *Philosophy and Literature* 23.1(1999), 78-95. And Jaakko Hintikka, "Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 38 No. 1 (Autumn, 1979), 5-14. In part, this conversation responds to Woolf's claim that she does not "want 'a philosophy' in the least." Virginia Woolf. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Four, 1931-1935*, Ed. Anne Olivier Bell. San Diego: Harcourt, 1982, 126. However, it also responds to Erwin Steinberg's claim that, "Woolf expressed not only a lack of interest in any particular philosophy and, indeed, in philosophy as a study in general, but also an inability to grapple with many of the basic concepts of philosophy." Erwin Steinberg. "G. E. Moore's Table and Chair in *To the Lighthouse*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 15 (1988), 163. On the other hand, Michael Lackey reads a "modernist anti-philosophicalism" in Woolf, albeit one that replaces a seemingly antiquated philosophy—dependent on primary and secondary qualities and an idealized concept of truth—with a "semiotic unsconscious" derived from Freud that inhabits the contingencies of human interaction and, in a sense, exchanges one mode of dominating thought for another. Michael Lackey. "Modernist Anti-Philosophicalism and Virginia Woolf's Critique of Philosophy," *Journal of Modern Literature* Vol. 29. No. 4. (Summer, 2006) ,92 & 80. On the other hand, Alex Zwerdling and others convincingly demonstrate that Woolf was socially, culturally, and politically engaged in the world around her. See *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* California UP, 1986. All told, a great deal of Woolf criticism focuses on how and whether or not Woolf interacts with the external world. Nonetheless, studies on Woolf's relation to philosophy often draw heavily on biographical material and, perhaps by extension, tend to focus on interpersonal relationships in and outside of Woolf's works without approaching her attempts to encounter the world itself without any sort of constructed mediating subjectivity. And, perhaps more importantly, what the texts themselves might indicate about how human being registers the world and its relation to it.

world in which they are situated, which will presumably continue to register time passing regardless of human experience.

Woolf, on the other hand, does attempt to access the realm she proves unable to approach in *To the Lighthouse* in several sections of her earlier *Jacob's Room*. While the novel builds towards representing Jacob's room after he dies in the war, mediated through its perception by his mother and his aptly named friend, Bonamy, it often dwells along the way in spaces that it stages as beyond perception and representation.[109] On many levels *Jacob's Room* is a novel in which the narrative voice drifts around its presumed objects of focus—Jacob and his room—often losing track of and rarely characterizing them, resulting in a sort of stunted bildungsroman that traces Jacob's life from beginning to end without revealing much about him or whether or not he has learned anything. The observations of others, diegetically rendered, describe Jacob as "distinguished" and, on four separate occasions, "distinguished-looking" (*Jacob's Room* 24, 50, 59, 129 & 135). While "distinguished" usually refers to the upper social class, most of these observations emerge from that very class. Therefore, these references to Jacob's appearance inform us of nothing other than that Jacob is somehow distinguished from other human beings—even those in his social sphere—presumably in the same manner that anyone would prove distinct when observed in isolation from and in relation to others, especially when chosen as an object of investigation.

Yet, as indicated above, the narrative just as often wanders away from Jacob as towards him, and, in these instances, Woolf allows it to register non-being and, by extension, the unseen.

[109] The novel concludes with "a pair of Jacob's old shoes," an image of an object nearly impossible not to approach through Van Gogh's peasant shoes, Martin Heidegger's situation of them between world and earth in "The Origin of the Work of Art," and Jacques Derrida's further inhabitation of them with "this is my body, these are my shoes" in "Resititutions." See *Poetry—Language—Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. N.Y.: Perennial Classics, 2001, 32-36 and *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago UP, 1987, 255-382.

Woolf self-consciously raises and side-steps the Berkeleyan question, commonplace yet still nearly impossible to answer: "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"[110] Early in the novel, wandering around Jacob's youth, we find that, "[t]he tree had fallen . . . There had been a volley of pistol-shots suddenly in the depths of the wood. And his mother had taken him for a burglar when he came home late" (*Jacob's Room* 17).[111] Additionally, "[t]he tree had fallen, though it was a windless night." A connection between Jacob, hunting for moths with a lantern, and the tree is never really established, other than that if a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to see it, it does make a sound, and it may make someone's mother take him for a burglar. After we can safely assume that the narrative has moved on from the tree, it unexpectedly returns to it, though Jacob is now in college at Cambridge and disinterestedly attending chapel. The narrative drifts in and out from the sea, asking "Does Cambridge burn not only into the night, but into the day?" (a question as difficult to answer as Berkeley's), before moving into the chapel and tangentially drifting away from it: "…If you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it… Ah, but what's

[110] Berkeley's version of the thought experiment and answer reads: "But, say you, surely there is nothing easier than for me to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them" and many pages later, "The objects of sense exist only when they are perceived; the trees therefore are in the garden, or the chairs in the parlour, no longer that while there is somebody by to perceive them. Upon shutting my eyes all the furniture in the room is reduced to nothing, and barely upon opening them it is again created." George Berkeley. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Thomas J. McCormack. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2003, 42 &54. For Berkeley, like Hemingway's narrator, there is "no more sea, even occasionally."

[111] Douglas Mao nicely sets out the significance of "the figure of the tree"—like the table or chair, but transcending them due to its status as living—to philosophical history (from Hegel to Saussure and Elaine Scarry), Roger Fry's critique of Impressionism, and, consequently, within the sphere of Woolf's writing, ranging from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *The Years* (Mao 46-47). Mao elucidates Woolf's exploration of the terrain of "the vegetal" to delve into the "existential questions" raised by the relation, or lack thereof, between the human and "the nonhuman or nonsentient," largely subject and object, 48-49. He also points out, through Septimus' musings in *Mrs. Dalloway* and drawing on Scarry, that "with their uncanny air of death-in-life, of being nearly but not quite sentient, they foreground the absence of feeling in the object world as few other objects can" (48-49). See Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain*. Oxford UP, 1985, 174. Yet, Mao glosses over *Jacob's Room* in passing and does not trace the philosophical tree back to Berkeley's idea of "immaterialism" that it toys with.

that? A terrifying volley of pistol-shots rings out—cracks sharply; ripples spread—silence laps smooth over sound. A tree—a tree has fallen, a sort of death in the forest. After that, the wind in the trees sounds melancholy" (*Jacob's Room* 24-5). Oddly enough, this jump back through the novel's chronological, yet unmotivated, temporality, reveals that the tree, perhaps, does not make a sound unless human associative faculties see and hear either it or its carcass. Until then, pistol shots have killed something, afterward a humanized tree has been murdered and, accordingly, its forest friends mourn it.

Perhaps Woolf positions these two tree passages to underline the absurdity of the perceptual assumptions that allow human beings their self-created place in the world and motivate the human-centric model of narrative that *Jacob's Room* constantly wanders in and out of. The narrative often maneuvers away from any sort of human presence, offering an obscurely rendered perception of the unperceived, and opening to the horizons that bound perceptibility as such. These narrative drifts away from the human abound. For example, Woolf dwells on the continuous movement of nature around human objects, such as sunlight moving across a room through an open window.[112] Nonetheless, Woolf inhabits this terrain most effectively in sections of the text that are either unanchored to Jacob or abstracted from him into the unperceived world outside of him, generally obscured in novels through human being's natural fixation on itself. One passage (too long for citation), spaced off from the previous section which details how a mind—not Jacob's—"skimmed leagues" beyond itself, already abstracting from the limitations of its own perception, sits and observes the world unobserved: rooks landing on and alighting from trees, the breeze making branches creak, moss growing on them, a meadow in which a

[112] For example, see *Jacob's Room*, 18. Woolf similarly uses the natural world—storms, seasons, etc.—in "Time Passes" to register the changes in the house in the Ramsay's absence.

moth moves from flower to flower, and then, finally, in the distance, "the dinner bell at the house"—a house to which the scene has not previously been connected—"scared sleepy wings into the air again," reinserting human presence into its surroundings (*Jacob's Room* 46). In another instance, the narrative presents how "The day had gone out," space and time blurring imperceptibly, while abstracted beyond the capabilities of perception, snow falls and amasses, "[t]he stream crept along by the road unseen by any one. Sticks and leaves caught in the frozen grass," and humans (not distinct from the objects that surround them) and their vessels slip in and out of whatever space it might be, until we learn that "[s]paces of complete immobility separated each of these movements. The land seemed to lie dead" (*Jacob's Room* 84-5). What Woolf seizes on powerfully in such passages is that the immediate world of our surroundings is every bit as alien, phenomenologically and epistemologically, as the expanses of the galaxy and the depths of the ocean, both of which the narrative drifts into in a similar manner at other points in the text. The aspects of our surroundings, she indicates, that we do register are moments of exception from all that we do not.

—"Real" Writers, "Writing Truly"

Both communication through omission and attempting to "convey" non-being describe the world, and our interaction or non-interaction with it, as if it can, in fact, be described: the omitted matter and the state of non-being (whether psychological or phenomenological) fall within the perceptual, and hence representational, grasp of the writer. Woolf appears to indicate that non-being, or the unremembered, slips through perception and, consequently, is not registered mnemonically. However, in her formulation, the distinction between moments of being and non-being remains unclear, and the one—the exception, as outlined above—simply

fills in the other. She recalls her reminiscences of the Woolf family's summer home at St. Ives, Cornwall:

> At times I can go back to St Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen. In certain favourable moods, memories—what one has forgotten—come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible—I often wonder—that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? (*Moments* 67)

Shortly thereafter, Woolf suggests that the exceptions from non-being structure her memory and, by extension, her mental life: "these moments of being of mine were scaffolding in the background" (*Moments* 73). Since "memory supplies what [she has] forgotten," the "scaffolding" of moments of being supplies an archival print through which Woolf can "watch[] things happen as if [she] were there." This film in her mind indirectly relegates many of the drifts in *Jacob's Room*, especially those that take place in Cornwall, to bits of non-being that linger in her memory.

Woolf's thought on this "device" in 1938's "A Sketch of the Past" overlaps quite extensively with her essay on "The Cinema" from 1926, in which she claims, "We behold [the various objects of the world] as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it. As we gaze we seem to be removed from the pettiness of actual existence."[113]

[113] Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays.* London: Hogarth, 1950, 167.

Nonetheless, the potential that Woolf sees in cinema lies precisely in "the suggestiveness of reality," not in moments of "great intensity," but in the ordinary accoutrements of the world (*Captain's* 167 & 68). For her, filmmakers falter in attempting any sort of artistic expression (especially the adaptation of literary works) instead of dwelling in the sublimity of capturing time and space as they flow before the camera. Film, as Woolf sees it, "embalms" reality in a manner somewhat similar to that of film theorist André Bazin—who refers to photography, and by extension film, as "the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can see"[114]—but she also suggests that the cinema's reality is either "more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life." It appears that Woolf would lean towards the latter since the world that film represents, as she discusses it, does not exceed the capacity of our visual perception, it is simply an unfolding of a reality that we are not present for. The potential of cinema, for Woolf, lies in its ability to store and display fragments of the world, regardless of whether or not they share the "pettiness" of our "actual existence," from which the world of film removes us. Woolf adds that the "beauty [of what film depicts] will continue, and this beauty will flourish whether we behold it or not." The world around us dwells unseen, yet wholly perceptible, regardless of whether or not we, or a camera, are on hand to take it in. Yet, on the other hand, every visual perception—whether direct or mediated through the cinema—therefore functions as a reminder of the infinite "beauty" that it eradicates in our selection of it. If film expands the range of perceptible material, it only does so quantitatively and not qualitatively.[115]

[114] André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, Trans. Hugh Gray. California U, 2005, 14 -15.

[115] Joseph Vogl's claim that in the post-Galilean world "every visibility is surrounded by an ocean of invisibility. Everything visible remains contingent, forever encompassed by the imperceptible and the unknown" holds true even in the context of our immediate surroundings. Joseph Vogl. "Becoming-media: Galileo's Telescope ," Trans. Brian Hanrahan, *Grey Room* No. 29 (2007): 18. The camera's ability to show us what we cannot see emphasizes how little we do see.

Returning to the archival visual "device" from "A Sketch of the Past," constructed by the mind to situate its memory, Woolf foresees an externalized memory "independent of our minds" that will somehow store feelings of "great intensity"—and, it would appear, judge and categorize them as such. Yet, the contingency of her vaguely defined external memory registers the contingency of the recorded world, of film and photography, that seeps through her memory of memory and from her earlier essay into her later one.[116] Furthermore, the contingency of externalized memory communicates the contingency of the cognitive mnemonic construction from which it emerges: the "exceptions" of being situate their "scaffolding" within the very non-being from which they distinguish themselves.

Hemingway similarly envisions his writing atop a reserve of memory from which he can extract: "I had learned already never to empty the well of my writing, but always to stop when there was still something there in the deep part of the well, and let it refill at night from the springs that fed it" (*Moveable Feast* 26). His work, furthermore, is contingent on the oscillation between what vaguely resembles Woolf's being and non-being: "I learned not to think about anything that I was writing from the time I stopped writing until I started again the next day. That way my subconscious would be working on it and at the same time I would be listening to other people and noticing everything, I hoped; learning, I hoped; and I would read so that I would not think about my work and make myself impotent to do it" (*Moveable Feast* 13). While he ostensibly situates his writing as the product of "learning" through his observational faculties,

[116] Mary Ann Doane suggests that cinema, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, allows for an indexical recording of contingency while simultaneously attempting to "make the contingent legible" through temporal structuration. Mary Ann Doane. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*. Harvard UP, 2002, 230.

it seems that his writing is strictly dependent on not writing, on leaving things unwritten and, by extension, unperceived. In a slightly different context, Hemingway explains why he has better luck writing of Michigan while in Paris: "I had already seen the end of fall come through boyhood, youth and young manhood, and in one place you could write about it better than in another. That was called transplanting yourself, I thought, and it could be as necessary with people as with other sorts of growing things" (*Moveable Feast* 5). These passages all indicate that writing, especially "writing truly," for Hemingway bars direct access to what he writes about. He must "transplant[]" himself away from what he "kn[o]w[s] about" in order to distill it into a story. In essence, his materials, experience itself perhaps, must filter through non-being to prepare for proper literary deployment.

The vagueness of these two phrases—"writing truly" and "real writers"—through which Hemingway and Woolf attempt to articulate what exactly indicates success in writing through omission and non-being, whether or not the terms are self-describing, reveals the imperceptible quality that they work towards communicating. In a sense, neither Hemingway nor Woolf know what they write, and neither can possibly have any idea what these two phrases mean. Erich Auerbach seizes on this quality in Woolf in his discussion of the narrative style of the opening of *To the Lighthouse* in *Mimesis*: "No one is certain of anything here: it is all mere supposition, glances cast by one person upon another whose enigma he [oddly Woolf in this context] cannot solve" . . . "we are not given the objective information which Virginia Woolf possesses regarding these objects of her creative imagination."[117] Auerbach errs in assuming that Woolf maintains any "objective information" when it concerns the "objects of her creative imagination." Perhaps

[117] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton UP, 1991, 532 & 534.

there is no such thing, and if there is, no one would have access to it. Woolf attempts to create non-being, or as indicated at the beginning of this chapter, "the alien and external," what lingers unglimpsed beyond the "luminous halo" that situates her in the world of being. Hemingway identifies something similar in *A Moveable Feast*: "The story was writing itself and I was having a hard time keeping up with it" (*Moveable Feast* 6). The story itself erupts out of "the well" that he taps, leaving far more than itself unwritten beneath it. These two writers both register contingency in their respective attempts to omit and channel non-being, and it is precisely for this reason that the blankness at the horizons of visual perception grounds and surrounds their narrative worlds. Furthermore, the two diverging strands of modernism that they have come to stand for both stem from their recognition, whether consciously or not, that writing emerges through the limitations through which it brackets itself off from the world. More precisely, the observational act of writing, in these two authors often approached biographically—and hence, through their respective interactions with and observations of the world—is a process of leaving things unseen and, hence, unwritten.

CHAPTER THREE

The Obscene and the Unseen in *Ulysses*

> "[. . .] down your gullet until you puke, and then the puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you begin to like it."
>
> —Samuel Beckett, *Watt*[118]

In an essay on obscenity in *Ulysses*, Rachel Potter traces the origin of "obscene" to its classical theatrical roots. The term "obscene" designates the offstage, referring to violence or sexuality thought too offensive to present visually before the audience.[119] The obscene, therefore, is what takes place unseen, beyond the bounds of the stage. This qualification, strangely enough, indicates that obscenity as such may not appear before an offended eye and, perhaps, never actually takes place. Or, simply, that what should not be seen nonetheless is. Obscenity in the modern age has come to demarcate when something has transgressed the bounds of taste and made its onlookers visualize, whether directly or mentally, what has expressly been categorized as what must not be seen: or, more precisely, what cannot be represented. In general terms, when obscenity occurs censorship responds accordingly, and its oddness is twofold: censorship prevents the distribution of whatever, it seems, has managed to represent the unrepresentable and, more importantly, displayed whatever offensive vision the world at large has agreed must not be seen. The obscene, in such a context, is a material

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[118] Samuel Beckett. *Watt*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1953, 44.

[119] Rachel Potter. "'Can My Daughter of 18 Read this Book?': *Ulysses* and Obscenity." *Critical Quarterly* Vol. 46, No. 4, 24.

substance, a physical presence that the sociocultural mechanism must remove from the sphere of visibility, or push back behind the scene onstage. At the same time, the modernist moment, if there was such a thing, emerges as the apotheosis of obscenity. Especially so if we accept Jean-François Lyotard's characterization of modern art as the attempt "to present the fact that the unpresentable exists."[120]

Much has been written on obscenity in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the most prominent example of modernist obscenity. However, a large portion of these studies approach the topic through controversies that the novel spawned instead of the actual text that caused offense. While such investigations are fruitful in some regards, they often tend towards generalizing Joyce's epoch's over-motivated sense of decency, specifically that of the United States, and, consequently, often have little to do with *Ulysses* itself. In focusing on the legal framework that labeled *Ulysses* obscene, critics frequently restrict their scope to the *Little Review* trial and, if they choose to even deal with the novel *Ulysses*, contain their analysis within the offending object: the 'Nausicaa' chapter. Consequently, the fact that *Ulysses* can be considered obscene—and perhaps should be, as Joyce himself very well may have intended—becomes merely a product of the context in which it was labeled obscene and not always a result of the author and text that communicate the untoward matter. If *Ulysses* is actually an obscene novel (whatever that may mean), 'Nausicaa' clearly ranks rather low in terms of its level of offensiveness in comparison with other chapters, specifically those that follow it ('Circe' and 'Penelope' are

[120] Jean-François Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minnesota UP, 1984, 78.

obvious examples).[121] In terms of redirecting the topic of *Ulysses'* obscenity in a different, and potentially more productive direction, one could ask the following relatively generic question: why does what is generally considered 'the greatest novel of the 20th century' exhibit what could easily be perceived as an obsession with bodily functions and, of course, matter that is traditionally considered obscene? While the preceding question may be rather large, this chapter hopes to work towards approaching an answer through a very specific instance of Joyce's engagement with the obscene and to reattach the question of obscenity to Joyce's fixation on the body within the text of *Ulysses*. This fixation, as the chapter will indicate, emerges most profoundly in an essential passage in which the typical objects of obscenity—the genitals—lurk at the bounds of visual perception.

While urinating beside Leopold Bloom in the "Ithaca" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus contemplates "the sacerdotal integrity of Jesus circumcised," reworking a scholastic "problem," but also perhaps alluding to St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* in which Aquinas attempts to rectify circumcision's ostensible contamination of the Word made flesh.[122] Christ's circumcision conceivably marks both a profanation and a sexualization of Christ's already profaned spiritual presence, and exhibits a bodily fixation within theology—an obscene site through which the sacred and the profane are indistinguishable. The meaning of obscene that Potter traces to the unrepresentable clearly problematizes any attempt to effectively categorize Joyce's novel as "obscene," and

[121] This clear increase suggests Joyce's desire to offend even more after hearing of the trial, though 'Oxen of the Sun' and 'Circe' had presumably already been written, and provide an alternative to approaching the legal context solely in relation to the trial and 'Nausicaa'.

[122] James Joyce. *Ulysses*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler. N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1986, 17.1203; hereafter cited in text by chapter and line number.

simultaneously disrupts previous interpretations of obscenity's function within *Ulysses* (and various concatenations of Joyce criticism). In terms of any judgment of obscenity, "the thing that cannot be represented," despite its departure from the word's etymology, clearly destabilizes such qualifications: how can a work of art or mode of representation be condemned for presenting that which cannot be represented? Yet, it is precisely the intersection of two such excesses of representation—the scatological and the theological—that perhaps most palpably manifests the function of *Ulysses'* obscenity. Potter indirectly indicates a similar conjunction of the sacred and the profane by citing Georges Bataille's definition of obscenity from *Erotism*. Bataille explains, "Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality."[123] Not only does Potter's reference of Bataille's designation prove useful in terms of *Ulysses'* fixation on the bodily and, as I shall explain later, the spiritual, it also functions to further articulate the anomaly of Joyce's scatology within supposed "high modernism."

Through Stephen's micturatory meditations, Joyce's catechetical structure ultimately unveils the Catholic sacred's self-profanation, suggesting that theology is inherently scatological. Christ's circumcision, the site of numerous threads of theological debate, arises in response to "Ithaca's" disembodied narrative inquisitor, a response from an unknown narrator/voice that prompts another sequence of questions and responses. Stephen's disembodied thoughts, expressed through an unknown voice, an unknown respondent—"echoes" or "re-utilizations" of previously received discourse, to borrow from André Topia—subvert their theological paradigm

[123] Georges Bataille. *Erotism*. Trans. Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986, 17-18. Potter cites the British version of the text, *Eroticism*, Trans. Mary Dalwood. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962, 17-18. Cited in Potter, 25.

through the highly profane context in which they are prompted and emerge, but also through the omniscience of the voice (an unknown spirit speaking for the bodies of Stephen and Bloom), a fusion of the scientific and the theological, that manifests Stephen's fleshly contemplation of Christ's "sacerdotal integrity."[124] Much has been written on the body and/or the obscene in *Ulysses* and its emergence within the spiritual realm, principally through the mediation of the Catholic confession, but also, again, through judicial investigations of its presumed depravity. Yet, the most obvious manifestation of the interrogative form—the catechism of Ithaca—has been generally ignored or merely alluded to within analyses of *Ulysses'* obscenity and, more specifically, Joyce's irruption of the obscenity of confession. When situated within this context, Stephen's scholastic urination simultaneously exhibits the motivation for and inadequacy of several archetypes of inquiry into *Ulysses'* obscenity, inquiries that generally explicate sections of the text from which Stephen is notably absent ("Calypso," "Lotus Eaters," "Nausicaa"), present in the background during others' decadent behavior ("Oxen of the Sun," "Circe"), or a speculative object of Molly Bloom's desire ("Penelope").[125] Nearly all discussions of the body in

[124] André Topia. "The Matrix and the Echo: Intertextuality in *Ulysses*. *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*. Eds. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer. Cambridge UP, 1984, 105.

[125] Of the numerous works concerning such topics, I allude specifically to those listed below. The only discussion I have been able to locate of sexuality and the body in relation to Stephen appears in Christine Froula's dubious claim that "Gerty is Stephen in metaphysical drag," and that he "ventriloquizes through Gerty" during her display in "Nausicaa" (Froula, 124-26). Froula's argument does not prove especially compelling, and relies on an association of Stephen with the authorial Joyce. Her association of Stephen with Gerty arises from an assumption that Stephen and Joyce share a foot fetish, which, of course, leads them to display Gerty's feet and legs to Bloom, who apparently does not have a foot fetish . . . Leonard, Parkes, and Streit analyze the confessional as a sexual/voyeuristic site (specifically within "Nausicaa" and "Penelope," but also in Bloom's allusion to the confessional's sadomasochistic quality in "Lotus Eaters," 5.425-430) in relation to Foucault's theorization of its power relations and presumed role in "the production of truth" in *The History of Sexuality, Vol.I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1978, 58. Christine Froula. *Modernism's Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce*. Columbia UP, 1996; Garry Leonard. "Power, Pornography, and the Problem of Pleasure: The Semerotics of Desire and Commodity Culture in Joyce." *James Joyce Quarterly*, 30.4/31.1 (1993): 615-667; Adam Parkes, *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship*. Oxford UP, 1996; Allison Pease. *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity*. Cambridge UP; and Wolfgang Streit. *Joyce/Foucault: Sexual Confessions*. Michigan UP, 2004.

Ulysses examine Bloom, excepting some of those concerning "Penelope" or "Oxen of the Sun,"[126] and delineate a hierarchy of body (Bloom) opposing spiritual/intellectual (Stephen); in essence, profane and sacred. While such dichotomies are inherently inaccurate, they underlie the majority of claims concerning Bloom "the everyman" and Stephen "the artist." Using Stephen's excretory theology—and its relation to Bloom's concurrent cogitations—as a locus of transgression, or parodic epiphany, I will explore how Joyce's rendering of the obscene as invisible ruptures the distinction between the sacred and the profane, the theological and the scatological, and the false association of Stephen and Bloom with the positive and negative sides of these hierarchical binaries. Furthermore, this site of scholastic urination, along with "Nausicaa" and "Oxen of the Sun," manifests *Ulysses'* incessant exhibition of language and perception as mere constructions of a continuous process of assemblage and contamination of previously received discursive formations, which may ultimately be reducible to processes of excretion and regurgitation.

—The Sacred Prepuce?

> At Stephen's suggestion, at Bloom's instigation both, first Stephen, then Bloom, in penumbra urinated, their sides contiguous, their organs of micturition reciprocally rendered invisible by manual circumposition, their gazes, first Bloom's, then

[126] Analyses of "Nausicaa," "Oxen of the Sun," "Circe," and "Penelope" often focus on the representation of non-reproductive sexuality, the public reaction to Joyce's representation of it, and whether or not Joyce promoted or opposed non-reproductive sexuality and contraception. See Mary Lowe-Evans. *Crimes Against Fecundity: Joyce and Population Control*. Syracuse UP, 1989; Katherine Mullin. *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*. Cambridge UP, 2003, esp. chapters four, five, and six; and Parkes. *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship*.

Stephen's, elevated to the projected luminous and semiluminous shadow.

(*U*, 17.1186.90)

In a letter to Frank Budgen composed while he was writing "Ithaca," Joyce explains the chapter's style: "I am writing *Ithaca* in the form of a mathematical catechism. All events are resolved into their cosmic, physical, psychical etc. equivalents . . . not only will the reader know everything and know it in the baldest coldest way, but Bloom and Stephen thereby become heavenly bodies, wanderers like the stars at which they gaze."[127] While Joyce emphasizes the "mathematical" aspect of the catechetical style of "Ithaca," he doubtless also refers to the use of catechism in Christian tradition, and Bloom and Stephen's "becom[ing] heavenly bodies" places them somehow beyond yet within the form and logic of the catechism. In transforming them into "heavenly bodies" Joyce also positions Bloom and Stephen beyond human experience and perception, making them reminders of the immense abstraction of the unknown that humans ignore in daily life. Karen Lawrence designates the unidentifiable narrator/narrative voice of "Ithaca" as a "lateral imagination" that "meticulously strings together facts without establishing any sense of priority among them." She additionally suggests that "[t]here is a curious sense of displacement about the writing, as if one story were being written, while another, more important story were taking place." [128] Lawrence emphasizes that she does not intend, through her use of "displacement," to psychoanalyze the narrator/narrative, but to explain that the "narrative displacement, in fact, sometimes dovetails with Bloom's own mechanism of avoidance," alluding to Bloom's displacement of his anxieties onto physical objects (one example being

[127] James Joyce. *Selected Letters*. Ed. Richard Ellman. New York: Viking Press, 1975, 278.

[128] Karen Lawrence. "Style and Narrative in the 'Ithaca' Chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*." *ELH*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 560.

Bloom's examination of his fingernails at the mention of Boylan's name in "Hades") and the narrator/narrative of "Ithaca's" frequent transference of answers onto either related or unrelated physical objects either present or absent. (Lawrence 561)

While Lawrence's contention often proves correct in "Ithaca," the "lateral imagination" just as often wanders away from objects as towards them, so that, when queried as to the whereabouts of an immediate subject or object, Bloom, Stephen, or Bloom's toenail clipping, for example, the "imagination" frequently drifts towards a variety of topics—banal, essential, or transgressive. When questioned as to why Bloom sniffed his recently clipped "ungual fragment" with "satisfaction," the "lateral imagination" responds, "Because the odour inhaled corresponded to other odours inhaled of other ungual fragments, picked and lacerated by Master Bloom, pupil of Mrs Ellis's juvenile school, patiently each night in the act of brief genuflection and noctural prayer and ambitious meditation" (*U*, 17.1492-96). The simple question "Why with satisfaction?" opens a field of profanation in which the act of sniffing "ungual fragment[s]" contaminates the bodily quest for transcendence through "prayer and ambitious meditation." Bataille explains profanation in its most basic terms: "[t]he principle of profanation is the use of the sacred for profane purposes." (Bataille 122) Beyond mere profanation of the sacred act, Bloom's toenail sniffing enacts a sort of redoubling of profanation, an unwitting desecration of his already profaned performance of prayer and meditation, accentuated through the "brief[ness]" of his genuflection. Similarly, one wonders what type of religious practice would have been enforced in the young Bloom—despite Bloom's presumed Protestant upbringing, genuflection seems to indicate Catholicism—and how it would have been perceived in Dublin. Nonetheless, the emergence of prayer within Bloom's inhalation of toenail fumes echoes Stephen's profanation within urination, and, through profane contamination, manifests the

inadequacy of the profane/sacred distinction that ordinarily categorizes the two characters and suggests that the unrepresentable is most perceptible in base materiality.

During the above quoted urination of Bloom and Stephen, or, in the words of Rudolph Von Abele "fraternal piss," [129] the following question and answer presents Bloom's ostensible bodily fixation and Stephen's scholastic prepucial "problem":

> What different problems presented themselves to each concerning the invisible audible collateral organ of the other?
>
> To Bloom: the problems of irritability, tumescence, rigidity, reactivity, dimension, sanitariness, pilosity.
>
> To Stephen: the problem of the sacerdotal integrity of Jesus circumcised (I January, holiday of obligation to hear mass and abstain from unnecessary servile work) and the problem as to whether the divine prepuce, the carnal bridal ring of the holy Roman catholic apostolic church, conserved in Calcata, were deserving of simple hyperduly or of the fourth degree of latria accorded to the abscission of such divine excrescences as hair and toenails. (*U, 17*.1199-1209)

In this curious case of quasi parallax, we have not "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," but "Two Ways of Thinking of a Man's Genitals." Bloom and Stephen—or at least the third-person representation of their presumed thoughts—displace their contemplation of the other's "collateral organ" into abstract discursive speculation, filtering the actual organ in question,

[129] Rudolph Von Abele. "Film as Interpretation: A Case Study of *Ulysses*." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 31, No. 4., 495. Wolfgang Streit reads this "penumbra" of urination as a refiguration of Stephen and Bloom's respective experiences on the strand in "Proteus" and "Nausicaa." However, he relies on the interpretation that Stephen does indeed masturbate on the strand, a claim that he admits relies heavily on a highly "obscured" occurrence in the text. Streit writes, "[t]he iconography of two parallel male sexual organs on the same beach is synchronized late at night—this time in a state of limpness—when Bloom and Stephen urinate in unison" (Streit, 111).

something outside the sphere of visibility, through a systematic process of interrogation. Their "problems" would seemingly affirm the response formulated earlier in "Ithaca" that their respective "temperaments" represent "The scientific. The artistic" (17.560).

Indeed, Bloom's "problems" are of a highly scientific nature, presenting a variety of essential material categories for determining the functionality, appearance, cleanliness, etc. of a physical object; however, in Stephen's case, we are presented with a curious remnant of his scholastic education. While it appears that Stephen's speculations are of a theological nature, it should be noted that the investigations ascribed to Bloom and Stephen are both, like the "bridal ring of the holy Roman catholic apostolic church," clearly "carnal." Bataille claims that "only in Christianity did the existence of the impure world become a profanation in itself. The profanation resided in the fact that it existed, even if pure things were not themselves sullied" (Bataille 122). If we accept Bataille's assertion, Stephen's speculations would further align with Bloom's wholly physical concerns, notwithstanding the highly fleshly context in which they arise, for his theological lucubrations are indeed of a profane nature. Don Gifford briefly explains Stephen's contemplation: "The scholastic 'problem' that Stephen raises is that since Jesus was both humanly and divinely complete (lacking nothing, having nothing in excess), does the fact that he 'submitted' to circumcision call that completeness (integrity) into question?"[130] Nevertheless, Stephen, or rather the voice/narrator that presents Stephen's presumed internal thoughts, further situates his "problem" within the profane realm by labeling Christ's bodily integrity as "sacerdotal," emphasizing his priestly role as mediator between God and man.[131]

[130] Don Gifford, with Seidman, Robert J. *Ulysses Annotated*. Berkeley: California UP, 1988, 585.

[131] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sacerdotal as, "Of or belonging to the priests or priesthood; of or pertaining to a priest; befitting or characteristic of a priest; priestly," though the etymological derivation would be

Stephen's focus on the "sacerdotal" potentially devaluates the role of Christ from the Word made flesh to that of the purely "carnal" mediating role of Christian priest whose function his coming necessitates. The spiritual aspect of the sacerdotal thus requires ordination as compensation for the priest's profane aspect, a sacred prosthetic for the bodily being, a distinction of which Stephen Dedalus, due to his scholastic education, would presumably be aware.

Gifford references *Romans* 4 as the motivation for the Church's presumed response to Stephen's "problem," specifically Paul's explication of the covenant of circumcision between God and Abraham relayed in *Genesis* 17. Paul interrogates whether one can be blessed without circumcision, indirectly positioning the severance of Christianity from Judaism in the severance of Christ's foreskin, reversing or restructuring the covenant through spiritual circumcision by baptism in Christ (a spiritual sign without its bodily equivalent, a performative mark replaces the signification of physical absence):

> Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, 'Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.' How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham

"one who offers sacrifices," which clearly, within the context of Christianity, points to Christ, but, nonetheless, signifies a compensatory mediating function of the profane in response to the sacred.

had before he was circumcised. (*Rom.* 4.9-12)[132]

To justify a rupture from Judaism, and its signature of circumcision, Paul relies on the signification of circumcision as merely "a seal of the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." In doing so, Paul associates Christ with Abraham as the "ancestor," or father, of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised faithful (though Christ also recognizes his descent from the "ancestor" Abraham), a father that bears the mark of repentance for original sin, at least in Catholic doctrine, a scar borne symbolically and sacrificially by Christ. Therefore, those who "follow the example of the faith," and follow Christ, are absolved from the mark of repentance that he bears in their place—a mark that severs Christianity's converts from its origin.

St. Thomas Aquinas, who begins his reply to this "problem" by arguing why Christ "ought to have been circumcised," instead of simply assuming that he was circumcised, explains the circumcision as an analogue of the passion: "As Christ voluntarily took upon Himself our death, which is the effect of sin, whereas He had no sin Himself . . . so also He took upon Himself circumcision, which was a remedy against original sin, whereas He contracted no original sin, in order to deliver us from the yoke of the Law, and to accomplish a spiritual circumcision in us." [133] Aquinas further explains his answer by claiming that Christ was circumcised so that "by taking upon Himself the shadow, He might accomplish the reality." By subjecting himself to the sign or "shadow" of circumcision, at the age of eight days, Christ

[132] *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks. N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1989, 2121.

[133] *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* Second and Revised Edition, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Question 37, Article 1. Aquinas' statement that Christ "ought to have been circumcised" is based in a retrospective account of Christ's birth in Luke 2:21, where Luke writes of the angel's command to the shepherds, "[a]nd after eight days were accomplished, that the child should be circumcised." This passage from Luke varies between translations, including variations between past and future tense.

makes the sign obsolete by removing the Law it represents, or, as Aquinas' suggests, "by taking on Himself the burden of the Law, He might set others free therefrom." In this respect, Christ's circumcision, which "ought to" have happened, is the event that retrospectively comes to birth those baptized in the new covenant, a passion (or initial blood sacrifice) before *the* passion that to some extent negates its singular repetition, as well as Christ's rise from death and ascension to heaven, through the contaminated basis of a "sacerdotal integrity" that within Christianity, especially Catholicism, obfuscates the sacred/profane distinction in which it is grounded. Within the revelation of Stephen's "problem," the catechetical process unveils its own disjunctive basis through the residue of the "divine prepuce" that, through both its attachment and severance, leaves the sacred dangling from the profane, as the profane office, circumcision itself, leading to the question of "sacerdotal integrity," lessens the sacrifice of the passion through its prefiguration in Christ's assumption of "the yoke of the law."

Stephen's "problem," despite its theological origin, could also be perceived as blasphemous, idolatrous, and obscene, especially due to its fixation on the "virile member" of Christ,[134] and its fetishization of his "divine excrescences," profane remnants of the earthly manifestation of the sacred, remnants that are clearly of a questionable validity.[135] Furthermore, Stephen's evocation of "hyperduly" and "the fourth degree of latria" elevates the prepuce to a sacred status somewhere between that of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Trinity, and conceivably enacts a further profanation of the presumptive bodily remnant of divine appearance, through the

[134] This term echoes Aquinas' discussion of circumcision in relation to Christ and Abraham. Clearly the question of Christ's "virility" would present another equally complex scholastic problem.

[135] The "Holy Prepuce" at the time of *Ulysses'* publication was believed to be held in Calcata, though its integrity is of a highly dubious nature, since, during the Middle Ages, there were up to eighteen different pieces of foreskin that variously presented themselves as Christ's. The Calcata prepuce was stolen in 1983.

worship of an object (a remnant or trace) instead of the abstract heavenly body from whose physical vessel it was severed. The catechetical response also emphasizes that "the abscission of such divine excrescences as hair and toenails" are accorded a higher status as objects of worship than the Virgin Mary, since latria, in strict scholastic terms, holds a higher office than hyperduly.

Earlier in "Ithaca," the "lateral imagination" presents another example of Stephen's fixation upon the physicality of Christ. The narrator/narrative/voice queries and responds,

> What were Stephen's and Bloom's quasisimultaneous volitional quasisensations of concealed identities?
>
> Visually, Stephen's: The traditional figure of hypostasis, depicted by Johannes Damascenus, Lentulus Romanus and Epiphanus Monachus as leucodermic, sesquipedalian with winedark hair.
>
> Auditively, Bloom's: The traditional accent of the ecstasy of catastrophe. (*U*, 17.781-86)

The narrator/voice's answer remains unclear: are the "concealed identities,' glimpsed through "Stephen's and Bloom's quasisimultaneous volitional quasisensations," revelations of the concealment of Bloom and Stephen, Stephen and Bloom, or Christ's representation and "[t]he traditional accent of the ecstasy of catastrophe"?

While this question is perhaps impossible to answer, Stephen's visualization of an amalgamation of questionable verbal representations of Christ's bodily appearance (the pure synthesis of divine and human) proves significant considering his subsequent speculations concerning Christ's "sacerdotal integrity." Gifford glosses that Johannes Damascenus—the Latin theologian St. John of Damascus—"argued that the divine and human in Christ were combined in one person without the possibility of conversion, confusion or separation. He described Jesus as 'a man of tall stature' with 'somewhat winecoloured hair'." (Gifford 579) Furthermore,

Lentulus Romanus is a fictitious character, "supposed to have been the governor of Judea before Pontius Pilate and supposed to have written a letter to the Roman Senate in which he described Jesus as 'a man of tall stature' with 'somewhat winecolored hair'." (Ibid.) Romanus's fictional description of Christ's physical appearance serves as the representational basis for both Johannes Damascenus's and Epiphanius Monachus's archetypes for the "traditional figure of hypostasis"—the prototypes for Medieval and subsequent icons. As we have seen with Christ's prepuce, Stephen's theological speculations (as figured in the "lateral imagination") are of a material nature, he fixates upon earthly images of the hypostasis, in both cases absent representations of disputed integrity. These arguably idolatrous manifestations of Christ curiously recall the aforementioned definition of obscenity as "the thing that cannot be represented." Stephen's evocations of debatable significations of hypostasis embody obscenity as they function to substantiate the unrepresentable, to make the unseen visible, exhibiting the sacrificed physicality that should ostensibly negate the human dependence on the sinful flesh—and hence iconic representation.

However, if the "concealed identit[y]" manifest in the visualized icon is his own, Stephen willfully elevates himself to the role of Christ through self-identification in his earthly significations—prepuce and iconographic archetypes—a doubly obscene act that transgresses the sacred and, in a mutation of Bataille's words, one in which the self-image would be the destabilizing erotic object, "upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality." If the "concealed identit[y]" is indeed Stephen's, the visualization oddly echoes his earlier declaration in "Oxen of the Sun": "I, Bous Stephanoumenos, bullockbefriending bard, am lord and giver of their life" (*U*, 14.1115-16). While Gifford rightly recognizes Stephen's allusion to Odysseus's gift of blood to the shades in

Hades, giving life through the blood of the oxen, and figuratively his own, (Gifford 434-5) Stephen's language clearly borrows from traditional descriptions of the Holy Spirit as "the Lord, the giver of life," emphasizing his presumed confidence in the creative powers of his artistic gifts (though the parodic style of "Oxen of the Sun" makes any such distinction difficult). Moreover, Stephen's drunken proclamation of his "ox- or bull-soul" designates him "as garland bearer for a sacrifice," (Ibid. 245) though his invocation of the Holy Spirit aligns the "coronal of vineleaves," with which he adorns himself in the parodic narrative, and the preparation for sacrifice with an inversion of Christ's crown of thorns, a pronouncement that clearly conflates Christianity with what his Jesuit education would consider paganry; notwithstanding his blatantly blasphemous identification with the physical representations and the bodily sacrifice of Christ (*U*, 14.1116-17). Through this mock-usurpation of the place of transcendence, within the realm beyond representation, Stephen positions himself as the object and answer of his own scholastic inquisition within the catechetical "lateral imagination" of "Ithaca."

Nonetheless, if the "concealed identit[y]" that Stephen "volitional[ly]" perceives (the "quasisensations") proves to Bloom's, he positions a physical being in mediation between himself and Christ, which situates Bloom in a vaguely sacerdotal role: either that of the mediating priest, or that of Christ himself. "Ithaca" further associates Bloom with a priestly life in the following question: "What future careers had been possible for Bloom in the past and with what exemplars?" (*U*, 17.787-88) In the response, Bloom's priestly potential emerges in several possibilities, his options being in retrospect, "[i]n the church, Roman, Anglican or Nonconformist: exemplars, the very reverend John Conmee S.J., the reverend T. Salmon, D.D., provost of Trinity college, Dr Alexander J. Dowie" (*U*, 17.789-91). Reiterating Bloom's trinity of baptisms (by Catholic and Protestant priests, and by a trinity of laymen), he could potentially

be the Jesuit overseer of Stephen's youthful and collegiate education at Clongowes and Belvedere, provost at the largely Protestant institution, and revivalist who believed himself "the modern reincarnation of the apostle Paul"—the circumcised preaching against circumcision. (Gifford 157) Notably absent from this list is the option of Bloom pursuing the Jewish faith of his father's ancestors, a faith and tradition through which Stephen additionally links Bloom with Christ.

Stephen further profanes the sacred, and sacerdotalizes his urinary partner, by scrutinizing Christ's circumcision through the intermediary of "the invisible audible collateral organ" of Leopold Bloom, "rendered invisible by manual circumposition," on which, we can infer, he assumes a similar operation has been accomplished. If Bloom, through the structure of the catechetical narrative, mentally interrogates the "irritability, tumescence, rigidity, reactivity, dimension, sanitariness, pilosity" of Stephen's appendage, Stephen cognitively contemplates the "sacerdotal integrity" of Bloom's "contiguous" member. Earlier in "Ithaca," the question of Bloom's Jewish heritage is raised several times, including the "lateral imagination's" observation of Bloom's preparation of a "collation for a gentile," Bloom and Stephen's difference in "[n]ame, age, race, creed," and that neither "openly allude[d] to their racial difference" (*U* 17.354, 403, & 526)). The topic also emerges in Bloom and Stephen's subsequent demonstration of their knowledge of several written languages and alphabets, Hebrew being among those Bloom knows. However, the question of Stephen's opinion regarding Bloom's heritage is never raised directly in the Catechism, nor does the narrative utter a response that in any way communicates Stephen's view. Bloom's concerns are expressed in the following inquiry: "What, reduced to their simplest reciprocal form, were Bloom's thoughts about Stephen's thoughts about Bloom and Bloom's thoughts about Stephen's thoughts about Bloom's thoughts about Stephen?"

(*U*, 17.527-29). The answer proves equally uninformative, relaying a third-person distillation of Bloom's conclusions, "[h]e thought that he thought that he was a jew whereas he knew that he knew that he knew that he was not" (*U*, 17.530-31). Nonetheless, Bloom's demonstration of his knowledge of Hebrew would presumably lead Stephen to at least a partial conclusion concerning his Jewish ancestry, beyond the assumptions of Bloom's inconclusive speculations.

Indeed, Stephen's scholastic "problem" arises from the very absence of foreskin he ascribes to Bloom's unseen organ, although, as we know from Bloom's post-onanistic agonies in "Nausicaa," he is not actually circumcised: "Stuck. Well the foreskin is not back. Better detach. Ow!" (*U*, 13.979-81). Again Stephen approaches the presumably unrepresentable sacred realm through the filtration of a visualization of an object outside his range of vision, although, in the case of Bloom's "organ[] of micturition," the mediating object for Stephen's signification of Christ actually attains a presumed physical presence (despite Bloom's unforeseen "sacerdotal integrity"), as opposed to his mental re-creation of Christ's prepuce and the archetypes for his physical representation. Perhaps Joyce's ultimate obscenity in "Ithaca," or arguably in *Ulysses* in general, considering the largely Christian public that would receive it, lies in the possibility that Stephen finds the most tangible manifestation of Christ in the foreskin he assumes to be absent from the man he urinates with "in penumbra," a man he seemingly supposes to be Jewish.[136] He perceives the sacred through an imaginary exhibition of its profane signification, while simultaneously assembling his perception of the profane object through the discursive framework of his sacred education, a sacred education in the tradition of Catholicism, a branch of Christianity that its critics believe "encourages a morbid preoccupation with the flesh," which,

[136] This "ultimate obscenity" would indeed be a buried offense, as it remains highly doubtful that most readers, judges, etc. offended by *Ulysses* would actually reach "Ithaca" or work through it closely enough to uncover Joyce's blasphemy.

as Jean Kane describes, motivates many of *Ulysses'* negative responses: "The wrong kind of Christianity *causes* Joyce's obscenity by warping his experience of the body and hence the world."[137] Clearly, Joyce's articulation of the Catholic fixation on the physical would become increasingly offensive to the Christian critic through Stephen's speculations on Christ's physicality, and consequently sexuality, within the immediacy of the Jewish body of Leopold Bloom.

—Theological Excretions

Stephen's discursive mediation of Bloom's "invisible audible collateral organ," and its concurrent formation of his visualization of Christ's embodiment, functions in a similar manner to the absorption and excretion of cultural productions that initially marks *Ulysses'* obscenity within the public sphere. *Ulysses* deliberately constructs a perceptual framework based on the discursive reception and emission, a cultural construction of human perception with which Joyce, ironically through his Catholic education, was criticized as being inculcated. In a contemporary review, which actually praises Joyce's "profound perception" as "a great imaginative writer," Cecil Maitland explicitly links Joyce's portrayal of sexuality and scatology—what Kane identifies as "somato-psychic representations" (Kane 427)—with Catholicism: "This vision of human beings as walking drain pipes, this focusing of life exclusively round the excremental and sexual mechanism . . . No one who is acquainted with Catholic education in Catholic countries

[137] Jean Kane. "Embodied Panic: Revisiting Modernist 'Religion' in the Controversies Over *Ulysses* and *The Satanic Verses*." *Textual Practice*, 20 (3), 2006, 427 & 429. Kane aptly explains much of the contemporary reaction to *Ulysses* in relation to Joyce's representation of the body, representations that essentially negate human individuality, and prompt critiques of Joyce's presumed Catholic fixations.

could fail to recognize the source of Mr. Joyce's 'Weltanschauung'. He sees the world as theologians showed it to him. His humour is the cloacal humour of the refectory."[138] Maitland's claim situates Joyce's pervasive bodily representation solely within the realm of Catholicism; only through theological indoctrination, specifically and essentially Catholic, can one's worldview be constructed through the functions of the body, and, as Maitland further suggests, Joyce shares "the priest's denigration of the body, and his view of sex has the obscenity of a confessor's manual."

In Maitland's formulation, Joyce's obscenity emerges solely through his Catholic conditioning against obscenity, and, therefore, his bodily representations can be nothing but contemptuous. Despite his "profound perception," for Maitland, Joyce's perceptions are wholly created and restricted within his Irish Catholic social and cultural construction. However, Maitland's claim that Joyce portrays "human beings as walking drain pipes" proves fundamentally accurate in a manner contrary to his argument. For, as Kane observes through her articulation of Joyce's "somato-psychic representation," *Ulysses* embodies the very inability to distinguish between the constant consumption and excretion of both human bodies and perceptual faculties; the inherent conjunction of human being (mind and body), that is to some extent disjunctive.

Furthermore, interpretations of the cultural mediation of human perception and desire in *Ulysses* generally focus on Bloom and Gerty as incarnations of the masses' presumed passive reception of cultural production, whereas Stephen's artistic/theological background seemingly transcends such categorizations through its association with the nebulous entity of high culture.

[138] Cecil Maitland. "Mr. Joyce and the Catholic tradition." *New Witness* (4 August 1922) 70-71. Discussed in and cited in Kane, "Embodied Panic", and Barbara Leckie, "Short Cuts to Culture: Censorship and Modernism: Learning to Read *Ulysses*." *Joyce's Audiences*, ed. John Nash. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002: 9-28.

Most discussions of obscenity in *Ulysses* fixate on "Nausicaa" as the site of the initial reaction to the text's sexual and bodily preoccupations, which instigated the obscenity trial of *The Little Review.* Adam Parkes and Allison Pease, sticking to the chapter as the preferred site of obscenity within the novel, both elaborate the exchange between Gerty and Bloom, specifically Gerty's "peep show," as portraying a mediation of sexual desire through the discourses of sentimental romance and pornography, often simultaneously. [139] Parkes suggests that Joyce emphasizes "Gerty's entrapment within the clichés of a worn-out novelistic style, manipulating language to show how much Gerty is manipulated by it," adding that "Gerty reproduces a commercial, mass-produced romantic fiction . . . [and] unwittingly transports herself into a mass cultural fantasy."[140] Gerty's enaction of this "mass cultural fantasy" transforms into pornography when she displays herself in the "peep show," a seemingly inevitable metamorphosis inherent in the performance of sentimental fiction itself. Nonetheless, Pease, who insists on interpreting *Ulysses* as merely a high-modern attempt at "appropriat[ing] pornography for high art, making sexual representation safe for the middle classes," [141] recognizes in the "ivorylike purity" of Gerty's face, her "genuine cupid's bow" mouth, "Greekly perfect," a yearning for classical artistic beauty (*U,* 13.88-89). Pease claims that this "reveals a longing in Gerty to assimilate herself to the cultural standards of high art, to become the reified manifestation of that metaphysical aura that

[139] For a brief explanation of the trial and its consequences, see Potter, "'Can My Daughter of 18 Read this Book?,' and for a more thorough examination, see Parkes, "Obscenity and Nonreproductive Sexuality: *Ulysses* and the *Little Review* Trial."

[140] Parkes, 79 & 81.

[141] Pease, 83. Pease's claims are especially intriguing, though not wholly convinving, when read against contemporary reviews of *Ulysses*, where the text was often recognized as being anything but high art. Furthermore, the idea of *Ulysses* being marketed towards the "middle classes" is rather puzzling. The term "low modernism," introduced by Rachel Potter and David Trotter, provides a useful antithesis to the association of *Ulysses* with "high modernism." Potter and Trotter. "Low Modernism: Introduction. *Critical Quarterly,* vol. 46, no 4. iii-iv.

can only exist for her as desire and the wish to be so desired." She further asserts that "Bloom's bodily consumption of her high-art imitation becomes not just another instance of kitsch consumerism, but a poignant one in their mutual submission to a desire for a cultural validation from which they are both debarred" (Pease 108). [142] While Pease's interpretation may be accurate in some respects, through her focus on so-called "high-art"—something difficult to align with middle-class values in Joyce's era—and what she presumes to be Joyce's appropriation of mass culture through Gerty and Bloom, she ignores similar instances of mediation through cultural productions in other characters in *Ulysses*—namely Stephen Dedalus, a character who, much like his creator that Pease attempts to incriminate in elitist commodifications of mass culture, upsets the distinction through which her argument functions.

Again referring to Joyce's presumed ironic appropriation of mass culture, Pease argues that Bloom "reinforce[s] the turn-of-the-century stereotype of mass man and mass culture. Exposed to the debasing effects of mass culture . . . mass man becomes an effect of their technique, an expression of the urge to subjugate art and representations to the body." (Pease 109) In this respect, Gerty functions as a mere representation, a trifle of mass production that everyman Bloom seeks to scopically dominate through his "rite of Onan" (17.2053-54). Pease concludes that "Bloom is a perfect example of one whose sexuality becomes mediated not through his own imagination, but rather through the discursive and representational practices set into motion through pornography." While again Pease's argument proves partially correct, due to Bloom's proclivity for erotica, manifest in *Sweets of Sin* and his collection of pornographic postcards, such distinctions between high and low modes of cultural production remain

[142] Katherine Mullin connects Gerty's introduction through classical imagery to Bloom's erotic interest in the statues of Roman goddesses in Laestrygonians (*U*, 8.920-22). See Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality, and Social Purity*, 152.

inadequate.

Within *Ulysses* all modes of representation function within the construction of mental perception, whether Bloom's, Stephen's, or Gerty's. André Topia suggests that in *Ulysses*, especially within Bloom's interior monologues, "the text splits and disintegrates, becoming vulnerable to a multitude of other texts which it receives without entirely maintaining control over them" (Topia 104). Topia additionally explains that Joyce's absorbed discourses contaminate one another, often to the point of indistinguishability. The text continuously feeds on other textual forms, including consumption and regurgitation of its own language; or, as Jennifer Wicke writes, "*Ulysses* surely does not shrink from portraying a cannibalistic process of language feeding on language."[143] One specific example of this discursive cannibalization and contamination that I refer to earlier would be Stephen's simultaneous invocation of Homer and the Holy Spirit in "Oxen of the Sun." Like Bloom and Gerty, the majority of Stephen's textually formulated worldview arises from "echoes" and "re-utilizations" of received texts, such as his famous ostensibly Aristotelian contemplation of the "[i]neluctable modality of the visible," and his blatant internalization of Aquinas and myriad others (*U*, 3.1). Indeed, Stephen's discursive self-construction could easily be traced back through the emergence of his aesthetic theory in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, although, as developed earlier in this essay, the conclusive manifestation of Stephen's culturally mediated engagement with the world remains his prepucial ponderance concerning Bloom's evacuating appendage, which becomes the site of intersection for numerous threads of obscene representation.

In a striking contemporary reaction to *Ulysses* in the *Dublin Review*, Shane Leslie, who

[143] Jennifer Wicke. *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, and Social Reading*. Columbia UP, 1988, 143.

inadvertently reveals a personal preoccupation remarkably similar to that which he attacks in Joyce, portrays the author of *Ulysses* as "a frustrated Titan . . . revolv[ing] and splutter[ing] hopelessly under the flood of his own vomit."[144] Leslie's characterization of Joyce clearly resembles Maitland's claim concerning Joyce's "vision of human beings as walking drain pipes," and leads to this essay's epigraph from Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, a text that arguably cannibalizes "Ithaca." Consumption, regurgitation, and excretion are the obscene bodily functions that Joyce embodies and enacts in *Ulysses*. Voices consume, regurgitate, and excrete discourse, repeatedly, eternally, "until you [and they] begin to like it." The continuous process that Joyce exhibits, much like the obscenity in which it manifests, essentially cannot be represented—in *Ulysses* it is embodied, cannibalized, and re-embodied. In "At Circe's, or the Self-Opener," Hélène Cixous writes of Bloom's ruptured perspective in "Circe": "You yourself are a stage where you meet yourself among many others through whom flash the thoughts of anyone-like-you . . . What is transparent opacifies. Your body's opacity is transferred to the world whose diffuse clarity flashes through your body. You belong to all the world, make use of it while it has room for any-self."[145] In Bloom's hallucination, the mind and the world outside it—the world of discursive consumption and excretion manifest as presence—transfer "diffuse" perceptions while the self is opened, the self "through wh[ich] flash[es] the thoughts of anyone-like-you." The world that Bloom belongs to belongs to him, and he can construct "any-self" in, through, and from the world of "Circe." A similar occurrence emerges in Stephen's urinary interrogation of Christ's "sacerdotal integrity," the interchange between the discursive construction of self, a discourse

[144] Shane Leslie. Rev. of *Ulysses, Dublin Review* (September 1922) 119. Cited in Kane, "Embodied Panic."

[145] Hélène Cixous. "At Circe's, or the Self-Opener." Trans. Carol Bové. *boundary 2*, Vol. 3, No. 2. (Winter, 1975), 388.

from which it is partially constructed, and a potential object to perceive ruptures the disjunctive conjunction within the perceiving and conceiving being, leading to the further production of self, and Stephen can only shake hands (without washing) and wander out of the novel. As the "lateral imagination" subsequently queries itself: "What syllabus of intellectual pursuits was simultaneously possible?" (17.1588)

CHAPTER FOUR

Nabokov's Caged Apes

In his 1967 essay "Music Discomposed," Stanley Cavell proclaims that "the possibility of fraudulence, and the experience of fraudulence, is endemic in the experience of contemporary music" and, by extension, what he identifies as the "modernist art" of his contemporary moment.[146] He adds that modern art's "full impact, even its immediate relevance, depends upon a willingness to trust the object, knowing that the time spent with its difficulties may be betrayed." In this interplay between "fraudulence" and "trust," which in a sense defines modernism for Cavell, modern art "makes explicit and bare what has always been true of art": the inherent threat of fraudulence (Cavell 189). Part of the risk "endemic" to art emerges from attempts to categorize it as such. To label something "art" is to trust that it is in fact art and, as Cavell observes, contemporary art demands trust without the retrospective criteria of judgement that time provides to assess the works of previous generations. Art from the past cannot "betray" us, since critical consensus has already placed it in that camp. To qualify as art in the contemporary moment, art must communicate that it is art—often without a framework for such communication—and any audience must trust that its claim is not fraudulent.

Concerning literature, Cavell references the French experimental novelists Raymond Roussel and Alain Robbe-Grillet as embodying the risks of modern art.[147] However, no modern

[146] Stanley Cavell. *Must We Mean What We Say?*. Cambridge UP, 1976, 188.

[147] Cavell distinguishes between writers and other modern artists: "Writers do not share the severe burden of modernism which serious musicians and painters and sculptors have recognized for generations: a writer can still work with the words we all share, more or less, and have to share; he still, therefore, has an audience with the chance of responding to the way he can share the words more than more or less." (187) This claim, however, proves

novelist inhabits the "experience of fraudulence" and demands that we trust an object "knowing that the time spent with its difficulties may be betrayed" more than Vladimir Nabokov. Much of the early scholarship on Nabokov focuses on his novels' game-like structures that play with and on the expectations through which we enter a novel.[148] In the still wide wake of his death (in 1979), critically engaging with Nabokov, as Eric Naiman has established in *Nabokov, Perversely*, brings with it the additional burden of contending with a staggering body of criticism devoted specifically to trusting Nabokov—a trust often extending to his creations, especially Humbert Humbert—and demanding that others share that trust.[149] Rarely has a novelist inspired such staunch defense against, as Naiman puts it in relation to *Lolita*, "the implied charge of

troubling. Is the visual arrangement of shapes and lines, whether in painting or sculpture, any further from a shared system of reference than something like James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*?

[148] See, for example, Mary McCarthy. "A Bolt from the Blue." *The Writing on the Wall*. N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962, 13-35. Page Stegner. *Escape in Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov*. N.Y.: Dial Press, 1966. and Alfred Appel Jr.'s essays collected in the preface, introduction, and notes to Vladimir Nabokov. *The Annotated Lolita*. Ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. N.Y.: Vintage, 1991, ix-lxvii

[149] Naiman identifies a rather problematic "tendency" that dominates Nabokov studies: "the desire to idealize the relationship between author and reader and to neutralize its troubling complexities." Naiman usefully points out that "Nabokov never ceases testing his readers, there is no such thing as a definitive pass, and he never lets his reader see who he is or offers us all he has found," and he also recognizes that "nearly all insightful analyses of Nabokov's prose, is very much committed to the recovery of authorial intention." Eric Naiman. *Nabokov, Perversely*. Cornell UP, 2010, 18. The analyses Naiman describes also tend to devote as much time to speculating about the ideas and beliefs of Nabokov the man as they do attending to the specifics of his fiction. For example, even Richard Rorty's often perceptive analysis of Nabokov's works, specifically *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, is largely framed through the *Lectures on Literature* and a few choice interviews which leads Rorty to proclamations on what Nabokov the man "fears most" (160). As a result, a broad oeuvre, as well as the man who produced it, is reduced to the product of a few short lectures intended to sell undergraduates on the worth of literary masterpieces and statements prepared for interviewers (by a man who at least ostensibly hated giving interviews). "Authorial intention," as it emerges in Nabokov criticism, often leads to Brian Boyd's biographical characterization of Nabokov. In a review of Boyd's biographies, Dean Flower identifies many of the tendencies that lead to morality obsessed, biographical criticism. Flower observes that, especially in *Nabokov: The Russian Years*, "Boyd needs to acquit Nabokov of any shabby behavior" and "continuously denies Nabokov moral complexity." "Nabokov and Nastiness." *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 574 & 575. J.E. Rivers goes further in a critique of Boyd's biographies: "[Boyd] persists in interpreting by means of homilies and lessons . . . present[ing] a highly questionable image of Nabokov. He makes him into a moralizer, a didactician, a dealer in general ideas." "Vladimir Nabokov, Here and Hereafter." *Review* 15, 1993, 207.

indecency" and some of his own claims to the amorality of art (Naiman 18). Due to such a perceived idea of indecency, something apparently antithetical to art, and whiffs of an amoral or at least ethically disengaged aesthete toying with his audience, a bulk of scholars have decided that not only was Vladimir Nabokov a moral man, but as Leland de la Durantaye has recently claimed, his oeuvre constitutes a "moral art."

Arguments that morality motivates and defines Nabokov's fiction also spring from debates surrounding a perceptible strand of cruelty in his writing: cruelty to his characters, his audience, and any cultural production he found worthy of ridicule. Such cruelty would arguably betray the trust that art demands. If fraud constitutes "[a]n act or instance of deception, an artifice by which the right or interest of another is injured, a dishonest trick or stratagem," (OED) what would constitute artistic fraudulence more fully than novels that exist largely to make mockery of previous artistic productions? Or art that, instead of morally edifying its audience, arguably reduces contemporary human life to pure parody? Against charges of this sort, and these qualities that provide many of the pleasures of reading Nabokov, scholars ranging from Richard Rorty to Brian Boyd refer to Nabokov's interview statements that he "loathes cruelty" (*SO* 3 & 19) to demonstrate that Nabokov was not a cruel writer: Boyd, for example, proclaims that Nabokov's elusiveness and allusiveness, specifically in *Pale Fire*, are not cruel, but a product of "generosity" and spawn a "synthesis of poignant artistic delight."[150] These critics take Nabokov's general statements on cruelty—one of which, under examination, is reducible to

[150] Brian Boyd. *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery.* Princeton UP, 1999. The main thrust of Boyd's speculations: "Nabokov allows his readers to find through the interrelationship between the parts of *Pale Fire* what he must not make overexplicit, to approach closer and closer to 'something else' hidden behind the world of his work, a reflection of the 'something else,' the great surprise that he thinks hidden behind life and death by the mysterious generosity somehow hidden still further behind." (8) Boyd's solution supposedly "transforms the whole novel and its world, and discovery cascades down upon discovery. And even there the magic and mystery have not reached their end." (13) The "magic and mystery" of this video game ending consists of John Shade's deceased daughter, Hazel, briefly inhabiting a butterfly from beyond the grave to greet her father just before his death.

"man asked about cruelty by interviewer says he doesn't like it"—at face value, and as an artistic manifesto, and thus elide any distinctions between author and work, and public image and private life. They also neglect to consider the rather obvious distinction between cruelty in representation and cruelty in material reality. Consequently, the critically constructed, and borderline hagiographic, version of Nabokov that has emerged since his death is cruelty free. Or, if sometimes cruel, such a Nabokov prompts de la Durantaye to ask, "might he not have been cruel to be kind?"[151]

The questions of cruelty and morality that often dominate Nabokov scholarship clearly result from the complexity and difficulty of his work: an oeuvre that is at least in part a referential mass of games that toy with the trust of an assumed audience. Returning to Cavell's discussion of contemporary music, what he refers to as "the burden of modernism" is "the procedures and problems it now seems necessary to composers to employ and confront to make a work of art at all *themselves* insure that their work will not be comprehensible to an audience." As a result, these composers expend a great deal of energy writing prose that, in a sense, attempts to explain their work and method with the potential—and potentially impossible—end of rendering it comprehensible to an audience that may not exist. While Nabokov's fiction proves less difficult to process than the work of the composers Cavell discusses—Cage, Stockhausen, Krenek, etc.—it nonetheless performs a similarly alienating task: the overtly metatextual packaging of his novels and their unrelenting referentiality beg the question of intent due to their lack of transparency.[152]

[151] Leland de la Durantaye. *Style Is Matter: The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov*. Cornell UP, 2007, 179.

[152] In her famous review "A Bolt from the Blue," Mary McCarthy establishes the ludic quality of *Pale Fire* that informs much of the Nabokov criticism before his death: "*Pale Fire* is a Jack-in-the-box, a Fagerge gem, a

Despite a desire to trust in Nabokov and his art—and its status as such—many of his admirers prove unable to put any stock in his claims that "I write for myself in multiplicate" (*SO* 114) and "a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss" (*AL* 314). Furthermore, many critics decide that he made such proclamations to obscure his true beliefs and intentions.[153] On the other hand, Richard Rorty resorts to value judgment in order to champion the morality of the art against its creator: "Nabokov's best novels are the ones which exhibit his inability to believe his own general ideas."[154] Such approaches equate to not taking Nabokov's words seriously in order to take them seriously. I.e. if Nabokov toys with his audience in his novels, he must do so outside of them and, therefore, if he says that "*Lolita* has no moral in tow," *Lolita* must have a moral in tow.[155] Or, in Rorty's case, *Lolita* does have a moral in tow, because Nabokov's art reveals the paucity of the man's ideas. Similarly, if Nabokov in one place refers to the "appalling insecurity of an afterlife and its lack of privacy" he must somehow intend to cloak the "intuition of a transcendent realm" that presents the "otherworld theme" that runs throughout his work.[156] Such thinking often leads critics to comb

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clockwork toy, a chess problem, an infernal machine, a trap to catch reviewers, a cat-and-mouse game, a do-it-yourself kit." (15)

[153] The current argument may sometimes rely on Nabokov's interviews and nonfictional writings. The intent in doing so is largely to demonstrate how his "Strong Opinions" are inherently—and presumably deliberately—inconsistent and provide no basis for generalizing claims about his broad body of work.

[154] Richard Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge UP, 1989, 168.

[155] Leona Toker, for example, argues that Nabokov's "habitual disparagement of meat-and-potatoes human appeal or social relevance in fiction is a rhetorical overstatement in response to the journalistic high-handedness of standard misreadings." Leona Toker. *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*. Cornell UP, 1989, 20.

[156] Vladimir Nabokov. *Speak, Memory*. N.Y: Knopf, Everyman's Library, 1999, 25. The supposed "otherworld theme" of Nabokov's work originates in Véra Nabokov's forward to a collection of his Russian poetry that emerged within two years of his death. Vladimir Alexandrov quotes Véra as claiming that "potustoronnost" is Nabokov's "main theme" and combs through his writings in search of its presence to suggest that "metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics" are inextricably intertwined throughout Nabokov's oeuvre and life. *Nabokov's Otherworld*. Princeton UP, 1991, 3. The quotation from *Speak, Memory* appears in chapter 2 "Portrait of My Mother" in which he explains that her "intense and pure religiousness took the form of her having equal faith in the existence of another world and in the impossibility of comprehending it in terms of earthly life." (25) Alexandrov suggests that this passage "sounds

through Nabokov's interviews, letters, and essays in search of an artistic manifesto in which he explains how and why he should be read.[157] Despite continued reverence for his Cornell and Wellesley lectures "Good Readers and Good Writers" and "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" there is no such manifesto. Consequently, critics often read Nabokov's fictions through the lens of a carefully curated set of remarks and anecdotes, from Nabokov and others, that somehow reveal a "truth" or "solution" to the novels' metaliterary and gamelike structures.[158] These critical constructions of Nabokov attempt to reframe his novels in a manner that disturbingly resembles how Charles Kinbote would like us to read John Shade's poem through his commentary. To take Nabokov's work as a whole for a lesson in morality, metaphysics, or an expression of "artistic generosity" is akin to reading John Shade's "Pale Fire" for its "magnificent Zemblan theme." If we view an artwork exclusively as what we would like it to be, and a reflection of what we would like the author to be, we make a fraudulent art out of it. Such a transformation especially diminishes the author and texts when the art in question deliberately enmeshes its audience in the interchange between fraudulence and trust.

Thanks to Naiman, the remainder of this chapter can largely leave behind issues of morality, ethics, and metaphysics and return to the wealth of Nabokov's arguably cruel entanglement with fraudulence, whether formal or narrative, and the ways in which his fictions

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very much like what he could have written about himself, and what he did imply throughout his works." (35) He overlooks Nabokov's remark about how the "appalling insecurity of the afterlife" eluded his mother's thoughts, her convictions concerning "premonitions" and "*déjà vu*," and the significance of the fact that Nabokov did not write such things about himself.

[157] Alexandrov's theory of Nabokov's "otherworld theme," however obscurely cobbled together from various anecdotes and remarks is a prime example of a critical response to a supposedly uncovered manifesto. Alexandrov goes so far as to claim that, "The only way out of the charmed circles of Nabokov's fictions is to recognize the virtual identity of the characters' otherworldly intuitions with those in Nabokov's nonfictional writings, where they are not similarly undermined." 6 For Alexandrov, the "nonfictional writings" provide a solution to the fictions, even though the fictions themselves undermine such a solution, notwithstanding the "appalling insecurity of an afterlife."

[158] Alexandrov, again, argues that "the metaliterary is camouflage for, and a model of, the metaphysical" (18).

produce and resist the types of readings that are often projected onto them. As fiction that is largely about fiction, Nabokov's novels tend to elaborate fraudulent methods of viewing the world: Humbert Humbert, for example, reduces the world around him and the people in it through false representation. Yet, at the same time, the world around him is inaccessible and potentially reducible to his representation of it. The very structure of Nabokov's novels functions to investigate the problem of distinguishing between false representation and some assumed, and abstract, realm of authenticity. His works force us to contemplate how we distinguish the "real" from the "fake" when we are unable to see the difference without providing any sort of solution to this quandary. *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Despair* all reflect on this complexity of perception through their entanglement with visual media. I will revisit Nabokov's presumably fictitious "inspiration" for *Lolita* to suggest that the respective "caged ape" narrators of these three novels in part through their shared claims to photographic, or eidetic, memory, communicate a visually fraudulent picture of the worlds they inhabit. These fraudulent pictures are similarly reflected and refracted in the *doppelgänger* motifs that Nabokov himself found "a frightful bore."[159] In constructing these characters, at least one in relation to his manufactured "inspiration," Nabokov attends to the entanglement of sight and knowledge and how their intertwining proves mutually constitutive of their respective limitations. Artistic solipcism—long a topic of Nabokov criticism—mirrored in author and creations, reveals that the immediate world often lurks unseen beyond the grasp of the visual mechanism, obscured and rendered inaccessible in favor of its fraudulent doubling.

[159] Vladimir Nabokov. *Strong Opinions*. N.Y. Vintage, 1990, 83.

—Apes, Dragons, and Neurotic Scoundrels

> "As far as I can recall, the initial shiver of inspiration [for Lolita] was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage."
>
> —Nabokov, "On a Book Entitled Lolita" (AL, 311)

Leland de la Durantaye contends that *Lolita's* "moral is that one must see the world as it is and not simply through the embellishing eyes of a gifted imagination" (*Style Is Matter* 109). Beyond the specifics of Nabokov's novel, one wonders how the world actually is and, further, how one might establish that it is so. What exactly is "the world" and is it viewable without "embellishing eyes"?[160] How can we establish the being of any "world" in the texts of Nabokov who claims that "reality" is "one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes"? (*AL* 312) Nabokov further explains what might be his perspective on a comprehensible perceptible world in his "Art of Fiction" interview: "the very term 'everyday reality' is utterly static since it presupposes a situation that is permanently observable, essentially objective, and universally known" (*SO* 94).[161] For the purposes of this chapter, and in relation to Nabokov's fiction, any

[160] de la Durantaye earlier refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein's first proposition "the world is all that is the case" that commences *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, but Wittgenstein's definition is deliberately hard to pin down, hinging on subsequent definitions of and distinctions between facts, objects, form and substance, and his eventual arrival at "The sum-total of reality is the world." What such a world actually "is" proves elusive. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. London and N.Y.: Routledge, 2001, 5-9.

[161] The interviewer asks Nabokov if he agrees with an unnamed critic's claim that his "worlds are static. They may become tense with obsession, but they do not break apart like the worlds of everyday reality."

reference to the "world" aligns with Niklas Luhmann's claim that "the world is not an object but is rather a horizon, in the phenomenological sense. It is, in other words, inaccessible."[162] The world of Nabokov's texts is something that eludes the colonizing grasp of a dominating vision and reduction to some sort of message concerning "everyday reality." Nonetheless, in relation to *Lolita* itself, a novel communicated exclusively through at least two layers of "embellishing eyes," and Nabokov's oeuvre more broadly, de la Durantaye's claim—in line with previous moralizing Nabokov criticism—proves equally difficult to maintain.

Claims to morality become increasingly problematic if we attempt to trust Nabokov's own assertion that "*Lolita* has no moral in tow" and respect his right to ambivalence (*AL* 314). Nonetheless, returning to Nabokov's "shiver of inspiration," if Humbert is the "cage[d]" "ape," and his "sketch" depicts the "bars of the poor creature's cage," any glimpse through the bars is framed by their shadows. Whatever world lies beyond the bars can only be viewed through them and Humbert's "embellishing eyes" that ground the novel's viewpoint and Humbert's eyes, of course, are the product of Nabokov's "gifted imagination." Critics that paint the portrait of Nabokov the moralist tend to claim that Humbert eventually sees through his solipsistic vision. Such readings locate evidence in the "moral apotheosis" that John Ray Jr. announces in the forward to Humbert's "notes," and claim that he regrets the results of his confining view of Lolita, ultimately communicating a moral message.[163] Yet, *Lolita's* forward emerges in the

[162] Niklas Luhmann. *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Trans. Kathleen Cross. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000, 6.

[163] As de la Durantaye usefully delineates, previous critics, following from Alfred Appel Jr.'s note in *The Annotated Lolita*, situate the "moral apotheosis" that John Ray Jr. suggests Humbert achieves in *Lolita's* fictional forward in the much discussed climactic scene outside of Parkington where he recalls a similar view above Elphinstone from which he heard a chorus of children's voices and notes "the absence of [Lolita's] voice from that concord." (AL 308). In contrast, de la Durantaye pinpoints the "moral apotheosis" in Humbert's recognition that he "loves [Lolita] not for the senses she might have fired, but simply for herself" (90) when he encounters her aged, married, and pregnant. Either of these scenes works fine as a "moral apotheosis," assuming that Ray's misguided introduction is

personage and language of psychoanalysis that Nabokov—in both fiction and nonfiction—relentlessly mocks. Furthermore, Humbert Humbert's narrative predicts the language of Ray Jr.'s forward and simultaneously plays up to it and parodies it.

Drawing on Dieter Zimmer's research for the German critical edition of *Lolita*, de la Durantaye reveals to Nabokov's English language critics that no such caged ape story exists and the inspiration is presumably fictitious (*Style Is Matter* 184). That Nabokov's inspiration for *Lolita* (and, of course, Humbert) turns out to be fraudulent proves fitting considering the questionable status of Humbert Humbert's "moral apotheosis." Trusting Humbert at his word—as John Ray Jr., another of Nabokov's fakes does—is something like viewing the bars in the ape's drawing as depicting the world outside of them. Any "moral apotheosis" in Humbert's narrative might reduce to another rhetorically embellished glimpse at those bars, another manifestation of a murderer's "fancy prose style" (*AL* 9). Nabokov, himself, suggests that "Humbert Humbert is a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear 'touching'" (*SO* 94).[164] Humbert's "appear[ance]" has proven quite persuasive, as numerous critics are quite "touch[ed]" by the appeals of such an obviously unreliable narrator. The fictitious source of Nabokov's caged ape trope possibly hints that the "initial shiver of inspiration" itself may be equally fraudulent, and the metaphor may well prove a lure to pull audience and critic into a cage of Nabokov's construction. Nonetheless, the theme of imprisonment runs throughout Nabokov's fiction and the

correct and, perhaps more importantly, that pseudonymous Humbert Humbert accurately describes himself as "a very conscientious recorder" (AL 72).

[164] Like the majority of the passages critics cite from *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov's characterization of Humbert is in response to a prompt. In this case, the interview suggests that "Humbert, while touching, retains a touching and insistent quality—that of the spoiled artist" (94).

occluding presence of visible bars provides a lens through which we can examine the distorted and fraudulent views Nabokov provides through his solipsistic narrators.

Instead of approaching Humbert's cage in isolation, the following will examine him in Nabokov's hell next to his fellow dragon, *Despair's* Hermann Karlovich. We will also assume that Charles Kinbote, whether live or dead, occupies an adjacent cell, and that Nabokov's fraudulent "inspiration" may well be in jest. In his forward to his (second) English translation of *Despair*, Nabokov takes pains to distinguish between his two dragons: "Hermann and Humbert are alike only in the sense that two dragons painted by the same artist at different periods of his life resemble each other" (*Despair* xiii). He further informs us that "there is a green lane in Paradise where Humbert is permitted to wander at dusk once a year; but Hell shall never parole Hermann." de la Durantaye interprets this "green lane" as evidence of the reality of Humbert's "moral apotheosis," but Hermann's eternal damnation says more about where his artlessness and socialist leanings position him in his author's rankings than it does about Humbert's moral growth.

Nonetheless, before granting Humbert his brief, perennial reprieve, Nabokov points out how his two dragons are actually "alike" beyond their shared creator: "both are neurotic scoundrels." In doing so, he equates "dragons" with "neurotic scoundrels" and emphasizes that the artist in question has continued to paint them over the course of his career. In light of Nabokov's contemptuous view of psychoanalysis, his classification of Humbert and Hermann as "neurotic" positions them as mythical beasts, alongside "dragons," and provides metaphorical means to approach abstractions. If Nabokov views psychoanalysis as myth, he may give equal weight to these two "scoundrels" and the "hell" they inhabit. Perhaps his reference to these "neurotic scoundrels" and "dragons" partially functions to parody two modes of thought he

abhors: psychoanalysis and organized religions that rely on the concept of hell. If so, the artist's "paintings" indicate that presumptions to greater knowledge on human being—whether scientific or metaphysical—result from a distorted or fraudulent mode of looking at the world: worldviews that dishonestly represents the world as comprehensible, reducing contingency to a digestible image. While these claims may appear to stretch beyond the bounds of their immediate context, they become more concrete when looking closely at *Despair*, *Lolita*, and *Pale Fire*. These three novels distill abstract worldviews down to their respective essences in the specific context of human narrators viewing the worlds they inhabit falsely and depicting them fraudulently.[165] Such viewpoints are intensified through Nabokov's narrator's bizarre claims to objectivity in the form of photographic memory and, often, the impossibility of distinguishing them from whatever presumed reality they obscure. In these novels, photographic memory finds its material corollary in Nabokov's inhabitation of the *doppelgänger* narrative.

Hermann, Humbert, and Kinbote all perceive the world as a product of their artistic designs, in line with previous work that reads *Lolita* through Humbert's solipsism. For Hermann, who routinely emphasizes his sanity, the world exits solely so that he can transform it into what he thinks of as art: similarity, and by extension the socialism that Nabokov so despises. The bars of this ape's cage are the absence of difference, in which he himself is reproducible, and the

[165] Regarding *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, Rorty suggests, "These books are reflections on the possibility that there can be sensitive killers, cruel aesthetes, pitiless poets—masters of imagery who are content to turn the lives of other human beings into images on a screen, while simply not noticing that these other people are suffering" (157). While Rorty's claim is largely accurate, it only reflects one component of the books he analyzes. For example, Rorty overlooks Nabokov's rather nasty sense of humor, which not only creates these "suffering" characters, but also the unflattering caricatures he devotes much of *Speak, Memory* to constructing. Rorty also claims that, "This particular sort of genius-monster—the monster of incuriosity—is Nabokov's contribution to our knowledge of human possibilities. I suspect that only someone who feared that he was executing a partial self-portrait could have made that particular contribution" (162). In Rorty's conception, "curiosity" proves unambiguously virtuous, and Nabokov, again, seemingly transcends himself through his novels.

world he inhabits reduced to his skewed perception of it. For the somewhat more self-aware Humbert, nympholepsy extracts aesthetic bliss from the banality of the everyday world (both in its Old and New variants) and he, of course, draws its bars in place of what dwells outside them. For Kinbote, art emerges from, and can only be glimpsed by, his holy trinity of royalty, male homosexuality, and Christianity. Shade's poem—and Kinbote's perspective on it—is the cage from which Kinbote's narrative emerges and the bars reflect and register what they enclose. All three of these narrators reduce the world at large to their visual experience of it, and their visual experiences are largely compositions that eclipse what they do not see with their projected views. The optic obscuration of the visible world in these novels, again, often emerges through two fraudulent perceptions of visual duplication: photographic memory and doubling.

To see something fraudulently, as Hermann, Humbert, and Kinbote do, is to not see it. When Hermann perceives Felix as his double, he glimpses his projected desire, and Felix himself, while in view, remains beyond the bounds of Hermann's sight. Similarly, Humbert generally fails to truly glimpse the real Dolores Haze through his projected vision of his Lolita. Vision, as Nabokov figures it in these characters, frequently reduces to psychological projection. Sight and the knowledge it produces spawn from flawed presumption: the narrator's encaged mind knows how the world is and, as a result, the world, through autovalidating feedback, conforms to a preconceived viewpoint. Fraudulence, in Nabokov's fiction, is endemic to modern life as well as modern art, regardless of whether or not a distinction between the two is possible. The following section of this chapter will trace Humbert and Hermann's respective claims to objective, photographic memory to further unpack Nabokov's inhabitation of the potentially indistinguishable boundary between visible representation and inaccessible "reality." In both cases, the "camera-type" memory is inextricably intertwined with the *doppelgänger* theme that

runs through much of Nabokov's work. The final section of the chapter will explore the implications of the *doppelgänger* more broadly.

— "Camera Type" Memory

Early in *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert begins his brief sketch of his encounter with Lolita's "precursor" Annabel by revealing that he recalls "her features far less distinctly," since knowing Lolita (*AL 9*). He then sets out two types of visual memory to explain how Lolita's image has obscured that of his "initial girl-child":

> There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open (and then I see Annabel in such general terms as: 'honey-colored skin', 'thin arms', 'brown bobbed hair', 'long lashes', 'big bright mouth'); and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark inner side of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors (and this is how I see Lolita). (11)

Beci Dobbin nicely observes that, "Humbert's argument is that Lolita is more authentic than Annabel, because Annabel has been 'recreated' in his mind's darkroom, whereas Lolita has occurred spontaneously with the speed of a negative's creation in the moment of contact between light and film. She is 'absolutely optical' in the sense that her visibility is a mechanical effect of the eye rather than a product of retrospection."[166] Dobbin adds that Humbert's image of Lolita, at

[166] Beci Dobbin. "Nabokov and Colour Photography." *Essays in Criticism* Vol. 64 No. 4. 2014, 415.

least for him, is "automatic" which makes it "authentic." Building on Dobbin's point, Humbert also announces that his "absolutely optical replica" of Lolita is an "objective" imprint. Humbert's claim to objectivity indicates that for him photographic memory functions identically to actual photography and, by extension, that the latter registers an objective "replica" of its object of focus. That Humbert begins his "confession" by stating the veracity of his visual memory underscores that he will, throughout its progression, interact with the world through the assumption that his perceptual faculties are capable of objective capture. Humbert's ability to distinguish between such an "optical replica" and the original model from which he constructs it proves questionable, further destabilizing his already tenuous grasp on any "objective" reality.

In recounting his initial erotic encounter with Lolita, in which she is "safely solipsized" (60) into the "optical replica" described above, Humbert remarks that it is a "pity no film had recorded" (58) the configuration of bodies and movements that allowed him to indulge in his masturbatory pleasure, "without impairing the morals of a minor" (62). He, of course, remembers the encounter as it was, but a filmed version could, perhaps, allow his "learned readers to participate in the scene" in a similarly objective manner (57). Humbert self-awarely observes that, "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own" (62). The "fanciful, perhaps more real" Lolita obscures the presumably objective "real" version she replicates and, within Humbert's narrative, the fraudulent construction takes precedence over the wronged child.

Humbert "had done nothing to her" since his ecstasy reduces to "a performance that affected her as little as if she were a photographic image rippling upon a screen," but even he realizes that in his conception there is no Dolores Haze beyond his creation/his "optical replica"

of Lolita. Furthermore, despite Humbert's presumed realization that he loves the "real" Lolita/Dolores Haze, it is his "own creation" of her to which he returns—"the refuge of art"—as he concludes his confession (309). "Aurochs and angels," not to mention nymphets, inevitably win the day over pregnant Dolly who, even if she had accepted Humbert's request for her to "live with me, and die with me, and everything with me (words to that effect)" (278) presumably would not have provided an ideal surface for Humbert to project his "optical replica" onto. Even a Lolita freshly removed from Camp Q following Charlotte's death initially fails to align with the "mental imprint [he] had cherished" during her absence until an "angelic line of conduct was erased, and [he] overtook [his] prey" (111). Such an "angelic line of conduct" amounts to Humbert superimposing his projection of Lolita over his perception of Dolores Haze. Given Humbert's "objective" memory, and his perception of its projection, we have little reason to trust that the real Lolita/Dolly ever springs into life from the cave paintings of Lascaux that Humbert's closing words entrap her within.[167] That Humbert and Lolita's "share[d]" "immortality" endures in a cave—vulgar, Freudian joke aside—restricts it, of course, to Plato's realm of shadows where prisoners take projected images for reality (309). Prisoner in a cave, ape in a cage, Humbert's confinement, whether a product of disorder or choice, constructs his world as a fraudulent projection that obscures the possibility of whatever "reality" may lurk beyond it.

In his retrospective account of the encounter that sets *Despair's* narrative in motion, Hermann approaches Felix on "a blurry trail" that embodies the visual gap in—or obstructions to—the "picture" he describes (*Despair* 7). He further explains that his mind, figured as a visual metaphor, was wholly open to the perceptible world he wandered through: "What was going on

[167] Alfred Appel, Jr. explains Nabokov's references to Lascaux in his note (*AL* 452).

in my mind? Nothing at all, oddly enough. I was absolutely empty and thus comparable to some translucid vessel doomed to receive contents as yet unknown." Hermann describes his mind as "translucid," as opposed to translucent, to emphasize his sanity. Clear and open to impressions, his mind lucidly processes the world around him. His mind has "nothing at all" occupying it that might occlude or distort the intake of perceptible material. Hermann's words, of course, are undermined almost immediately, presumably in the actual moment and in its subsequent narrativization, when the inside of his completely preoccupied mental "vessel" manifests outside of it in the form of his double. Hermann's account of his perceptions resembles what Humbert Humbert refers to as "the stark lucidity of a future recollection (you know—trying to see things as you will remember having seen them)" (*AL* 86). While we can assume that Hermann actually encounters Felix, whether or not he actually sees him proves difficult to determine. Drawing on the Narcissus myth, Hermann describes seeing Felix as looking into a mirror. Felix, of course, does not share Hermann's view, and presumably only perceives a slight resemblance at best. He fails to take the bait when Hermann demands, "Don't you really *see* anything?," which leads Hermann to exclaim, "You must be blind" (11). The world at large is Hermann's mirror, and, accordingly, he sees himself wherever his eyes wander and anyone not sharing his view is unable to see.

Hermann sets this scene by acknowledging that he has subsequently realized the problematic status of vision, but he nonetheless characterizes the events as a static visual image: "Alas, after all that has happened, I have come to know the partiality and fallaciousness of human eyesight. Anyway, here is the picture…" (11). Hermann indicates that human vision is "partial[]" and "fallacious[]," but such partiality and fallaciousness is only communicable as a "picture." Hermann, perhaps, recognizes that his perception has distorted the world around him,

enframing it as a "picture," and since the picture has already been taken, he cannot return to the moment of its capture and unpack what the picture fails to take in, including, most importantly, Felix's actual appearance. Hermann explains the reorienting vision of his memory somewhat clearly when he first describes the "yellow post" that marks the road to his wife's cousin Ardalion's property where he will eventually murder Felix: "It shone, a faithful beacon, in the darkness of my speculations. I have the feeling today that I *recognized* it, when seeing it for the first time: familiar to me as a thing of the future. Perhaps I am mistaken…" (35). Until Hermann's plan eventually unravels, his ability to anchor his "fancies" in the perceptible world makes the future easy for him to recognize.

Recollecting writing to Felix to arrange a meeting, "near the bronze equestrian statue at the end of the boulevard which starts left of the railway-station square, at Tarnitz" (61). Hermann explains why he has chosen that exact location:

> "one day, while driving through Saxony in the car of a business acquaintance, I got stranded for two hours at Tarnitz . . . I have always possessed a memory of the camera type, I caught and fixed that street, that statue and other details—quite a small-size photo, really; though if I knew of a way of enlarging it, one might even discern the lettering of the shops signs, for that apparatus of mine is of admirable quality." (61)

Hermann neglects to reveal why, with his "camera type" memory, he chooses to meet in this particular photograph at Tarnitz, instead of any of the others that presumably fill out his photo album. Yet, Hermann also reveals that he does "not remember either that bronze writer's identity (some vulgar and mediocre *Herzog*, I believe) or the name of the boulevard." Clearly, Hermann's "small-size photo" fails to capture all of the location's details, and his "memory of the camera type" suffers from the same limitations as an actual camera which, as Cavell observes

in *The World Viewed*. "being finite, crops a portion from an infinitely larger field."[168] Like its namesake, photographic memory, as Hermann describes it here, extracts a "quotation," in Susan Sontag's terms, out of a larger visual continuum.[169] Furthermore, to zoom in on any specific details would require a mechanism for "enlarging." Hermann, nonetheless, fails to recognize that such a "small-size photo," even with the material trace of actual film, does not produce an objective representation. Regardless of whether or not photographic memory has any basis in reality, the idea that he has one often defines Hermann's perception of the world and his relation to it: his vision, for him, is an indexical capture. His world is composed of pictures, despite the "partiality and fallaciousness of human eyesight."

While Hermann's "camera type" memory proves unable to enlarge details out of its perspectival capture of the past, it can merge various objects and locations to elide any incompatibility between various memories and their projection onto any perceptible space. Oddly enough, Nabokov performs similar acts of mnemonic visualization and superimposition throughout his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, as when the firs of the Russia of his boyhood reemerge during a butterfly hunt in Colorado (90). He can "fold" the "magic carpet" of memory "to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another" in a manner that curiously resembles Hermann's yellow post (106).[170] Various pasts and presents merge in his remembrance and like

[168] Stanley Cavell. *The World Viewed*. Harvard UP, 1979, 24.

[169] Susan Sontag. *On Photography*. N.Y.: Picador, 1977, 71.

[170] Tetyana Lyaskovets nicely elaborates on Nabokov's use of photography as a metaphor for reversible time in *Speak, Memory*: "Inherent in photography and optical technology, there are qualities which would appeal toNabokov's vision of how a writer can work through the theme of time. Optical instruments emphasize the recreation of images, their treatment enlarges or diminishes these images, authorial control over the images, and the viewer's accessibility to the objects distant either in time or space. Along with all these qualities — for Nabokov to "re-enter" his past (*Speak* 86) — photography embodies the collapse of time by transposing the past photographed moment into the present." "Time, Photography, and Optical Technology in Nabokov's Speak, Memory." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16.3 (2014) 3: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2189>

Hermann, he simultaneously notes distinctions between mnemonic images and allows some to obscure others. The inherent selectivity of memory, for Hermann, Humbert, and the autobiographic Nabokov, is based in visual perception and, consequently, registers the selectivity of human optics more broadly. That Nabokov's autobiographic construct aligns with—and in some cases obscures—his fictional creation, and vice versa, suggests that the former may well be another painted dragon. Yet, Nabokov also specifically indicates that his visual mnemonic captures often appear in his novels and, elsewhere, that his fictional creations, even "neurotic scoundrels," tend to express them. All in all, these reveal that such distinctions between memory, especially of the "camera-type"—and fiction often prove tenuous in Nabokov's work.

—*Doppelgängers* and Denials of Perspective

Through their "camera-type" memories, Hermann and Humbert assume that their memories are composed of objective captures of the material world. In such a view, the world is an object readily available for duplication. At the same time, for Hermann and Humbert, doubles—what are ostensibly psychological duplications—manifest materially, as if the world returns the favor. Hermann, of course, strikes a strong contrast to Humbert and *Pale Fire's* Kinbote by actually desiring a double (notwithstanding his plan to kill him). The double, in both literary studies and contemporary psychiatry, often suggests schizophrenic hallucinations, but such hallucinations are not generally self-willed. Hermann's heautoscopic desire, in part, announces his vulgarity—his appreciation for communism's "faith in the impending sameness of us all" (*Despair* 20)—which Nabokov aligns with what he sees as the falsely egalitarian ideals of

socialism.[171] Hermann's double Felix's lower-class vagabondry seemingly duplicates Hermann's disgust with his "simple and coarse" mother whom he initially conceals with a characteristic lie as "a pure Russian . . . from an old, princely stock." Yet, within the window of the narrative that he provides, the double appears blatantly as a product of his narcissistic desire to see himself from the outside and, further, as evidence of his capacities as an artist: his "gift of penetrating life's devices" and "innate disposition toward the constant exercise of the creative faculty" fuel his actions and literary representation of them (*Despair* 3). Due to his curious claim to singularity—in both art and cultural being—and despite his socialist leanings, Hermann must have a double so that he can observe himself in all his splendor. Hermann's sexual fantasy, indulged during one of the most curious accounts of connubial bliss put to paper, amounts to a retreat from the act itself into increasingly detached observations of himself engaged in it. Narratively, this fantasy emerges after he meets Felix and "grow[s] much too used to an outside view of [him]self" and finds that he gets "an extraordinary kick" out of "the sensation of being in two places at once" (19 & 27). While Hermann claims such desires have long propelled his bedroom activities, as indicated above, temporalities either merge or eclipse one another at various points throughout his narrative. As a result, the sexual fantasy either spawns from his

[171] Priscilla Meyer notes that while Hermann "praises Soviet classlessness, he fantasizes a higher class background and picks a lower class victim whom he lures with his status as a wealthy businessman." "Black and Violet Words: *Despair* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* as Doubles. *Nabokov Studies* Vol 4, 1997, 41. Meyer nicely elaborates on these two novels as negative and positive doubles, but ultimately reduces *doppelgängers* in Nabokov to a reflection of the lens of otherworld criticism: "In all his novels Nabokov shows the only true doubles to be this world and the otherworld; any vision that stops short of this must be solipsistic, confined by the 'close-fitting dream of one's one personality'." 58. Inquote from *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. New York: New Directions, 1959, 179. Such clear duality proves reductive in a writer who continuously makes mockery of doubling and pronounced distinctions between worlds, fictional and otherwise. Furthermore, intrusions from the otherworld into the world of his narratives often appear in absurd—and highly questionable—forms: a flashing light in a barn in *Pale Fire*, an acrostic in "The Vane Sisters."

encounter with his "double" or lays the ground for such an encounter. Since Hermann can view himself from the outside, it only makes sense that he would eventually run into himself.

Doubles in Nabokov's fiction function to call attention to the unreliable narrators he creates and, perhaps, to parody the very unreliable narrator convention: what could possibly announce a skewed perspective more obviously than the solipsistic creation of a double? As such, Humbert, Hermann, and *Pale Fire's* Kinbote do not simply reduce to subjective perspectives that ground the texts they create. Nor do they function to merely indicate the epistemological limits of narrative. Instead, they tend to parody what precisely a narrative subjectivity, in the generically articulated modern mode, might aspire to. These narrators deliberately beg the question of what we can verify and what we cannot purely for the sake of demonstrating that the question is impossible to answer. Nabokov famously described the *doppelgänger* narrative—whether psychological, ontological, or some fusion thereof—as a "frightful bore," despite producing a number of works that rely heavily on the motif (*SO* 83). That said, he presumably felt the same way about any of the other genres and styles his works draw from: the confession, the detective/mystery novel, the campus novel, the autobiography, and so on. Nonetheless, the *doppelgänger* theme proves especially useful in unpacking the three novels discussed here due to their ostensible place in the sphere of psychological and/or subjective fiction as explorations of distorted minds

As, in a sense, one of the most obvious modes of reflecting on and representing human self-absorption, the double narrative, especially one communicated in the first-person, simultaneously reflects and eradicates a subjective point-of-view: autoscopy, seeing from a perspective outside one's body, and heautoscopy, seeing one's body from an outside perspective

seemingly blur the line between subjective and objective perspectives.[172] Similarly, as Nabokov frequently points out through Hermann's skewed perceptions, the *doppelgänger*—the symbolic embodiment of narcissism—simultaneously asserts and eliminates subjective singularity, destabilizing claims to an individual point-of-view. Unlike in the originary case of Narcissus, the Nabokovian double is often one's projection and/or externalization of their own perceived repugnance, but at the same time, the perceived double presumably inhabits an ontological reality outside of their status as reflection or distorted double (i.e. in the diegetic world of Nabokov's novels, Felix and Quilty are human beings that live and die). [173] As such, Nabokov's doubles register within both subjective and objective spheres, indicating the limitations of such categorizations.

In strong contrast to Hermann, *Pale Fire's* Charles Kinbote bristles at the mention of his own doubles, Professor Botkin—potentially his actual identity—and Gerald Emerald, the meek and the "manly" inverses of his New Wye persona.[174] Despite his excessive manufacture of his singular identity, Kinbote's escape from Zembla, where he reigned as King Charles Xavier and subsequent anonymity overseas rely on his description of his conventionality and replicability.

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[172] See, for example, Olaf Blanke and Christine Mohr, "Out-of-body experience, heautoscoy, and autoscopic hallucination of neurological origin. Implications for neurocognitive mechanisms of corporeal awareness and self concsciousness." *Brain Research Review* 50 (2005) 184-199.

[173] David Walker nicely articulates concerning *Pale Fire* that, "The dominant image of the book is the mirror; trapped in a prison of reflections, the characters are doomed to see, or think they see, everything as reflected image. Twins, doubles, dualities, imitations abound. But these are no ordinary mirrors; all the images are in some way altered or distorted." "'The Viewer and the View': Chance and Choice in *Pale Fire*." *Studies in American Fiction*. Vol. 4, No. 2, Autumn 1976, 205. Walker's claim applies equally well to *Lolita* and *Despair*.

[174] Kinbote sneeringly refers to Emerald's presumed dalliances with coeds which mirror his own games of "table tennis" and bouts of wrestling with male students in New Wye. Emerald's namesake jacket is excessive and out of place like Kinbote's own lavender jacket he wears in the only photo of him with Shade, which points to Joe Lavender's villa and Charles Xavier's visit with the "pet" Gordon. The clichéd status of Emerald's predatory mode of virile professorship also underscore that the "manly Zemblan customs" Kinbote takes great pride in are not viewed as such in New Wye.

"All brown-bearded, apple-cheeked, blue-eyed Zemblans look alike," he explains to a group of colleagues at New Wye [specify colleagues and school?] "and I who have not shaved now for a year resemble my disguised king" (*Pale Fire* 74). Furthermore, as Mary McCarthy observes, during Kinbote's narrative of Charles Xavier's flight from Zembla, the fugitive king is glaringly visible while blending in: "red is a color that is dangerous to a wearer who is trying to melt into the surroundings. The king escapes from his royal prison wearing a red wool cap and sweater (donned in the dark) and he is only saved by the fact that forty loyal Karlists, his supporters, put on red wool caps and sweaters too . . . and confuse the Shadows with a multitude of false kings" (McCarthy 21). The Karlist's similarity of thought and dress resembles Hermann's idealization of uniformity and, ironically given the Zemblan political situation, the promise of socialism: king and subjects are indistinguishable and interchangeable. "All brown-bearded, apple-checked, blue-eyed Zemblans" especially "look alike" when identically made-up in gaudy attire.

In literature, the double is an exteriorization of interiority, but it is also the realization of human uniformity. If anyone can be taken for someone else, no one is unique. The novel presents a particular problem in this respect, since we are unable to actually see the doubles and are forced to rely on the text's description of their similarity and, eventually, difference. At the same time, any narrative interiority reduces the doubling to a purely visual phenomenon, albeit one that the text is unable to render visible. An actual double would eliminate the singularity of perspective since perspective and experience would necessarily be shared. True doubles would be both physically and psychologically indistinguishable. The double narrative is a "frightful bore" because there never is a double. The double, and hence the narrative, is always false and detectable as such. The double, in literature, is either reducible to a distorted reflection—whether

literally in a mirror, or projected on a screen—in the mold of Poe's "William Wilson," or the resemblance is eventually undercut.[175]

Nabokov draws on both of these trajectories whilst situating the double within a text's material reality. Quilty is Humbert's brother/cousin, and the quality of a "family resemblance" pervades their shared system of cultural references and sexual proclivities. Humbert, further, resembles an advertisement: the apex of interchangeability—everyone's double—indexically captured in a photograph. Nonetheless, Humbert and Quilty are, perhaps, only doubles because Humbert situates their interchange within established narrative conventions and both inhabit a certain intechangeability through their resemblance to, and capture within, visual media. Felix is the lower class reflection of Hermann, a man in whom Hermann, regardless of any resemblance, can see himself distorted to advance his scheme. We are forced to trust Hermann's description of their similarity until the presumed reality of the novel's world interjects to undercut his fantasy. *Pale Fire* escalates the *doppelgänger* theme to parodic absurdity since Kinbote perceives doubles (and even quadruples) for all the novel's major players: Gradus is potentially de'Grey aggrandized through Kinbote's lens to an apotheosis of vulgarity. Shade is four different "Shades," all existing in *Pale Fire's* diegetic material world, including the Goldsworth that de'Grey hopes to kill. Kinbote is Charles Xavier, but also Botkin and, perhaps, Gerald Emerald, and Charles Xavier, himself, proves quite easy for his allies to duplicate as he flees Zembla. In Nabokov's fiction, the double is a convenient product of fraudulent projection, reconstruction,

[175] Anthony Uhlmann suggests that *Despair* references German Expressionist cinema which often embodies the externalization of mental distortion. Specifically, Uhlmann refers to Henrik Galeen's *Der Student von Prag*, 1926, which in part draws on Poe's "William Wilson's" *doppelgänger* plot. While this connection is useful, Uhlmann ultimately expands on it, along with Nabokov's assertion that "Hell shall never pardon Hermann" to offer a deliberately Brian Boydian "solution" that Hermann is possibly already in hell as he recounts his tale. *Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov*. NY: Continuum, 2011, 127-40.

and paranoia traceable to some version of material reality in the diegetic world of the novel. The double is a "frightful bore" and a cheap joke with seemingly serious consequences, assuming that serious consequences, and what produces them, are possible within the worlds he constructs.

Nabokov's continuous return to the "frightful bore" of the *doppelgänger* communicates the impossibility of establishing authenticity in visual perception, of distinguishing "real" from "fake" when the difference is unseeable. Whether in the form of the double or the elaboration of solipsistic worldviews (or the two intertwined), Nabokov's work reflects on this eternal problem of perception, especially as it arises in the sphere of artistic representation, whether human or technological. The boundaries of human knowledge, reducible to the limitations of human perception and comprehension, lurk as the endpoint of all lines of inquiry and hinge on the horizons of visibility. In his oft-cited *Playboy* interview, Nabokov responds to an interviewer's suggestion that "science has begun to plumb the most profound mysteries of existence" with what reads like the tedious recitation of a "frightful bore": "even in a better sense of 'science'—as the study of visible and palpable nature, or the poetry of pure mathematics and pure philosophy—the situation remains as hopeless as ever. We shall never know the origin of life, or the meaning of life, or the nature of space and time, or the nature of nature, or the nature of thought" (*SO* 45). The great, unanswered question of human being—the ape drawing the bars of its cage—provides the grounds for artistic representation, and perhaps the only fitting method of ontological contemplation in the modern world is an ambivalent embrace of tiresome genre conventions. The double is a "frightful bore," but like the "camera-type" memory, it reemphasizes through exaggeration that the horizons of our visible world often fall where we would like them to.

CHAPTER 5

The World Outside the World

"The moment belongs to the twentieth century, which means
it had to be captured on film."
—Don DeLillo[176]

In his essay "Becoming-media: Galileo's Telescope," Joseph Vogl asserts two consequences of Galileo viewing the universe through a telescope. First, he suggests that, "the telescope increases visibility, produces an increase in empirical knowledge and gives certain evidence for the Copernican system."[177] "On the other hand," Vogl adds, "this very evidence is called into question by the telescope-effect: every visibility now bears a stigma of provisionality; every visibility is surrounded by an ocean of invisibility. Everything visible remains contingent, forever encompassed by the imperceptible and the unknown." Building up to this claim, Vogl explains that the telescope's dual effect also means that "what the eye sees is now itself understood to be a construction" and the optical device—the telescope—becomes a medium, and, hence, the vision it provides becomes media (18) Galileo's telescope then, as Vogl suggests, does not merely "extend" vision, it redefines "sensory perception, turning any and all visible facts into constructed and calculated data" (17) Vogl adds that the telescope reveals "an alterable horizon of the visible" and as a result, "sight is now turned toward that which withdraws from

[176] Adam Begley. "The Art of Fiction CXXV: Don DeLillo." *Paris* Review 35.128 (1993) 274-306. http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1887/the-art-of-fiction-no-135-don-delillo

[177] Joseph Vogl. "Becoming-media: Galileo's Telescope." Trans. Brian Hanrahan. *Grey Room* (2007) No. 29, 22.

sight" (21). In this vein, the history of visual media technology, and hence vision itself, might be the continuous reorientation of this "alterable horizon of the visible."

Recently, in *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* Shawn Michelle Smith articulates a similar duality in photography. She observes that, "Photography revolutionized perception, making the invisible visible. But as it enlarged the visual world, bringing new things into sight, it also demonstrated how much ordinarily remains imperceptible."[178] Smith adds that,

> "photography revealed the limitations of human sight even as it offered its prosthetic compensation. Further, as it extended the realm of the visible, photography also suggested that some things would remain forever out of sight. Just as vision is not endlessly expandable, photography has its own limitations. The exposure photography proffers is the recognition of a world paradoxically visible in its invisibility. Photography brushes against the unseen, and photographs bring us to the edge of sight. (Smith 8)

Photography, in this sense, intensifies and represents the selectivity of vision more broadly. As Stanley Cavell puts it, "The camera, being finite, crops a portion from an infinitely larger field."[179] Cavell adds that, "When a photograph is cropped, the rest of the world is cut *out*. The implied presence of the rest of the world, and its explicit rejection, are as essential in the experience of the photograph as what it explicitly presents." A photograph, then, marks a visible gap in a larger continuum that remains unseen. As a new "order of vision," building on Vogl's terms, photography once again alters the horizon of the visible, positioning us, as Smith contends, at "the edge of sight." Photography has the capacity to show us what would otherwise dwell unseen—presenting something "that has been" as Roland Barthes' explains, albeit outside

[178] Shawn Michelle Smith. *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*. Duke UP, 2013, 8.

[179] Stanley Cavell. *The World Viewed*. Harvard UP, 1979, 24

our sphere of perception—but, at the same time, as a visual excerpt, photography obscures everything that surrounds its object of focus.[180] The existence of the world around the photograph, drawing on Cavell, is only "implied." As such, a photograph abandons its viewer to attempt to mentally conjure the infinitely larger world it eclipses. Following from Vogl's argument, photography might then emerge as another register of "constructed and calculated data," or an observation that makes us reflect on the contingency of our own observation of it.

Film, of course, as André Bazin suggests in his classic account, pushes photography's capacities further by capturing duration or "embalm[ing] time."[181] Nonetheless, film also marks a perspectival horizon, a limit to vision, a capture of moving time extracted from its flow. In film, as Virginia Woolf notes, "We behold [the various objects of the world] as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it."[182] Bazin, further, refers to photography, and by extension film, as "the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can see" (Bazin 14). Both mediums technologically extend vision—"offering prosthetic compensation," as Smith puts it—allowing us to see without presence, to see life, or a lack thereof, with no relation to us: to see what we cannot see. Photograph and film, like a mirage, provide a glimpse of something forever beyond the bounds of visibility. The "presence of the rest of the world" beyond the captured image is "implied," as Cavell suggests, but the uncertainty of what composes such a "world" further communicates that it remains inaccessibly beyond the bounds of perception. Visibility's shifting horizons reorient our constructed perspective on the world, and in doing so, indicate their eternal alterability.

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[180] Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. N.Y. Hill and Wang, 1981, 76.

[181] André Bazin. *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, Trans. Hugh Gray. California UP, 2005, 14.

[182] Woolf, Virginia. *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*. London: Hogarth, 1950, 167.

Literature provides a perspective to reflect on visual media from outside of it. It allows us to observe one type of media as another observes it and, in a different register, reenacts it. As such, literature can reflect on the limitations of vision and how film and other visual media function as shifting horizons that reveal those limitations. Since film's rise to prominence in the early part of the 20th century, fiction has often attempted to ekphrastically render the moving image. Novelists such as Joyce, Hemingway, and Dos Passos all added filmic prose to the modern novel's cornucopia of styles, with varying degrees of success.[183] However, as the 20th century plunged towards its end, novelists increasingly devoted their skills to the task of linguistically producing filmic imagery. Arguably no writer of the latter portion of the 20th century has engaged with visual media as consistently as Don DeLillo, whose earliest novel—among others—inhabits the perspective of a filmmaker during the production process. Furthermore, DeLillo has often conceived of the 20th century itself as contingent upon its own duplication on film. Of Abraham Zapruder's footage of JFK's assassination, which he curiously scrutinizes in a section of his largest novel *Underworld*, he claims "the moment belongs to the twentieth century, which means it had to be captured on film" (Begley).

Many critics have explored DeLillo's representation of visual media and the centrality of film, broadly conceived, in his work. DeLillo himself acknowledges the influence of Jean-Luc Godard, in particular, in an interview with Tom Leclair, which in many way frames work on his novels leading up to *Underworld*.[184] Analysis of Godard's influence on DeLillo, however, is

[183] Michael North, for example, points out that Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* "is not nearly so visual as it claims to be," noting that the 'Newsreel' segments "are not actually newsreels at all," and that the "'Camera Eye' sections . . . are also a good deal less overtly and literally visual than their title implies." Michael North. *Camera Works*. Oxford UP, 2007, 143-4.

[184] Tom LeClair. "An Interview with Don DeLillo." *Contemporary Literature* 23 (1982): 19-31. See also, Mark Osteen. "Children of Godard and Coca-Cola: Cinema and Consumerism in Don DeLillo's Early Fiction." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Autumn, 1996): 439-470.

largely restricted to *Breathless* (1959) and the general idea of the freewheeling New Wave style it introduces. Godard's continuous devotion to filming the written word—as it literally is read—indicates a clear commonality with DeLillo in communicating the *mise en abyme* of Marshall McLuhan's well-known pronouncement that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium."[185] Yet, DeLillo and Godard both incorporate other media into their chosen modes to reflect on the representational boundaries that media tests, exploring the shifting horizons of perception.

Film theorist Raymond Bellour's argument that film is "unquotable" oddly raises the question of whether or not film can quote itself, while Susan Sontag usefully observes that a photograph can "be described as a quotation."[186] Godard famously explores this prompt, among many examples, when his protagonist Nana views Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* in *Vivre sa vie (My Life to Live*, 1962*)*.[187] However, Godard pushes this question of film's quotability much further in *Numéro deux* (1975)—a title literally referring to itself as "shit," the "number two" of which a constipated working-class mother yearns to relieve herself.[188] Many types of films, quite obviously, incorporate segments of other films. Yet, the majority of *Numéro deux* consists of scenes previously recorded on video physically playing on televisions spread out in various configurations before the camera which leaves them, due to darkness of their

[185] Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 2003, 19.

[186] Raymond Bellour. "The Unattainable Text." *Screen* 16.3 (1975) 22. Susan Sontag. *On Photography*. N.Y.: Picador, 1977, 71.

[187] Godard's "quotation" of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* further influences Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's incorporation of Dreyer's film into *Dictee*. California UP, 1982.

[188] While the phrase "number two" does not necessarily hold the same meaning in France, it functions well in relation to the film, whether or not Godard intended it.

surroundings, "swim[ming] in a pool of blackness," as Kaja Silverman observes.[189] The film, then, largely emerges as a sequence of quotations, and various visual quotations frequently appear on screen at the same time. While the juxtaposed screens do "comment upon" one another, their "simultaneity" more often drives one or more of them into an unperceived periphery (Silverman 142). Focusing on one television screen relegates any other to number two, the shit that the visual apparatus flushes away. Positioning his work, and film itself, as waste is nothing new for Godard. *Weekend's* (1967) sub-titles explicitly signal its status as unseen detritus, "A Film Adrift in the Cosmos," and as salvage, "A Film Found in a Dump." Regardless, *Numéro deux* may be the only film to automatically position at least half of its content as excretion: actual waste on camera, with half the screen and half the visual content present only to not be seen. Film as waste and waste on film are a proper trajectory into *Underworld's* curious engagement with visual media and align the novel's interrogation of human refuse with Godard's influence.

As much criticism observes, *Underworld* fixates on the uncontainability of waste, whether human, nuclear, or psychological. Mark Osteen, for example, points out that "physical and emotional waste are underground streams that always eventually surface" in DeLillo's novel.[190] While "physical and emotional" refuse indeed flow through DeLillo's pages, the optic world also consists of waste or, more precisely, unseen visions cast into oblivion—visibilities "Adrift in the Cosmos." Recording technology, as *Underworld* envisions it, functions to salvage:

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[189] Kaja Silverman and Farocki, Harun. *Speaking About Godard*. N.Y. UP, 1998, 141.

[190] Mark Osteen. *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo 's Dialogue with Culture.* Pennsylvania UP, 2000, 227. Also see, Rozelle, Lee. "Resurveying DeLillo's 'White Space on Map': Liminality and Communitas in *Underworld." Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (winter 2010) 443-452 and David H. Evans "Taking out the Trash: Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, Liquid Modernity, and the End of Garbage." *Cambridge Quarterly* 35:2 (2006) 103-32.

the camera recycles bits of detritus out of the rubbish-bin, or "Dump," of cast-off visibilities. Any optic recording—whether analog or digital—marks a gap in the continuum of the unseen world that surrounds it. What the camera does manage to film is a cut away from what it cannot. Yet, at the same time, any visual recording—as DeLillo's construction of a fictitious Eisenstein film, his rendering of Robert Frank's long suppressed Rolling Stones documentary, *Cock-sucker Blues,* and the Zapruder footage suggest—carries with it the possibility of its removal from the visible world. Films both controversial and utterly banal, in DeLillo's conception, stand an equal chance of ending up in the rubbish-bin.

Explaining how Pieter Bruegel's painting *The Triumph of Death* "surfaces everywhere, offering what amounts to a visual scaffolding, a way of seeing the novel's bones," Peter Boxall describes *Underworld* as, "a novel which seeks to plumb the depths of the culture, to bring what is hidden to light."[191] Boxall's characterization proves accurate as the novel, in basic terms, historically "plumbs the depths" of its subject matter on both an individual and cultural level: as DeLillo traces in reverse the development of his sometime protagonist Nick Shay from third-person, 1950s Bronx juvenile delinquent and murderer to first-person, 1990s Phoenix executive for a firm of "waste handlers, waste traders, cosmologists of waste,"[192] he simultaneously excavates Cold War culture, from late 90s attempts to clean up its nuclear refuse to a New York Times cover that curiously signifies its origin:

> Front page of The New York Times. Oct. 4, 1951. A pair of mated headlines, top of the page. Same typeface, same size type. Each headline three columns wide, three lines deep.
>
> *Giants capture pennant* -- this was the dramatic substance of the first headline.

[191] Peter Boxall. *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*. N.Y.: Routledge, 2006, 180.

[192] Don DeLillo. *Underworld*. N.Y.: Scriber, 1997, 88

Soviets explode atomic bomb -- this was the ominous threat of the second.[193]

Yet, DeLillo's sustained representation of visual media demonstrates that the novel's quest through the "depths of the culture" more often than not merely reveals that there are further depths that remain forever inaccessible. Boxall adds that, "the dark material of the novel resists the work of recycling, and refuses to be sanitized, purified, or brought into the light" (Boxall 204). Film, it seems, offers a glimpse into the "dark material" of the unseen world that surrounds what it captures. What the camera does reveal is a contingent extract from what it does not. Furthermore, while DeLillo represents a wide swath of visual media, from cinematic productions to chance recordings with consumer grade cameras, all of the forms that compose his representation of media emerge through the process of salvage.

—"The world is lurking in the camera, already framed"

Part Two of *Underworld*, "Elegy for Left Hand Alone" names itself in homage to the anonymous, and lonely "Texas Highway Killer," whose ultimately irrelevant identity—"twisted in with the profiles of a hundred other individuals in the crime computer" (*Underworld* 216)—DeLillo reveals to his audience, but leaves a mystery within the world of the narrative he constructs. "Elegy for Left Hand Alone," in part, stages the possibility that the rise of the consumer-grade camcorder renders the world wholly recordable. Lapsing into a second-person narrative voice that simultaneously addresses everyone and no one, DeLillo writes, "You know

[193] Don DeLillo. "The Power of History" *New York Times Magazine*. September 7, 1997. http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/090797article3.html

about families and their video cameras. You know how kids get involved, how the camera shows them that every subject is potentially charged, a million things they never see with the unaided eye…They learn to see things twice." (155) While Jeremy Green is correct that "the Video Kid's" camera here "establishes a complicitous link between her viewing and that of the avid, anonymous watcher of TV," the narrative nonetheless extends Matt Shay's interior universalization of his obsession with the footage to the extent that it undercuts our absorption into the second person.[194] The "you" watches with a degree of self-consciousness far too generous to extend to TV viewers as a broad category. The general idea of a "self-conscious viewer" is an unfounded projection, as is the anonymous narrative voice's speculation that the anonymous girl, ostensibly playing a "game," "feels halfway clever and inventive and maybe slightly intrusive" as she films. It cements a perspective on the footage, in both its viewing and its capture, that the "rawness" that the narrative ascribes to the recording largely resists. The incidental act of recording, in this case by a twelve-year-old girl, herself "only the means of recording"—and, hence, evacuated of the psychological complexity Matt, and by extension the second person voice, ascribes to her—produces visuality that they "unaided eye" would filter out.

Recording, or aiding the eye, "charge[s]" the banality of the everyday world with meaning through its doubling. While the footage that "the videokid" captures in this instance is truly "charged," it doubtless emerges out of innumerable other potential recordings that even the aided eye would presumably dispense with: "see[ing] things twice" leaves other things unseen and, in a sense, reduces the sphere of visibility. Todd McGowan observes that, "For all of the

[194] Jeremy Green. "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999) 594.

people watching (and for the victim), the shot emanates from a void: all of a sudden it appears, without warning and without apparent premeditation. It thus marks an event that seems to those who witness it to be irreducible to any chain of causality, to any meaning that we might attribute to it."[195] Sheer contingency allows the girl to catch the Texas Highway Killer's "tenth or eleventh homicide" (159) and making it visible for "everyone on the planet," in DeLillo's words. However, the fact that she does record the murder opens up one view into the void while foreclosing innumerable other glimpses into it. Ironically, one of the many video captures her recording removes from visibility is an adjacent perspective on the killer himself who also shoots at the same car from a perpendicular position.

Mark Seltzer observes that "[s]erial killing, by all accounts, became a career option at the turn of the [twentieth] century," and DeLillo's novel seems to indicate that by the middle of the nineteen-eighties it has risen up to compete with baseball for the status of National Pastime.[196] This rise in no way contradicts Seltzer's description of how serial killer narratives have attained a position of prominence, reflecting the "pathological public sphere" of American culture, and only further emphasizes the status of serial murder in the contemporary world at large through the transition from occupation to hobby (Seltzer 6). As DeLillo drifts back in time from the early-90s to the mid-80s, baseball and serial killing emerge as parallel objects for mediated observation with the latter now "designed for random taping and immediate playing" (*Underworld* 159). In this symbiotic relationship, "serial murder has found its medium, or vice versa." Baseball—both game and nostalgia materialized and crystallized in the Bobby Thompson

[195] Todd McGowan. "The Obsolescence of Mystery and the Accumulation of Waste in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 2005 Winter, Vol.46 (*2*) 130.

[196] Mark Seltzer. *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1998, 1.

homerun ball—marks the transition between objective observation and mediated detachment.[197] This shift manifests clearly when Nick Shay and fellow waste management executives observe a Dodgers game from "[t]he Stadium Club" and "pretend[] to watch the game" through a window (91). Brian Glassic, one of *Underworld's* frequent disbelievers in the increasingly immaterial world of late capitalism, remarks that"[w]e need video helmets and power gloves. Because this isn't reality. This is virtual reality. And we don't have the proper equipment" (92).[198] While clearly a product of its early-90s context, and emerging as a product of the glass seal's elimination of crowd noise, Glassic's point still rings true, except that no equipment is necessary: baseball largely appears through the mediation of a video screen, even to those in the stands, and perhaps the players, who inevitably watch a large portion of games on the Jumbotron. Glassic, regardless, fails to ascertain that batting helmets and baseball gloves also have a rather nebulous relation to whatever may constitute reality. As the Texas Highway Killer says, in relation to his murders, "if this is all a game, then take it as a game" (216).

[197] David Cowart observes that, "The point of the Bobby Thomson baseball is that it embodies a wholly memorable piece of reality—of history, even—precisely because it could not be 'replayed'." He adds that, "The baseball is also a textual nexus, linking virtually all of the novel's themes and motifs—including the theme of connectedness itself." David Cowart. *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*. Georgia UP, 2002, 192.

[198] Glassic's speculations resemble Fredric Jameson's claim concerning the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, that, "We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. The newer architecture therefore [. . .] stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions." Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke UP, 1991, (39-40). Philip Nel usefully draws upon this passage from Jameson to contrast his version of materialism with DeLillo's and point out "the flaws of a modern-postmodern conceptual paradigm." Nel argues that, "Jameson's theory [. . .] is unable to imagine a space that has not already been co-opted by dominant ideologies of late capitalism," whereas, "In contrast, by constructing contingent arguments, DeLillo's avant-garde practices of representation can resist the lure of an absolute, unified field theory and, instead, provide us with an active--if qualified--participatory role. One representational benefit of DeLillo's approach in *Underworld* is precisely its resistance to a univocal, clearly directed message: it leaves spaces from which others can speak." "A Small Incisive Shock: Modern Forms, Postmodern Politics, and the Role of the Avant-garde in *Underworld*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999) 742.

As *Underworld* moves backwards from1992 into the mid-80s, it transitions from Nick Shay's anti-nostalgic contemplation of the "Shot Heard 'Round the World" baseball—a sort of totem of authenticity—to serial murder's eruption into "the simplest sort of family video" (155). DeLillo allows us to drift through his linguistic creation of this murder on video, and various observations on the relation between visual media and the material sphere it simultaneously inhabits and contains, before revealing that Nick Shay's brother, Matt, obsessed with the video, grounds our perspective on the footage as it appears on his television, presumably on the nightly news. Matt's fascination doubtless stems from the contrast of such a public murder with the private shooting that dwells mysteriously beneath the relatively ordinary American life of his brother, Nick, and, it would appear that shootings behind closed doors are a thing of the past. In the world of the consumer-grade camera, and *America's Funniest Home Videos*, arguably inching closer and closer to murder throughout its runtime, "The world is lurking in the camera, already framed, waiting for the boy or girl who will come along and take up the device, learn the instrument, shooting old granddad at breakfast, all stroked out so his nostrils gape, the cereal spoon baby-gripped in his pale fist" (156). Although the camera that contains the world grants "old granddad" a brief reprieve before his inevitable end, the Texas Highway Killer proves less generous to "a man in a sport shirt at the wheel of his car" (155). The narrative announces that "[t]here is nothing else to see," too caught up in "the jostled sort of noneventness that marks the family product" to recognize that something rather important lurks offscreen: "if she had panned to another car, the right car at the precise time, she would have caught the gunman as he fired" (157). Indeed, "the Video Kid" captures "a stranger in a car, a random figure, someone who has happened along in the slow lane," instead of another "random figure" happening along in the adjacent lane. Mere chance dictates that the family car from which the girl, again "only the

means of recording," films aligns itself with the killed and not the killer and, as a result, selects her frame of focus.

"The Video Kid" at once records and fails to record. Contingency both reveals and obscures. Video in this instance "embalms time" as André Bazin argues that photography does and captures "objectivity in time" like the cinema (Bazin 14). The Texas Highway Killer footage also "mummifie[s]," to use another of Bazin's terms, death itself (Bazin 15). Roland Barthes observes—notwithstanding his resistance to film—that the "catastrophe" of photography is its inevitable prefiguring of death, and that historical photographs, to go further, display something "*that* is dead and *that* is going to die" (Barthes 96). The "videokid," due to the camera's ability to capture duration instead of simply a snapshot of time, registers not only the man dead, but also the man going to die and the man dying. As Peter Boxall points out, "DeLillo finds death, and deathly possibility, inhabiting the very technologies that promise to eradicate death" (Boxall 10). If death marks the last "taboo" in the cinema, as Amos Vogel suggests, and "confound[s] representation and exceed[s] visibility," as Vivian Sobchack adds, DeLillo ostensibly speculates that it is both presentable and inevitable not only on the network news, but within the contingent construction of the consumer grade camera. [199] In this sense, the camcorder revives the representational possibilities of early film. Mary Ann Doane articulates the lure of death, as the manifestation of contingency, in early cinema: "Perhaps death functions as a kind of cinematic Ur-event because it appears as the zero degree of meaning, its evacuation. With death we are suddenly confronted with pure event, pure contingency, what ought to be inaccessible to

[199] Amos Vogel. *Film as a Subversive Art*. N.Y.: Random House, 1974, 263. Vivian Sobchack. *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. California UP, 2004, 235.

representation."[200] Yet, as Doane emphasizes, actual death is a common subject in early cinema, most prominently evident in the execution film, as contingency elaborately staged. [201]

Much of Matt Shay's viewing of the recording of the Texas Highway Killer appears to indicate that indeed "the world is lurking in the camera, already framed." Furthermore, the recording ostensibly emphasizes that nothing escapes its doubling in visual media, technologies that, as Boxall notes, "promise to eradicate death." Death, Vogel's last "taboo" of cinematic representation, proves "open to the hand-held camera" as the Texas Highway Killer's victim—possibly "a chump, a sort of silent movie dupe" (160)—is "open" to both the recording mechanism that captures his image and the gun that kills him.[202] The camera's focus, however, reveals that the seemingly glaring visual world in fact largely lies outside the frame. The tape itself "shows very little in the end," and as a capture of serial murder, it curiously appears as a ninth or tenth sequel in a series of movies that no one was on hand to film (159). [S]erial murder has found its medium," but the medium rarely finds serial murder. If "the world is lurking in the camera, already framed," there remains a greater world—both in scale and significance—that lurks outside the world, open to framing but eluding capture. It is in this world outside the world that "the Video Kid" herself, "famous in the modern manner of people whose names are strategically withheld," lurks in anonymity, escaping her camera's range of vision. These

[200] Mary Ann Doanne. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*. Harvard UP, 2002, 164. Doane also suggests that, "Perhaps the execution films circulate around the phenomenon of death, striving to capture the moment of death, in order to celebrate the contingency of the cinematic image, a celebration that is always already too late, since the contingent, in the face of the cinematic apparatus, has already received a 'posthumous shock'" (163).

[201] If anything, the internet has further revealed the contingency of the filmed image, and made death more accessible rendering the execution film an unacknowledged, and popular, genre of cinema.

[202] That DeLillo refers to the victim as "a sort of silent movie dupe" indicates that cruelty and humiliation are nothing new in filmic representation, and, of course, human history more broadly conceived.

anonymous dwell, "famous without names or faces, spirits living apart from their bodies, the victims and witnesses, the underage criminals, out there somewhere at the edges of perception." Despite his or her absence from the list, the serial killer—the Texas Highway Killler in this particular instance—similarly inhabits these "edges of perception," an anonymous celebrity drifting imperceptibly outside the camera's frame.

—Lost Information, Instantly Repeatable

The footage of the Texas Highway Killer's victim appears earlier in *Underworld*—though subsequently in diachronic time—on the computer screen of Nick Shay's somewhat reclusive son Jeff. As Nick's first person narrative meanders through details of his career in the upper echelons of waste management, the banalities of everyday life (coming close to unearthing an affair between his wife and best friend), and obscure hints at his distant youth, he weaves in a brief aside on Jeff's obsession with the footage. Even before Nick's observations on Jeff examining the footage, Nick jokes that he is the Texas Highway Killer during his visit to Klara Sax's "Long Tall Sally" art project. That any random car on the road could be the killer makes clear that he remains anonymously at large. The fact that Jeff fixates on the footage suggests that it serves as a gateway drug to internet conspiracies: by the novel's contemporary (in 1997) epilogue, in which "[n]o one talks about the Texas Highway Killer anymore" (807), Jeff is a "lurker" (808) on "a website devoted to miracles" (806) and "spends tremendous amounts of time with his computer." That Jeff may "forever" live with his parents emphasizes the results of such fixations.

Nick's description of Jeff's obsession with the footage prefigures—or echoes, given the text's reverse temporality—Matt Shay's conspiracy speculations and Klara Sax's visit to the Zapruder footage installation in the 1970s. It also demonstrates that conspiracy obsessions result from a lack of seeing:

> His personal computer had a multimedia function that allowed him to look at a copy of the famous videotape showing a driver being shot by the Texas Highway Killer. Jeff became absorbed in these images, devising routines and programs, using filtering techniques to remove background texture. He was looking for lost information. He enhanced and super-slowed, trying to find some pixel in the data swarm that might provide a clue to the identity of the shooter. (118)

Jeff searches the footage for "lost information," a phrase that communicates the impossibility of its discovery, as opposed to hidden or overlooked visual material. He searches inside the camera's frame for everything that dwells outside of it: since there is nothing else to see, no lost information, he attempts to construct something absent from what he can see. His unfruitful search clearly relates well to the Zapruder footage of J.F.K.'s assassination, the classic example of recorded murder that, like the video Jeff scours for meaning, "shows very little in the end."

In his *Paris Review* interview during the composition of *Underworld*, DeLillo observes that, "every new generation of technical experts gets to take a crack at the Zapruder film. The film represents all the hopefulness we invest in technology. A new enhancement technique or a new computer analysis—not only of Zapruder but of other key footage and still photographs—will finally tell us precisely what happened" (Begley). After the interviewer, Adam Begley, astutely responds with "[i]t's one of the great ironies that, despite the existence of the film, we don't know what happened," DeLillo concurs that "[w]e're still in the dark. What we finally

have are patches and shadows. It's still a mystery," and they both agree that, as Begley points out, "the confusion is created by the film." The filmic trace of the assassination allows the possibility for analysis and speculation—including, quite obviously, DeLillo's own *Libra*—merely revealing that the event of the assassination is not clearly represented. While Begley's observation nicely points out the "great irony" of the footage, further irony lies in the emergence of the commonly held assumption that the video camera captures reality—or truth—in a conversation concerning a novel so skeptical about its ability to do so.

Nonetheless, the little that the Zapruder footage presents visually functions to indicate how much of the scenario dwells unseen outside the frame of the camera. Zapruder's film exists solely as a perspectivally and temporally contingent slice of time. Like the Texas Highway Killer footage, it captures death accompanied only by a sliver of comprehensible context. DeLillo lays out a clear distinction between Kennedy's death and Lee Harvey Oswald's and its significance to their respective media presences:

> Kennedy was shot on film, Oswald was shot on TV. Does this mean anything? Maybe only that Oswald's death became instantly repeatable. It belonged to everyone. The Zapruder film, the film of Kennedy's death, was sold and hoarded and doled out very selectively. It was exclusive footage. So that the social differences continued to pertain, the hierarchy held fast—you could watch Oswald die while you ate a TV dinner, and he was still dying by the time you went to bed, but if you wanted to see the Zapruder film you had to be very important or you had to wait until the 1970s when I believe it was shown once on television, or you had to pay somebody thirty thousand dollars to look at it—I think that's the going rate. (Begley)

Like the Texas Highway Killer's murders, Oswald's shooting is "a crime designed for random taping and immediate playing. [leaving its audience to] sit there and wonder if this kind of crime became more possible when the means of taping an event and playing it immediately, without a neutral interval, a balancing space and time, became widely available. Taping-and-playing intensifies and compresses the event." (159) Yet, if Oswald's death "became instantly repeatable," repetition seemingly unmoors it from reality. Oswald dies day and night, year after year, and, extending DeLillo's claim, he "is still dying." If "Taping-and-playing intensifies" reality, it simultaneously denies that reality singularity as the "intensifi[cation]" results from duplication and repetition. The "hoarded" reality of the Zapruder footage, however, resists "intensifi[cation]" dwelling unseen in an enduring "neutral interval."

In a lengthy passage from his New York Times Book Review essay "The Power of History" that publicizes *Underworld's* publication, DeLillo sets out what resemble alternative versions of the Video Kid's recording, inhabiting the second-person complicity that Green points out more fully. DeLillo's shift between various crimes-on-tape here represents the inevitable glut of such recordings in an era of omnipresent surveillance and suggests, before *Underworld* is available to the Book Review's audience, that the recording of the Texas Highway Killer is merely another tape in this arbitrary sequence.

> *You're watching a video-tape of hooded men emerging from a bank and they move with a certain choreographed flair, firing virtuoso bursts from automatic weapons, and you wonder if they are repeating a scene from a recent movie [. . .] and the tape is played and replayed, exhausting all the reality stored in its magnetic pores, and then another tape replaces it [. . .] and the culture continues its drive to imitate itself endlessly -- the rerun,*

the sequel, the theme park, the designer outlet -- because this is the means it has devised to disremember the past.[203]

The passage itself enacts a repetition of repetition. Each tape "played and replayed" is merely a tape in a sequence of largely indistinguishable tapes—a car chase and convenience store robbery follow, developed as simply more of the same—each, perhaps, duplicates a film scene that potentially repeats another. DeLillo's bank robbers, for example, clearly resemble those in Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995), a film that exemplifies the feedback loop between supposed real life and Hollywood, fictionalizing true crime and reentering reality through its imitation in subsequent robberies. Both Mann's film and this passage of DeLillo's essay replay a month after *Underworld's* publication in the infamous "North Hollywood Shoot-Out," a sort of apotheosis of "choreographed flair" in the bank robbery genre of modern life.[204] As Norman M. Klein puts it, "The movie version and the real event took place simultaneously."[205] Everyone DeLillo includes in his second-person interpellation—a way in which the novel anticipates and replicates the critical context of nineties literary studies—becomes "a passive variation of the armed robber," both passive and active entities wholly subsumed pawns of consumer culture. For him, watching

[203] Don DeLillo. "The Power of History" *New York Times Magazine*. September 7, 1997. http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/090797article3.html

[204] Footage from the North Hollywood Shootout is now readily available on YouTube, and the event itself has been developed into a made-for-TV movie, *44 Minutes: The North Hollywood Shoot-Out* (2003), and an episode of *National Geographic: Situation Critical* that merges, as such programs inevitably do, actual footage and reenactment. A website, "Bears in the Beehive: the Lives and Crimes of Larry Eugen Phillips Jr. and Emil Matasareanu endeavors "to collate all the available information, sift out the bad from the good and attempt to recreate the crime scenes as logically and accurately as possible; therefore telling the story in as complete a format as we understand." http://www.northhollywoodshootout.com/ This format extends to include detailed information on the size and brand of the robbers' underwear.

[205] Klein also writes that, "To audiences in Los Angeles, this 'robocop' robbery looked very uncanny (and was much discussed on talk radio, and in the papers). The news helicopters shot the scene as if it were a movie. They managed to keep light off the crime scene. They zoomed in so easily that the shootout looked literally like the downtown shootout in *Heat* (d. Michael Mann, 1995)." Norman M. Klein. "Staging Murders: The Social Imaginary, Film, and the City." *Wide Angle* 20.3 (1998) 90.

these increasingly ordinary media events, "*separates you from the reality that beats ever more softly in the diminishing world outside the tape.*"

Yet, all of "The Power of History's" examples of the increasingly banal status of violent crime in contemporary life, along with Oswald's death on TV, differ from the Zapruder film and the Video Kid's footage in one key component: like Jack Ruby, all of DeLillo's created criminals star in their "instantly repeatable" films. Besides being "instantly repeatable," these nebulously fictitious videos join with Oswald's death in containing precisely what Zapruder's lacks. They eliminate the possibility for "mystery" and speculation because, despite their "raw" and chaotic nature, they reveal an evidentiary trace of criminal and crime, actor and recipient. The Zapruder film, now readily available for instant viewing online, retains its allure since actually seeing it reveals nothing. As Sobchack observes, "Rituals of repetition and stop motion, of closer and closer scrutiny, yield only greater and greater mystification" (235). While DeLillo presumably writes "The Power of History" after *Underworld's* completion, the novel's version of the crime-on-tape scenario marks, depending on one's perspective on the capacities of media to document and/or construct contemporary reality, either an evolution or a devolution. Due to its techno-historical position, the Texas Highway Killer footage dwells in a sphere in which the "world outside the tape" has "diminish[ed]" to a lesser extent than it ostensibly has in the contemporary moment of DeLillo's writing in which "culture continues its drive to imitate itself endlessly" in order to "disremember the past." If "the world is lurking in the camera, already framed," the mid-eighties culture that inhabits it ostensibly lacks the recording and storage capacity to expose that world on film or tape. The "world outside the tape," even if it "lurk[s] in the camera," remains a world outside its media duplication, a world that oddly, in DeLillo's formulation, resists "disremember[ing]" through our inability to see a visual recording of it. Such a claim

hearkens all the way back to what marks potentially the first recorded suspicion of media technology: Socrates' argument that the written word, as the prosthetic memory that Phaedrus theorizes, provides not "a potion for remembering, but for reminding."[206] As such, DeLillo appears to suggest that media can, and potentially has, supplanted historic memory

Regardless, DeLillo's figuring of the Texas Highway Killer's murder, and by extension the Zapruder film, undercuts the techno-media determinism inherent in his claims in "The Power of History." Such deterministic claims repeat assumptions that tend to emerge and reemerge in the theoretical realm with each new and, presumably, more invasive technological advancement.[207] The videokid's capture lacks the "incessant information" that DeLillo finds in the "commonplace homicide" he both represents and creates in "The Power of History" and, consequently, obsessives like Jeff Shay comb it for "lost information." That the tape "shows very little," renders the murder itself far from commonplace. DeLillo's argument that the proliferation of recording technology and visual media "separates" us from the evaporating reality that dwells in the "diminishing world outside the tapes" bizarrely literalizes the implications of Martin Heidegger's conception of the "world picture." Heidegger envisions humankind's subjugation of "everything that is" through "calculating, planning, and molding" to modern world views.[208] DeLillo substitutes the construction of recording technology, suggesting that, eventually, nothing will exist beyond what has been technologically translated into viewable media.

[206] Plato. *Phaedrus*. Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995, 275A.

[207] Veblen, Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer, McLuhan, Debord, Baudrillard, Kittler, and beyond.

[208] Martin Heidegger. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. N.Y.: Harper Perennial, 1977, 134-5.

However, *Underworld*, in "Elegy for Left Hand Alone" and beyond, continuously questions the power and predominance of such a presumptive media ecology. Near the novel's conclusion, set in the contemporary world DeLillo writes in, old fashioned, germaphobe nun Sister Edgar visits "the inner ghetto, a slice of the South Bronx called Wall" where Ishmael Muñoz and his team of "graffiti writers spray-paint an angel every time a local child dies of illness or mistreatment" (810). Edgar's reaction to the presence of a television, albeit one drawing power from a bicycle powered World War II era generator, in "a place unlinked to the usual services," encapsulates various fears that the world is largely reducible to its technological capture: "Now here [TV] is, suddenly. You touch a button and all the things concealed from you for centuries come flying into the remotest room. It's an epidemic of seeing. No conceivable recess goes unscanned. In the uterus, under the ocean, to the lost halls of the human brain. And if you can see it, you can catch it. There's a pathogenic element in a passing glance" (812). The disease of visual media—and its ability to harness innumerable technological extensions of vision—carries with it the reality, for her, that everything becomes visible and, as a result, everyone will inevitably see everything. The origins of life, inside the mother and "under the ocean," historically beyond the bounds of human comprehension, are on view alongside the presumably unseeable "halls" that obscurely house that comprehension. Due to the reach of technology, anything visible, which now includes things once invisible, now must be seen. Edgar's "epidemic of seeing," of course, raises the question of what exactly constitutes sight, especially when technology extends the capacities of the human eye. As much philosophy of science and media theory have shown, this question proves quite difficult to answer.[209]

[209] For example, Grover Maxwell's distinction between the observable and the "unobservable in principle," which, for him, is a false distinction because, basically, science can confirm the ontological status of theoretical and traditionally unobservable entities. Grover Maxwell. "The Ontological Status of Theoretical Entities," *Minnesota Studies in Philosophy of Science* 3 (1962) 6. Bas van Fraassen disagrees, claiming that the moons of Jupiter are

Regardless, what distance and scale once withheld from vision, technology forces upon us. Edgar's fear makes no distinction between representation and reality: anything visible exists and, as a result, bears the threat of contaminating anything else that does.

After Edgar's death, the narrative, at least temporarily, validates her technophobia. She incorporates into the world wide web, her transformation culminating with the ability to see the history of hydrogen bombs—prompted presumably by one of many random internet searches to come, a query potentially emerging from the narrative's own preoccupations with the nuclear story of the second half of the twentieth century—a haptic and auditory visualization, an experience Edgar is "basically in." (825) As *Underworld* nudges towards its end, DeLillo abandons the novel's most characteristic technophobe within the medium that embodies the novel's paranoid refrain: "Everything is connected in the end." The narrative voice then asks, "Is cyberspace a thing within the world or is it the other way around? Which contains the other, and how can you tell for sure? (826) Cyberspace, in *Underworld*, tellingly manifests optically and, these questions, quite clearly align with the narrative's pronouncement in "Elegy for Left Hand Alone" that "the world is lurking in the camera, already framed." DeLillo's cyberspace manifests as a screen, and it is into this screen that the world, and the novel itself accompanies it. Nonetheless, DeLillo pulls back from such a pronouncement with the computer screen itself—"Peace" appears on it, origins and derivations accessible with a click, one of the positive side-

observable—and hence seeable—since they "can be seen through a telescope; but they can also be seen without a telescope if you are close enough," but the objects we view through a microscope are not since they are never visible to the unaided eye. Bas van Fraassenn. *The Scientific Image*. Oxford UP, 1980, 16. "Observable" is clearly a problematic term in relation to sight, which Ian Hacking also establishes in his argument that we can, in fact, see with a microscope: "We are convinced about the structures we seem to see because we can interfere with them in quite physical ways, say by microinjecting." Ian Hacking. *Representing and Intervening*. Cambridge UP, 1983, 209. Returning to the chapter's opening, Joseph Vogl, on the other hand, suggests that the telescope marks the "becoming-media" of sight since, in the wake of Galileo, "what the eye sees is now itself understood to be a construction" (Vogl 18).

effects of technology—driving the second person narrative to look upon the not so "diminish[ed]" world outside of the screen. *Underworld's* conclusion endeavors to verify that the world outside of cyberspace and the camera still exists. If such a conclusion feels, perhaps, a bit too easy, considering DeLillo's presumed stance on the omnipresence of recording technology, and media more broadly, throughout much of *Underworld* and "The Power of History," it supports the revelation of the Texas Highway Killer footage, which "shows very little in the end."

—"The Dead Times Were Best"

As the internet continues to advance after *Underworld* concludes with the world, in a sense, reemerging from absorption in cyberspace, DeLillo returns to the contingency of video recording in *The Body Artist*. This return stages what, at the turn of the millennium, further indicates that the world exists solely as its translation into visual media: the "live-streaming video feed." DeLillo's follow-up to *Underworld* marks a shift from maximal to minimal, but this decrease in scale in no way marks a departure from the preoccupation with the human place in and in relation to media that occupies his larger works. However, in *The Body Artist*, the omnipresent camera has failed to register spectacles of violence and instead captures sheer banality, inhabiting the reality that if the digital camera can record anything, it can also record nothing. Mourning her filmmaker husband's recent suicide, DeLillo's protagonist Lauren Hartke, the titular body artist, "spent hours at the computer screen looking at a live-streaming video feed

from the edge of a two-lane road in a city in Finland. It was the middle of the night in Kotka, Finland, and she watched the screen."[210]

DeLillo provides no context for the feed, nor how Lauren chanced upon it. The feed's utter geographic randomness once again appears to suggest that "the world is lurking in camera, already framed." Yet the contingent capture of the feed rather obviously diverges from the scene that the Video Kid records in *Underworld*: "It was interesting to her because it happened twenty-four hours a day, facelessly, cars entering and leaving Kotka, or just empty road in the dead times. The dead times were best." A two-lane road replaces a highway, and the occasional passing car, or preferably nothing whatsoever, fuels Lauren's obsession instead of public violence. Spectacle gives way to banality and, in contrast to the surveillance footage DeLillo explores in "The Power of History," the omnipresent technological gaze fixates on the purely ordinary. The obituary that DeLillo crafts for Lauren's husband Rey Robles, a "sharp pastiche of journalistic style" as Osteen observes, refers to him as a "Poet of Lonely Places" who "found a spiritual knife-edge in the poetry of alien places" (*Body Artist* 29 & 31).[211] DeLillo provides scant information on Rey's films, and the obituary cites a critical assessment of his work that sounds remarkably like an attempt to condense Michelangelo Antonioni's oeuvre to a short sentence: "His subject is people in landscapes of estrangement." These descriptions could also apply to the Kotka feed, assuming the camera, as Antonioni's does to conclude *L'Eclisse* (1962), removes human beings from its focus.

Lauren is compelled by the seemingly omnipresent camera's ability to register "nothing happening," though the feed of Kotka pushes this ability further, especially in its "dead times,"

[210] Don DeLillo. *The Body Artist*. N.Y. Scribner, 2001, 40.

[211] Mark Osteen. "Echo Chamber: Undertaking *The Body Artist*." *Studies in the Novel*. Vol. 37 No. 1 (2005) 68.

by moving as close as possible to literally recording nothing. In *Underworld,* DeLillo depicts a screening of Robert Frank's controversial Rolling Stones tour documentary, *Cocksucker Blues* (1972), by a cinema group that "showed rare things, mostly unrunnable in theaters for one reason or another (382). At the screening, artist Klara Sax "loved the tunnel blue light and the nothing-happening parts, everybody's got cameras and they're shooting nothing happening, and the sound that gets lost in the ceiling tiles" (383). Klara observes the most striking quality of *Cocksucker Blues* that seemingly defies its controversial status: "everybody's got cameras" but all they capture is "nothing happening." While in *Underworld,* DeLillo registers how the video camera, even in an ostensibly eventful atmosphere, is drawn to nothing as often as something, the live streaming video feed amplifies this tendency. Boxall suggests that, "The frame of the computer screen marks the temporal and spatial distinctions between the USA and Finland; but it also collapses the boundaries, breaks the geopolitical frame, brings Kotka pouring into the midst of Lauren's mourning," adding that, "The internet, and the virtualization of material conditions that it witnesses and enables, produces a kind of thin simultaneity, a condition in which it is possible . . . to be 'here and also there'" (Boxall 222).[212]

Boxall nicely situates this passage in the context of DeLillo's fiction, noting the inherence of seemingly random connections in modern life. Yet, despite the obvious technological and historic difference, his reading strikingly resembles classic reactions to the cinema, such as Virginia Woolf's aforementioned observation that in filmic recording, "We behold [the various objects of the world] as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it" (Woolf 167). Film, as Woolf sees it, "embalms" reality in a manner

[212] Cowart suggests that, "Kotka is the spatial emblem of a traditional view of time in which past and future—the road in, the road out—converge from different directions of the present. Electronic technology allows viewers in one time zone to share another time zone's present" (Cowart 207).

somewhat similar to that of André Bazin, who refers to photography, and by extension film, as "the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can see" (Bazin 14). All of the quotations above hinge on a technological extension of vision's ability to allow us to see without presence, to see life, or a lack thereof, with no relation to us: to see what we cannot see. While the feed that Boxall describes presumably appears in "real time"—"digitally microtimed," as DeLillo puts it in "The Power of History"—and "produces a kind of thin simultaneity," it largely shows Lauren nothing of Kotka except a small segment of a road, with nothing, save the context of the feed, to distinguish it from other segments of road in other places. Boxall adds that, "This little slip of space and time, hanging in a kind of anonymous suspense, containing a road that, as in the set of Beckett's *Godot*, both approaches and recedes, becomes representative of the co-ordinates of cyberspace itself" (Boxall 222). If the feed embodies the between-ness and embeddedness of cyberspace, it also manifests the web's ability to capture and communicate dead space, oddly interchangeable with the "dead time" that attracts Lauren, or, more precisely, nothing whatsoever. Furthermore, expanding on Boxall's connection to *Waiting for Godot*, the feed captures a space, like Vladimir and Estragon stumble around in, between nowhere and nowhere, a moving snapshot that "embalms" a gap of visual matter from the incomprehensibility of its unseen surroundings.

The camera can point into a world—or the world—far removed from ours; that it can do so does not, however, suggest that it can show us anything of that world: after all, it is "a place stripped of everything" that Lauren commits herself to seeing (41). Visibility in this case, returning to Joseph Vogl, is "surrounded by an ocean of invisibility. Everything visible remains contingent, forever encompassed by the imperceptible and the unknown" (Vogl 18). Lauren's work as a body artist is "to disappear from all her former venues of aspect and bearing and to

become a blankness, a body slate erased of every past resemblance" (*Body Artist* 86). Moreover, "In the mirror she wanted to see someone who is classically unseen, the person you are trained to look through, bled of familiar effect, a spook in the night static of every public toilet."[213] She strives to become unseen and to see invisibility. In a sense then, she aims to become the camera, to see into the unseen and to see nothing. Nonetheless, what *Underworld* and *The Body Artist* reveal is that visual media, whether filmic or digital, through its apparent omnipresence, often functions to obscure. Sister Edgar fears that recording technology renders "all the things concealed from you for centuries" visible. If so, it also, by indicating that vision is a construction, as Vogl puts it, at the same time conceals far more than it reveals: the increasing visibility of the world reduces the visible world a mere extract from its unseen surroundings.

[213] Lauren's attempt to become unseen clearly derives from her encounter with Mr. Tuttle, the random, seemingly aphasiac man, she either discovers or creates during her grieving process in the house she shared with Rey: "She had to concentrate to note these features. She looked at him and had to look again. There was something elusive in his aspect, moment to moment, a thinness of physical address" (*Body Artist* 48).

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