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Edited by Maria Beville

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Otherness and the Urban

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Introduction: Otherness and the Urban

by Maria Beville

The city is a unique and subjective space. It is fragmented and indistinct. It is, at once, place and text: to walk the city is to read it. In “Semiology and Urbanism” (*The Semiotic Challenge*), Roland Barthes notes that the city is a discourse and a language: “[t]he city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it”. However, in this discourse, there exists “a conflict between signification and reason, or at least between signification and that calculating reason which wants all the elements of the city to be uniformly recuperated by planning”. Our desire to map the city is a desire to map and to write the self: a process without closure that constantly reminds us of our own inherent Otherness.

In this way the city is multivalent. It is both the location and the sign of the Other. And rather than merely existing as a physical place, the city is experience; individualised and multiplied in its alterity. While the city exists as a place to be read and is therefore unique in every individual reading, it is also a place to be written, inspiring writers, artists, and thinkers to become lost in city streets and locales as they struggle to find new ways to meet the challenge of representing the unrepresentable. Thus, the city is where the subject and space become intertwined.

While the city becomes part of the subject and the subject a part of the city, urban space, in its resistance of representation, remains an unvarying challenge to notions of self, of sameness, of homogeneity. The city is therefore bound to exist in tension with identity, both individual and collective. Just as is the case with the self, there can be no cohesive vision of the city because the city not only resists mapping, it resists unified narrative; in its flux and in its phantasmagoria.

And yet the Otherness of the city remains a part of the definition of urban selfhood and understanding this is best achieved through a balanced view of the city's physical and metaphysical dimensions. No examination of the textuality of the city should overlook the materiality of the city and its impact on the city experience. City design, city building, city governance and city use form the structures of the city which carry and mediate its otherness. The series of multidisciplinary articles in this special volume address these aspects of the city and Otherness to form a body of research which examines the nature of identity construction in relation to the Otherness of the city. By approaching the Other in the city, they also consider the city as Other. Topics explored include: urban otherness in literature, food culture and otherness in the city, the postmodern city, ethnicity, urban minorities and spatial identity, and animal otherness in an urban context. Spanning representations of the city in and of Asia, North and South America, and Europe, the articles in this issue present research which is positioned at the intersections of Gothic Studies, theories of postcolonialism and transnationalism, food studies, ethnic studies, media studies, and genre literature. What they share in common is a preoccupation with the imagined city, and with the magic of the urban: the potential of the cityspace to reflect and contain the multiplicity of identity in all of its fluidity and ambiguity.

Chris Jenks refers to the city as "a magical place". However, "the magic is not evenly distributed" (2004). The intense flux that the city presents renders it impossible. It exists in a state of ontological non-conformity. As such it has been

an ideal context and subtext for literary and artistic modes such as the Gothic, Science-fiction, and postmodernism. This is addressed in articles in this issue by Carys Crossen and Inger Dalsgaard. In her examination of Lauren Beukes' novel *Broken Monsters*, Crossen argues that the author imbues her fictional city (Detroit) with the Gothic in order to reflect the upheavals of Detroit's past, but also the ambiguity of its' uncertain present. As the opposite of the romantic idyll of community, the American city, she argues is a space of corruption and stifled identity, haunted by the Old World values that modern America seeks to escape.

For Dalsgaard, the city of New York, as drawn in Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, is less this den of crime and decay than a site for potential escape for the subject. It is a refuge: a sanctuary for those who inhabit it. Dalsgaard asserts that the city in the novel is a site of the subjunctive; of potentiality and possibility. Furthermore, by presenting various alternative or "Other" New Yorks in the novel, Pynchon uses the postmodern to explore the fissures between imaginative fiction and the factual world as these are experienced in the urban setting.

These opposing conceptualisations of the American city in literature revive Jeremy Tambling's idea that the urban is ultimately "amorphous". In literature, metropolitan settings frequently pose a challenge to definitive representation, reminding us that the city has no history. In conflict with efforts to generate an imagined community and by resisting national consensus, the city is, according to Tambling, economically and culturally global. This quality of the city de-centres the urban space even further (see Gottdiener & Budd) and the potential of the urban experience, enhanced through the technology and infrastructure afforded by globalisation, increases almost to the point of singularity. This has led many artists, thinkers, and writers in their quest to represent the city as a coherent space, to engage with the Otherness of individual cities in order to bridge links between the material city and local or specific

cultures and traditions. Shelby Ward, in her article on Anthony Bourdain's "Cosmopolitan Table" examines how the city becomes an "ethni(C)ity" and how it is mapped through street food culture and the representation of these in the media. Examining food-television personality Anthony Bourdain and his CNN show *Parts Unknown*, Ward discusses the intersectional mapping practices of food culture and television in a number of Asian cities. She considers how Bourdain performs the role of cosmopolitan moving within and consuming cities of the imagined Other while also examining how food television effects the viewer's ability to view the city without being viewed themselves in what could be considered the ideal consumption of the urban.

Staying with the Asian city, Shana Sanusi situates representations of Asian urban cultures within the discourses of colonialism and modernity. By offering a reading of the Pang Brothers' 2002 film *The Eye (Gin Gwai)*, Sanusi elaborates on the spatial uncanniness that affects Hong Kong in her analysis of how culturally specific constructions of the city's urbanity are revealed in the film. This leads us back to the supernaturalism and the haunted quality of the city which is further explored in essays by Michael Moreno, Courtney Lynn Whited, and Helena Esser, who explore minority identities and the urban Other in relation to the ghostly, the miraculous, and the retrofuturistic. In Moreno's article on Chicano fiction set in Los Angeles, we are offered an insightful commentary on the manner in which the systemic displacement of minorities in an urban setting has cultivated new sites of discourse in the city, which in turn shape the broader identity of the cityspace. As such, the city can be a site of empowerment but often at the expense of homogenous notions of home and ethnic identity.

Whited posits a similar discussion in her article on the Native American experience of the urban environment as depicted in the fiction and non-fiction writing of Susan Power. In Power's writing, she argues, the urban and the rural (reservations or tribal lands), are never entirely separated from one another,

reminding us that “cities often span traditional Indigenous homelands, which, in their natural features, may have spiritual and historical significance” (Smith 2009, 151). Identity in the city is formed through a recognition of the multiple layers of histories and stories that both situate us in and allow us to transcend geographical space. Understanding this allows us to re-negotiate our mappings of the city and the identities and communities that coexist within it.

Helena Esser’s article on the steampunk cybercity takes a similar approach but to a very different kind of city, and mode of literature. Focusing on the “smog-choked alleys of Victoria’s duskless empire”, Esser reminds us of how steampunk re-creates the British city as retro-speculative playground, disrupting and re-mapping the urban imaginary. For Esser, the city creates, as well as harbours, the “Other”. By re-evaluating identity, alterity, and hybridity through the metaphor of the steampunk city, which Esser argues is presented as a non-human entity (like the computer, it is both human-made but also fundamentally Other), steampunk fiction offers a discourse on the unknowable qualities of the city and its potentials for autonomy of identity.

The non-human in the city and of the city is further examined in Nathaniel Otjen’s article on the fire ants of Hurricane Harvey. With a focus on themes of displacement and belonging, Otjen engages with media representations of Otherness in the city of Houston and how these effect urban concepts of the human. Otjen presents the idea that the city is often a contemporary risk society, built upon “unknown and unintended consequences”. After the devastation of Hurricane Harvey, the physical space of Houston underscored human vulnerability and future uncertainty. The city, in this way, became a site for staging encounters between humans and more-than-human others, allowing for the perpetuation of damaging and inadequate explanations of the role of non-human species in both the imagined and material city space.

Otjen's article, like others in this issue is evidence of a renewed interest in the city as a site of simultaneous order and chaos and of inclusion and exclusion. As a shared space, experienced on both an individual and collective level, the complexity of the city is frequently represented in relation to its unconscious effects on the subject. Tim Keane considers the city as a disorienting locus of deceptive images, commodity fetishes, multifaceted icons and symbols, and hybrid interior-exterior spaces (Keane 2018, 81). It is this language of the city – its signs, symbols, and personal mappings, which holds the nebulous concept of the city together. This brings us back to Barthes who reminds us that there is, in the city, “a conflict between signification and reason”. The city of the imagination is fluid and unstructured, inherently subjective and beyond totalising concepts and processes and yet we all possess a desire to contain the city in uniform, ordered maps and descriptions.

The research presented in this special issue is offered as a critical response to this problem of representing the city of the imagination, where the potential of the subject, and therefore of the city endures. While the city is often obscure, and a site of diverse cultures and geographies, it is a place where the subject and the artist can identify and respond to Otherness. It is the place where the Other can be itself.

Many thanks to our contributors.

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**“Some people have a ghost town, we have a ghost city”:
Gothic, the Other, and the American Nightmare in Lauren
Beukes’s *Broken Monsters***

Carys Crossen

Detroit is the most Gothic of cities. Once the fourth-largest city in the USA and the heart of the American automobile industry, in the second half of the twentieth century it entered an economic and industrial decline it has yet to recover from. Mark Binelli observes that the popular contemporary narrative for Detroit is one that portrays the city as a failure, a place of poverty and lawlessness (Binelli 2003, 3). Detroit is filled with abandoned, crumbling buildings, to the extent that Dora Apel has described the city as “the poster child of ruination.” (Apel 2015, 4). It embodies Gothic tropes such as the spectre of the past, in its ruined factories and memories of the 1967 Detroit Rebellion, which was one of the deadliest and most destructive riots in US history. The Gothic has a lengthy history of confronting, responding to and in some instances processing or even healing from trauma (Veeder 1998, 20-29). However, Detroit’s trauma is ongoing and the city has yet to make any meaningful recovery, at least in terms of popular perception. The Gothic genre habitually expresses and processes not only past trauma but also embodies contemporary fears and anxieties. Lauren Beukes’s novel *Broken Monsters* uses the Gothic city as a backdrop for a story about a serial killer and the cop hunting him. Confronting trauma is one of several central themes in the text, which also features modern art, the risks of the internet, homelessness,

marital and family breakdown, and the supernatural. Beukes's novel emphasises the strange and the weird; the otherness of the city and its inhabitants.

Otherness in a literary context is a nebulous term that signifies opposition to the dominant culture, the self. The other and otherness are of paramount importance to the Gothic genre especially. Robert Miles observes that

In no genre is the other quite so unavoidable as in the Gothic. Indeed, through tales of doubles, hauntings and *Doppelgangers*, one may even say the Gothic raises the other to the status of a narrative principle. (Miles 2002, 84)

Hauntings abound in *Broken Monsters*, as this article will demonstrate. Furthermore, the narrative is a Gothic one according to Miles's definition. The other is intrinsic to the story and the narrative of Beukes's novel, shaping both the characters populating the novel and the depiction of Detroit itself, with the backdrop and settings frequently othered. Arguably, the entire city is othered in the text, a point I will return to later.

A basic definition of the self within the Gothic is that the self is almost always white, masculine, upper-class, wealthy, human, law-abiding and Christian (Protestant). The other is any mode of being that does not adhere to these definitions, which encompasses a vast swathe of potential characters, situations and states of being. Yet despite existing in opposition to the self, the other is inexorably bound up with it. As Tabish Khair observes,

Every definition of the Gothic highlights a version of Otherness, an event, personage or term that is finally a partial or flawed attempt to conceptualise that which is vital to the Self and absolutely not the Self. (Khair 2009, 7)

The self in the crime novel, a category to which *Broken Monsters* also belongs, is the representative of the law and/or justice – the police officer, the lawyer, even the private detective. Their aim is to restore or preserve the social order, which is broadly depicted as good and worth upholding. The social order is preserved by eliminating or at the very least capturing the deviant and rendering them

powerless by holding them accountable for their misdeeds. The law would have no purpose if criminals ceased to exist: and so the self is inextricably bound up with the other in the crime novel.

Detroit is an infamous example of the American Dream gone horribly wrong. The American Dream is based on the premise that anyone can achieve their idea of success through hard work and industry in a society where upwards mobility is possible for all regardless of birth, race or class status. Detroit is a counterpoint to this supposition: the prospect of material success, at least, is remote in such a depressed economy and the city's deep racial divisions are a continuing source of tension (Widdick 1989, 166-185). Detroit is arguably already othered: it bears little resemblance to America's best version of itself.

Although one of Beukes's central characters, Gabi Versado, is a senior police officer, and thus part of the establishment, the majority of her characters in the city are representative of the other. Most disturbing of all is the isolated, mentally-ill killer Clayton Broom, a failed artist. There is also T.K., a homeless man who has done time in prison and has vigilante tendencies. There are also plenty of self-styled outcasts: Gabi's daughter Layla, who spends her spare time luring paedophiles into public confrontations over the internet, and Jonno, a hipster journalist who spends his days writing articles that he contemptuously refers to as "chum to pull in the likes" (Beukes 2014, 57). Detroit's artistic community, which has apparently evolved to replace the heavy industry that disappeared half-a-century ago, also features heavily and the novel casts a sardonic eye over the self-consciously non-conforming artists who have moved into Detroit's abandoned buildings.

Broken Monsters is full of characters who represent the other, and Beukes's depiction of the city is as a Gothic, haunted location that bears little resemblance to the thriving city of the early twentieth century. As the city and its inhabitants are the norm, the average – no matter how eccentric or disturbed, then

arguably their otherness comes into question. It is only through the novels contrasting of their narrative with the bright lights of the American Dream, that their otherness is upheld. Although direct comparisons between Detroit and other American cities are not present in the novel, Detroit is established as the graveyard of the American Dream. “The dream” (Beukes 2014, 111) is a supernatural force which lurks throughout the city, permeating the text. It is unclear whether it possesses Clayton or whether he is merely sensitive to its presence, but it is clearly malign and his attempts to express how it appears to him manifest in the gruesome murders he commits. The term “dream” in the novel is suggestive of something extraordinary, supernatural, but also references the broader American mythology of universally attainable upward social mobility and success. Detroit, however, is an American nightmare, and Clayton’s dream is equally horrendous.

The Dream of Detroit

Broken Monsters is not a conventional murder mystery. Although the Detroit Police Department have no idea who the killer is, the text reveals the murderer to the audience early on. Clayton Broom, a mentally-disturbed artist, starts creating art to express the aforementioned dream, using the bodies of humans and animals. His first murder is that of a young boy, Daveyton, who he cuts in half, adding a pair of deer legs to the torso to transform the child into a faun. He then murders a woman and creates what Gabi describes as “a clay exoskeleton” for her (Beukes 2014, 251). “The shape in the oven is not human. Some kind of insect or sea creature, she thinks... A carapace” (ibid.). Then the lower half of Daveyton’s body is found attached to the torso and front legs of a deer at a modern art exhibition. Significantly, Clayton places the second boy-deer carcass in the “Dream” themed section of the exhibition. Although as Gabi points out that “murders happen every day in Detroit” (336), the sheer strangeness and otherness

of these murders capture the public imagination. Beukes intersperses more conventional narrative chapters with extracts from internet message boards and descriptions of internet videos in which people take ghoulish delight in speculating on the meaning of the mangled bodies and what the next victim may consist of. Murder is a commonplace in Beukes's Detroit, but the dream/Clayton has othered his victims to such a degree that the public views them with horrified fascination and the media grants them much more attention than the majority of murders that occur.

Clayton himself is another example of extreme othering. He is possessed by the dream, which is strongly implied to be a malevolent supernatural force and not solely Clayton's mental illness. He describes the sensation: "I can feel it inside me, like an octopus in my head, getting its tentacles into everything" (84). He quite literally makes the dream flesh (and clay) when he murders his second victim and adds clay tentacles to her body. Whatever the dream consists of, it consumes Clayton. Two-thirds into the story, he ceases to refer to himself by name and simply calls himself "the dream" (111). He (or the narrator) also begins using gender-neutral pronouns and begins referring to "Clayton's body," suggesting that his original identity has been erased completely (341).

Clayton/the dream disrupts the conventional narrative about Detroit. Although the city has a reputation for gang violence and a high murder rate, these statistics are arguably what observers expect from the city (Buccallego 2015, 97). Mark Binelli suggests that

...On a basic level of storytelling, people love tales of Detroit because there's just something inherently pleasing about having one's plot expectations so consistently fulfilled... In fact, such events reinforce existing ideas in a way that's positively reassuring. (Beukes 2014, 5)

Tales of violence and of murder and economic decline, in other words, are precisely what is expected of Detroit. Beukes herself reiterates this point when depicting the cynical journalist Jonno, who observes that "people don't want

novelty – they want the reassurance of familiarity. No-one want to be challenged, no-one wants to have their minds blown” (164). The murders committed by Clayton, however, are decidedly unfamiliar. Clayton does not kill people in territory disputes as a gang member might, or for revenge as TK does (TK’s backstory involves a long stint in prison after he shoots his mother’s boyfriend, after the boyfriend battered her to death). There are overtones of *Frankenstein* (1818) in Clayton’s confused ramblings on his murders, and not simply because he stitches body parts together. When he attaches deer legs to Daveyton’s torso, he waits for his creation to come to life and embody the dream, and is devastated when it does not. Although the police do not grasp the reason behind the mutilations, they nonetheless suspect something occult behind them and begin investigating taxidermists, Wiccans and Satanists. The degree of otherness inherent in the murders, their strangeness, is evident to the investigators, who have no set routines or avenues of enquiry for these mutilations – unlike the more conventional drive-by shootings or domestic violence cases.

“The dream” does not manifest in the novel solely through the murders committed by Clayton. TK, in an encounter with Clayton, senses that there is something deeply wrong with him, far beyond the typical problems with drink, drugs, and abuse he usually encounters in his efforts to assist other homeless people. The dream infects the entire city: “there is evidence of the dreaming everywhere. There is a world that lurks beneath the world that is rich and tangled with meaning” (112). What this world consists of is never fully explained within the narrative, but it is hidden, subterranean and shadowy and only occasionally breaks through the surface to reveal itself. It is tempting to consider the dream as the unconscious expression of the corruption and evil of the city – not least because it is referred to as the dream throughout. However, as Sara Wasson observes:

[t]here are dangers in reading urban Gothic in terms of psychological dualism, of a conscious versus unconscious ‘self’ as discrete entities, since such an approach

misunderstands the degree to which Freudian psychoanalysis presents the unconscious as being incorrigibly fragmented. (Wasson 2014, 136)

The dream exists as an entity in its own right in the narrative, rather than as a reflection of Detroit and its denizens. Although the dream is arguably fragmentary, as evidenced by Clayton's assemblages of human and animal body parts in an effort to express it, it is not the intention of this article to argue that is a manifestation of the city's collective unconscious. That the dream is an entity, quite possibly a conscious one, is clarified in the text's denouement, when the main characters all converge on the same abandoned warehouse.

Although the supernatural elements in the texts are somewhat muted (with the exception of Clayton) up to this point in the novel, the warehouse is the setting in which the dream finally reveals itself to the horrified protagonists. Jonno's girlfriend, Jen Q, is ripped apart from the inside out as the bird tattoos on her skin come to life and the birds claw their way out of her body. Layla stumbles across TK, and witnesses him being attacked by a pack of dogs: "its [the dog's] head distends with the movement, stretching like putty..." (Beukes 2014, 153) All the characters with the exception of Gabi suffer from what might be hallucinations or could very well be the dream warping the fabric of the world. Significantly, they behold their greatest fears: TK revisits the scene of his mother's death, Layla is pursued by a paedophile she encountered earlier in the narrative. The setting becomes entirely other: while an abandoned warehouse is a common space in Detroit, the way in which it is twisted and gives rise to the character's anxieties, marks it as a space that is both Gothic and other. While a criminal, even a murderer, belongs to the conventional narrative of Detroit, the dream is completely alien.

The Gothic aspect of this confrontation between the dream and the main (human) characters is heightened considerably when it becomes apparent that the dream has managed to break down the boundaries that exist between the everyday

world of Detroit and whatever dimension it inhabits. “A black angel steps out into the room with a door embedded in its face... its wings erupt into flame, the halo flares into spikes of light...” (494) The dream escapes into Detroit when Gabi shoots Clayton in the head and unwittingly unleashes the entity that has consumed him. Once the boundaries of Clayton’s body are destroyed, the dream is freed and begins to warp the fabric of the world. But in an interesting twist, it becomes apparent that the dream cannot sustain itself without people to witness it. Jonno, who is filming the entire sequence on his mobile phone, grants the dream power: “everything his lens sees becomes more alive, more real. A window to the world...” (489) While this is a less than subtle commentary on the contemporary obsession with the internet and social media, it also draws parallels with ancient religion. Layla observing that the old gods needed the faith of their followers in order to gain power and Jonno’s self-serving filming of the event offers unlimited potential for the dream, allowing it to gain endless disciples. Whereas old religions were constrained by such things as geography, birth, and law, the internet has broken down these borders and allowed videos – and potentially the dream – to reach the entire world. It isn’t until Layla smashes his phone and deletes the imagery that the dream is finally extinguished and the other is temporarily contained.

“If you liked this, click on...”: social media and othering.

A recurring theme throughout the novel is the power of social media and the internet, a theme Beukes has also explored in previous novel *Zoo City* (2010). The power of the internet to transform the identities of the people who use it, to both break through and define boundaries and to copy things, thus doubling them, is explored in detail in *Broken Monsters* and represents another example of how the text others the city. The city and its residents are examined through a computer screen and through the online jargon of message boards and chatrooms, and the

result is Detroit is othered by social media, which exists in an interesting parallel to the dream. The internet exists in a parallel dimension to the physical world, and like the dream it has the potential to warp and mutate the reality its users inhabit. Also like the dream, the internet content e.g. blog posts and memes, requires attention and awareness to gain power over people.

Although the light-hearted side of the internet is mentioned (rainbow toaster cat memes are popular, apparently) the text is far more preoccupied with the ugliness that created online. The novel chronicles and experiments with the potential of the internet to mutate, transform or even obliterate identity in much the same way the dream does to Clayton Broom. One of the novel's darkest Gothic elements is an event in the past of Layla's friend Cas, who was sexually assaulted when unconscious by a group of (male) classmates. Worse, the incident was filmed and posted on the internet.

The threat of sexual violence has been present in the Gothic novel since its inception in the 18th century. Kate Ferguson Ellis notes that the Gothic tradition is that "conjures up, in its undefined representation of heroinely terror, an omnipresent sense of impending rape without ever mentioning the word" (Ellis 1989, 46). In one sequence, Layla plays the video in which Cas is attacked, conjures this Gothic terror, evoking such fear in Layla that she can only listen, and not watch. She cannot bring herself to say the word "rape" when she speaks to Cas about what happened. Nonetheless terror is bound up with desire. Cas confesses that prior to the assault, being desired by boys was an intoxicating sensation: "it's better when the craving is mutual, a feedback loop... she felt worshiped" (Beukes 2014, 371). This desire recurs throughout the novel as other characters – specifically Jonno – try to attract attention via the internet, unleashing the terror of the dream as they do so.

The potential of the internet to warp identity is emphasised by this section of the novel. Cas suffers not only the sexual assault, but the shame and

humiliation meted out by her peers, who far from being sympathetic label her a slut. While normally a fast-talking and confident teenager, Cas's day-to-day identity is eclipsed by the footage, which defines her in the eyes of her classmates, (with the exception of Layla). It is revealed later that her family moved to Detroit to escape the stigma and the denunciation of Cas as a "slut" by her peers. The reach of the internet means that the awful event is inescapable, however. "Social media leaves ghosts," Gabi observes (379). Or, in an echo of Clayton's description of the dream, it is like an octopus, getting its tentacles into every aspect of people's lives. Social media, as Joseph Crawford argues, has parallels with the Gothic in the 18th century, which was one of the first mass-market forms of entertainment (Crawford 2015, 36). In *Broken Monsters*, the internet casts a baleful influence upon its users and very nearly unleashes the dream upon an unsuspecting world, as the Gothic was once accused of doing in the 18th century.

The Gothic potential of technology – which presumably includes the internet and social media – is also remarked upon by Justin D. Edwards, who argues that

The subject is imitated, duplicated and eradicated by the power of technology. The mechanization of nature and the uncanny nature of doubling reduce individuality through a reliance on surface, the erasure of depth. (Edwards 2015, 11)

The internet in *Broken Monsters* is used in all these capacities: it can imitate, duplicate, and eradicate identity. Most importantly from the point of view of this article, it offers a distorted view of the city and the vicious killings taking place within it. The incident at the art show – where Daveyton's dismembered legs and the deer's head and torso are displayed – is filmed and goes viral. A *Reddit* message board dedicated to discussing the killings and possible suspects sprouts numerous branches and areas of discussion ranging from other serial killers to the Disney villain Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* (1991). And chillingly, towards the conclusion, Jonno has set up a webpage dedicated to fundraising for the

documentary is planning about the incident, describing himself as the disciple of the higher power he witnessed (Beukes 2014, 508).

Social media within the text carries tremendous subversive potential as it is impossible to control and can be used to undermine the official narrative of the city, as embodied in the statements given by police and the articles written by print journalists for newspapers and official websites. In a blackly humorous scene, police are trying to detain people at the art show following the discovery of the corpse, and people begin looking up their legal rights on their smartphones. More seriously, much of the internet featured prominently in the text is, to borrow Gothic terms, shadowy and liminal. Some of the content, such as the video of Cas being sexually assaulted, cannot be found on mainstream websites such as *YouTube* as these websites have rules against violent, sexual or otherwise dubious content. It can only be found on sites with no such restrictions that like the city of Detroit, have a reputation for crime and lawlessness. Such spaces offer a distorted reflection of the physical world, where evil lurks in abandoned, dark places and memory can never be wholly erased – not even if the places containing it are destroyed.

Urban Gothic Geographies

Broken Monsters takes place, for the most part, in the Gothic spaces of Detroit. Derelict warehouses, homeless shelters, spooky forests and basements all serve as settings for the events that take place during the cold dark month of November.ⁱ However, as noted in the introduction, in some respects these liminal spaces are normal for Detroit, which has been in economic decline since the mid-twentieth century, giving people in general plenty of time to adjust their perceptions of the city. The novel others these spaces through the medium of the supernatural entity the dream. However, it also accomplishes this through the urban geography of the city itself and the demographics of its population.

In an analysis of the urban Gothic and the works of George Lippard, Chad Luck argues that in Lippard's texts "the social space of the city... enacts the same disjunction between surface appearance and hidden truth as do the novel's interlocking crime narratives" (Luck 2014, 129). Surface appearances are not to be trusted in *Broken Monsters*, simply because these can be altered so easily. As Edwards argues in his examination of the internet in relation to the Gothic, the internet can erase identity through its focus on the surface, and the social spaces of Detroit serve as camouflage for the underworld in which the more gruesome events of the novel takes place. One of the most notable examples of this is the avant-garde art show at which Clayton Broom leaves one of his stitched-together creations. A series of deserted houses are each given a theme and filled with artworks in a surreal show including projections, paintings and sculpture. In this scene the art does not appear in a conventional space that has been designated for the purpose of displaying it, as in a traditional art gallery. The abandoned houses are appropriated and given an 'other' purpose, turning from family homes to areas of self-expression. This sequence is reminiscent of Mighall's examination of a city's Gothic:

For Gothic *of* a city rather than just in a city, that city needs a concentration of memories and historical associations. Ideally these would be expressed in an extant architectural or topographical heritage, as these areas provide the natural home for ghostly presences of imagined/projected meanings. (Mighall 2007, 55)

The imagined and projected meanings are quite literal in the art show, but Mighall's analysis hints at a deeper resonance, memories that linger in the buildings and layout of a city. That Detroit feels haunted by its past is made explicit within the text: one character references Zug Island, an artificial, heavily industrialised construction at the southern city limits. It is rumoured to produce "subsonics" (this presumably means infrasonics, noise produced at a vibration below the range audible to the human ear) which creates an uneasy ambience (Beukes 2014, 282). That the city of Detroit is haunted, or feels as though it is

haunted, is made explicit by the text. "Maybe that's why the whole city feels haunted," says Layla in response to being told about Zug Island (ibid.). Although by no means the only heavily industrialised city in the USA, the extent to which Detroit is identified with (haunted by) its manufacturing history is worth noting. The hauntings Layla refers to in this context are common in Gothic fiction, but Detroit is not haunted by the ghosts of American historical traumas, such as the Civil War (although racial tensions are still very much present). The specifically industrialised haunting is unique to Detroit and expresses the Gothic of the city, as defined by Mighall.

Mighall also refers to a "concentration of memories" as necessary for expressing the Gothic unique to a particular city. A developing area of sociology is researching into social haunting. According to Avery Gordon, a social haunting "registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present" (Gordon 2011, 2). Rather than registering in physical terms, e.g. deteriorating infrastructure or a declining economy, a social haunting is a trauma that registers emotionally and is passed on from generation to generation. It is an atmosphere that pervades a community, and it appears in *Broken Monsters* in microcosm. TK, who faces a legacy of domestic violence and incarceration, is perhaps the most obvious example. Although his tragedy is specific to himself, TK is African American and from a low income background, as well as being a native of the inner city, all demographics that suffered disproportionately from the decline of heavy industry in American cities (including, of course, Detroit) (Wilson 2017, 323). The gutting of the motor industry and the flight of whites and wealthier African Americans to the suburbs entrenched the poor even deeper into the inner city and made it even more difficult for them to escape the cycle of poverty being passed on from one generation to the next. This is reflected in TK's homelessness and his difficulty in securing steady employment. In this respect, TK is far from unusual: African American males are disproportionately

represented in the US prison system. As of 2006 46% of the male prison population were African American, despite their making up just 12% of the overall population (Mauer 2001, 200). These depressing statistics hint at all manner of historical traumas and hauntings that have been passed down from generation to generation. Although Detroit was sufficiently far north that it was not impacted by the battles of the American Civil War, the legacy of slavery and the Jim Crow era are apparent. More recently, the Civil Rights movement and the infamous Detroit Riot of 1967, which is still within living memory, left lasting scars upon the city's population. Although Beukes does not refer explicitly to these historical events within the text, the racial tensions of the city are a recurring theme. TK as an individual is not othered by his past: in many respects it means he is unexceptional, disheartening though that is. But if a wider view is taken, then TK's story is a microcosm of how Detroit is haunted by numerous aspects of its past, traumas that in true Gothic fashion, continually resurface to confront its current population.

Detroit's population itself is arguably another method through which the city is othered, and not simply in the case of truly warped characters such as Clayton Broom. Sociologist Richard Sennett has commented that the inhabitants of cities are always in the presence of otherness (Sennett 1992, 123). Nicholas R. Fyfe and Judith T. Kenny elaborate on this, commenting that "consciously or unconsciously, an individual's experience of the city is influenced by categories of difference, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability and age" (Fyfe & Kenny 2005, 213). Although city neighbourhoods may be segregated according to race or social class and income, living in the city ensures that its inhabitants are continually confronted with people who differ from themselves in some respect. Nor is this confrontation a static, us-versus-them opposition. The city, constantly in flux, offers a myriad of possibilities in relation to identity – people are always coming to the city from somewhere else, or leaving the city

behind, or in the case of the homeless endlessly wandering its streets. This instability is increased by the continual reinvention of identity. In the vastness of Detroit, it has become very easy to invent a new self, something Layla and Cas do several times over the course of the narrative. They adopt different personas online to lure in a paedophile, Cas moves to Detroit to escape her history (unsuccessfully), and Layla plays the dutiful daughter for her mother (until Gabi finds out what she’s been doing in her spare time). But arguably all characters adopt different personas depending on the situation they find themselves in: Gabi is alternately hard-nosed cop and loving parent, Jonno is a quirky, inventive journalist online and a self-serving opportunist elsewhere in life. Identity is something that can be played with, altered or erased completely in *Broken Monsters*, and together with the dream, the internet, and the geography of the city, it all serves to render the city of Detroit as an othered space.

Conclusion

Catherine Spooner has argued that in the 21st century, Gothic has become more mainstream than ever.ⁱⁱ However, the setting for *Broken Monsters* remains othered throughout the novel. The atmosphere of the city in *Broken Monsters* is imbued with the Gothic, reflecting the upheavals not only of Detroit’s past, but its’ uncertain present. Although Detroit has undertaken various initiatives to revitalise itself in the 21st century, in the popular imagination it is still very much an example of the American Dream gone wrong (Binelli 2013, 16). Beukes does not challenge this perception to any great degree, using the city’s economic decline and abandoned neighbourhoods as backdrop for her supernatural crime story. This Gothic depiction of the city as a ruinous, haunted place of violence and despair would in most instances serve to other the urban area in which the story is set: it is completely alien, completely other, when set against the American dream of social mobility and infinite prosperity. However, Detroit’s Gothic reputation is so

strong that the breakdown of the American Dream has become its new normal, its new self. Charles L. Crowe suggests that

For many Americans still, the city remains the opposite of the Jeffersonian dream of a society of farms and villages – a place, rather, of corruption, crime and disease, the legacy of the Old World that immigrants to America were trying to escape. (Crowe 2009, 166)

Detroit is an excellent example of this. *Broken Monsters* portrays all the negative aspects of the city, most particularly crime. However, with such corruption and delinquency being an intrinsic aspect of the city within the narrative, otherness must come from elsewhere. The text uses numerous different methods to other the urban landscape of Detroit. Foremost among these is the supernatural entity the dream, which is inhuman and emanates from somewhere beyond or beneath the everyday surface of the city. The internet too acts like a broken mirror, presenting people with a distorted image of themselves and the world they inhabit. And thirdly, there is the city itself, permeated by traumatic memory that continues to resonate in the lives of all its residents. Although the disturbing return of the past is a conventional Gothic trope, different methods of preserving memory are emerging. Internet search histories, videos filmed on camera phones, police records and telephone transcripts are all incorporated into the narrative of *Broken Monsters*, ensuring that the past can never be fully erased. As Layla muses at the book's conclusion, "you have to find a way to live with it" (Beukes 2014, 517).

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ⁱ Beukes specifies the date at the start of each section of the book.

ⁱⁱ Catherine Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of the Happy Gothic* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1-17. Spooner's analysis focuses predominantly on the UK, but many of the world events she refers to took place on American soil, and many of the popular culture texts she references were American-made and set in the USA.

Sanctuary City

Pynchon's Subjunctive New York in *Bleeding Edge*

Inger H. Dalsgaard

When Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* was published in 1997, Brian McHale remarked on how his use of the subjunctive was highlighted (McHale 2000, 43). As a localized narrative strategy, it had been present in earlier works, but in late Pynchon elegiac musing on the hopes of what America could have become (had developers of the New World not reduced it, piecemeal, into a factual, present reality) moved to the forefront. Eventually, the potential of a subjunctive, American history makes way for what Pynchon describes variously as the "mortal world", the "ordered swirl" of urban planning which provide the houses we live in and the "indexed world" built for us to inhabit online. In *Mason & Dixon*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) the Old World clung to hope of a fresh start in the West, while also colonizing, infecting and reducing the possibilities represented by the New World. In Pynchon's three California novels - *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990), *Inherent Vice* (2009) - this westward exploration of available borderlands is further replicated within the USA. It seems to drive characters' hopes of "shelter", "harbor" or "refuge" into the pacific though John Miller has argued the closing of the frontier in Pynchon is still subjunctive and endings are ambiguous, insofar as California remains a "contested landscape" with "ongoing and unresolved" historical struggles (Miller 2013, 227).

This paper looks at subjunctive reading strategies in Pynchon's most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge* (2013) in which he plays with the subjunctive space and time of New York around 9/11 in 2001. I give examples of how Pynchon engages with urban development in the real city of New York by letting characters recollect and project the fate of specific parts of the city. In doing so, his narration plays with the subjunctive mood - in a broadly narratological rather than narrowly linguistic sense - and conjures up an 'Other' New York among several possible cities. In the cross section between narrative technique and urban history, Pynchon suspends ideas of what that city might have been – in the future - in the gaps between the realities that characters from 2001 and readers from 2013 onward inhabit respectively. Their existence in the space and time between the narrative point of view and the act of reading have epistemological and ontological implications. Urban space, when combined with subjunctive time in a narration, accommodates "superpositional" states, where two or more contradictory outcomes can co-exist.

Linguistically, the subjunctive has been described as a non-factive or "subjective epistemic modality", often associated with the future tense, expressing ideas of potentiality, intention, desire, "inference, supposition and prediction" (Lyons 1977, 848, 817). Pynchon critics who have sought to describe his epistemologically and temporally complex narrative strategies have more frequently looked to the intersection between narratology, science or philosophy than linguistics to explain how his textual experiments challenge our understanding of reality. To explain the complex relationship of his fictions they have worked with concepts such as subjunctive time and space, heterotopia, multiverses, chronotopes, attenuated reality, relativity and quantum mechanics (McHale 2000, Kolbuszewska 2000, Dalsgaard 2008, 2011, De Bourcier 2012, Hume 2013). It seems straightforward that in the "mortal world", history (the progression of time) eventually reveals which subjunctive hopes for the future

make way for indicative reality in the present. In historiographic metafiction like Pynchon's, however, a text can be like the thought experiment in which "Schrödinger's cat" inhabited two "superpositional states": as long as the box in which its fate was decided remains closed to us the cat is simultaneously dead and not dead. The two superpositional states collapse into one or the other only once we observe the cat inside the box. Likewise, a text can be argued to hold multiple possibilities until we open it (observe, read, interpret) in which case the same collapse of superpositions or subjunctive hopes would apply as we see in science and history. What this paper explores, however, are instances where Pynchon's latest novel keeps superpositional possibilities available. Adding a linguistic concept like the subjunctive to time-space readings also restores the imaginative and moral power of language to this balancing act between multiplicity and potentiality. Intratextually, these ideas of superpositioned realities may not have ontological or moral equivalence – as I shall show, Pynchon's portrayal of the precarious existence of urban subjects in a capitalist world, where they risk dispossession, displacement, or even erasure, has become increasingly personal – but our act of reading takes place in a different episteme from the one projected into the future in the book. While we may have our own, subjective preferences, the passing of time adds an indicative aspect to our interpretation of now-past events.

This paper works with three time-space relations which have subjunctive implications for our understanding of a New York which exists within but also reaches outside of the novel in different ways. One is explored in the threat posed by urban development to failing sanctuaries inside the narrative and outside in history – exemplified in the shared fates of the Isle of Meadows and Times Square. Another is the future promise of alternate cities with different social networks – exemplified in Zigotisopolis and DeepArcher, a Deep Web program into which versions of New York and its inhabitants are coded. A third concerns

the temporal superpositions between the 2001 setting, the 2013 publication date and the “now” of reading – and how readers and characters respond to the gap between subjunctive projections and an indicative end point. Anticipating these subjunctive projections of New York is Pynchon’s description in his previous novels of the modal nature of real estate development, urbanization and, ultimately, colonization as we move into twenty-first century in which *Bleeding Edge* is set and read, so I begin by outlining his concern with the urban dispossessed.

Urban planning and dispossession in Pynchon

The future tense can be infused with expressions of “desire and intention” and with elements of prediction; the “so-called subjunctive of likelihood” or possibility (Lyons 1977, 818, 817). As such and because the human creative mind can conjure many possible future cities with varying degrees of likelihood and desirability, the future is open to superpositionality. The future tense can also include a deontic modality, so that statements indicate an ethical imperative as to what ought or ought not to happen in the future. Urban planning decisions require only one of the future cities be physically realized and the choice may have more to do with real estate logic than ethics. This would certainly be clear from Pynchon’s writing where what ought not to have happened to cities in the past, and to the people in them, is a recurring theme. Most Pynchon texts have very consistently looked back and pointed to the encroachment by real estate development on the American landscape and mindscape. Over the years, Pynchon has become increasingly clear about how dispossessed groups suffer at the hands of real estate developers who seek to fulfil visions of a new and better world or a cleaner, safer city – visions which exclude members of those groups either by reducing them to being health and safety hazards (which should be removed) or to nothing at all (and thus easily “disappeared” from one day to the next). In

Inherent Vice (2009) a character named Tariq comes out of a stint in jail to find his neighbourhood simply vanished and replaced overnight, and expression of the “[l]ong, sad history of L.A. land use . . . Mexican families bounced out of Chavez Ravine to build Dodger Stadium, American Indians swept out of Bunker Hill for the Music Center, Tariq’s neighborhood bulldozed aside for Channel View Estates” (Pynchon 2009, 17). *Inherent Vice* presents the idea that black neighbourhoods are wiped out as part of drives to improve the city (and earnings) so that gangs and their turfs can be replaced by “houses for peckerwood prices, shopping mall, some shit” or out of fear or anger directed at non-white Americans, which is Tariq’s own interpretation “more white man’s revenge” (Pynchon 2009, 17) for the recent race riots in nearby Watts. Pynchon has frequently populated his novels with the ghostly presence, the otherness of those who have been passed over, erased, rendered past tense subjunctive, that is, but remain in the interstices of dominant, indicative narratives as embodiments of unrealized possibilities.

Though set in L.A., *Inherent Vice* does not just reflect negatively on urban planning *per se* but on the idea of colonization in a wider sense – a “persistent leitmotif in Pynchon’s California trilogy” (Berressem 2014, 41). In *Bleeding Edge* Pynchon expands on the fate, similar to Tariq’s, which befell actual Puerto Rican neighbours of two fictional main characters, Maxine Tarnow and March Kelleher, who “discovered they'd been living only blocks from each other all this time, March since the late fifties when the Puerto Rican gangs were terrorizing the Anglos in the neighborhood, and you didn't go east of Broadway after sunset.” Nonetheless, March hates the Lincoln Center, “for which an entire neighborhood was destroyed and 7,000 *boricua* families uprooted, just because Anglos who didn't really give a shit about High Culture were afraid of these people's children” (Pynchon 2013, 55). Such descriptions, from Pynchon’s recent novels, are strikingly different to those in *The Crying of Lot 49* from 1966 where the “ordered

swirl of houses and streets” in suburbia and the “pro-longed scatter of wide, pink buildings, surrounded by miles of fence topped with barbed wire” (Pynchon 1966, 24, 25) along the highway into L.A. reads almost as if progress through real estate development is a victimless crime. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, European infrastructure and cities lie in ruins, acted upon by invisible forces behind World War II, and produce countless, fugitive “DPs” – Displaced Persons – who roam through the altered landscape. Some are anonymous homeless European refugees, others are African colonial subjects; “Hereros”, who struggle with whether to accept or fight the German annihilation order applied to their ancestors. Bringing these to the fore means they regain their historical fate and an identity to which readers can relate at more than a conceptual level. Pynchon’s Zone-Hereros are fictional but the historical plight of Hereros becomes real.

As Pynchon’s works have progressed, he has given more up-front space to the return of the dispossessed raising awareness also of the price paid in vibrancy to achieve urban singularities. In 2013, the critique of a general concept of colonization is still negotiated through changes to the cityscape but is not so disembodied – it becomes grounded in specific historical events in e.g. New York’s past. In the act of describing the sterilization and “Disneyfication” of Times Square, Maxine repopulates it with memories of the now-missing “dope dealers . . . pimps . . . three-card monte artists . . . kids playing hooky” (Pynchon 2013, 51) whose presence she did not appreciate in the past but whose absence she mourns as a loss of subjunctive possibility and diversity. Memories of a more colourful community in *Bleeding Edge* can be full of regret but also energy. An example of future-oriented engagement is found in March Kelleher’s feisty activism among “neighborhood gadflies, old lefties, tenants’ rights organizers” (Pynchon 2013, 54). Colonization and assimilation are also concepts cast forward as risks encroaching on new communities with a deadening effect. The digital community emerging in *DeepArcher* is as vulnerable to commercial colonization

as it is a new harbor to the vibrancy – nefarious and life-reaffirming alike – of its inhabitants.

Urban development and failing sanctuaries

In *Bleeding Edge*, March and Maxine both engage with the fate of dispossessed New Yorkers, but one seems to act where the other reacts. Where March fights for a different future, Maxine often seems resigned to what will come. On the one hand, March pursues oppressors with righteous anger and a set course. She is literally ready to throw lye in the face of landlords who were “reverting to type and using Gestapo techniques to get sitting tenants to move” (Pynchon 2013, 54). On the other hand, Maxine Tarnow reacts with empathy, melancholy and restraint. She is moved by people, buildings and facts which her wide-ranging fraud investigation uncovers but she herself is also geographically moved around by what happens to her. She often goes along with the flow, emotionally and literally, and though a sense of indignation does emerge in passages where Maxine observes injustice it can be unclear whether it can be attributed to her or the narrator.

One such example comes on an unplanned boat trip, which Maxine happens to join one night, and where we are presented with an Other, abjected New York which is often passed over. March’s ex, Sid, takes them from Tubby Hook Marina on Manhattan to “the intersection of Fresh and Arthur Kills, toxicity central, the dark focus of Big Apple waste disposal, everything the city has rejected so it can keep on pretending to be itself” (Pynchon 2013, 166). Fresh Kills on Staten Island is a landfill site, a dumping ground for garbage, first opened in 1948 and changing the topography around it as it grew over the next half-century, and as such also a field Pynchon mines for waste metaphors and realities resulting from the irresponsible urban development and teeming human life of New York City. Within the boundaries of the vast landfill at Fresh Kills lies the

Isle of Meadows, a bird sanctuary which seems like a divine exemption from the sins of urban development. The landfill itself was officially closed in the first quarter of 2001 and the invisible machinery she hears from the dump is the sound of it being graded, capped and turned into a park thanks to “Giuliani, the tree-hugger”(Pynchon 2013, 166). Rudy Giuliani’s move to close the landfill was more likely a reward to Staten Island for delivering his victory in the latest mayoral race. When Maxine hears “moving around somewhere close, heavy machinery, much too deep into these early-morning hours”, it is also a foreshadowing of the imminent reopening of Fresh Kills after 9/11 as a staging ground for sorting through the debris of the World Trade center for evidence and human remains.

Present day readers with no particular knowledge of New York history a generation ago, nor the specific history of which Fresh Kills is about to be part at this point in the narration, may be as unaware of the indicative future of the site as are the 2001 characters. Nonetheless, to characters and readers alike, the connotations of topographical names – ominous (“Fresh Kills”) and idyllic (“Island of Meadows”) – support the subjunctive gap between what Sid and Maxine know at this point and what we and the narrator might or ought to know about what would happen soon after. The Isle of Meadows – “100 acres of untouched marshland, directly underneath the North Atlantic flyway, sequestered by law from development and dumping, marsh birds sleeping in safety” - is a rare refuge in the middle of all this refuse, but the narration quickly turns negative, because

given the real-estate imperatives running this town, it is really, if you want to know, fucking depressing, because how long can it last? How long can any of these innocent critters depend on finding safety around here? It's exactly the sort of patch that makes a developer's heart sing—typically, ‘This Land Is My Land, This Land Also Is My Land.’ (Pynchon 2013, 166)

In subjunctive terms, this statement rests between the deontic and the predictive: an event which ought not to happen but which probably will. By 2013, the actual Isle of Meadows itself has not been developed, so was this postdated burst of aggressive negativity about its future misplaced? That depends on whether you agree that the as-of-yet not quite realized ideas for developing the capped landfill site surrounding the nature reserve, has indeed turned them into what Sid dismissively foresees will be “another family-friendly yup resource” (Pynchon 2013, 166).

While the impending doom of 9/11 hangs over the New York in this novel, the slow moving disastrous effects of yuppification on the original, culturally diverse fabric of the city, is clear to characters in the novel. Lest readers think March is the optimist to Maxine’s pessimist throughout the novel, tables are turned when they lunch at the Piraeus Diner, a traditional place Maxine labels “eternal.” Between “the scumbag landlords and the scumbag developers,” March retorts, “nothing in this city will ever stand at the same address for even five years, name me a building you love, someday soon it’ll either be a stack of high-end chain stores or condos for yups with more money than brains.” As with the bird sanctuary, the Piraeus is living on borrowed time, March asserts. “Any open space you think will breathe and survive in perpetuity? Sorry, but you can kiss its ass good-bye” (Pynchon 2013, 115).¹ Rudy Giuliani is emphasized as the insidious urban developer, the sanitizer of New York, who supports the “ordered swirl of houses” ethos and the planned waste these produce over the creative chaos which preceded them. When Maxine visits the new Times Square, its

¹ It would be interesting to find out if the fate of any real Piraeus Diner on Columbus Avenue was indeed to be replaced by a Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts. A New York University digital humanities project, NYWalker, conceived as a literary map based on distributed data collection and visualization for literary analysis (Williamson 2017, 7) fittingly leads to a dead link: nywalker.newyorkscapes.org/books/bleeding-edge-2013

mainstreaming by the urban planning of “Giuliani and his developer friends and the forces of suburban righteousness” make her feel

nauseous at the possibility of some stupefied consensus about what life is to be, taking over this whole city without mercy, a tightening Noose of Horror, multiplexes and malls and big-box stores it only makes sense to shop at if you have a car and a driveway and a garage next to a house out in the burbs. (Pynchon 2013, 51-52)

Pristine sanctuaries or lacunae of dis-order in *Bleeding Edge* both appear vestigial refuges from the commercial consensus of the “indexed world” (Pynchon 2013, 476). Inhabitants roaming the urban or dark-web underground find it increasingly hard to escape the forces of order, planning and uniformity. The question is whether there are hopeful ways to continue an open life – a present tense subjunctive of sorts - without being reduced to a dispossessed, ghostly existence in the interstices between the superpositional futures which once seemed possible but which have now been overwritten by the indexable, indicative present as a singular past.

Negotiating alternate future city spaces

Maxine’s two early-adolescent boys, Ziggy and Otis, grow up in New York, but they also encounter and create digital versions of New York which affect their perception of a “real” or stable city. Before the World Trade Center towers fell in 2001, destabilizing adult ideas of what New York stands for, the two children had already found themselves rattled by one possible future New York shown to them by a couple of “suburban normals” (Pynchon 2013, 291) they meet while playing an ancient arcade game, Time Crisis 2, in Iowa. Another game reveals to them

a postapocalyptic New York half underwater here, suffocating in mist, underlit, familiar landmarks picturesquely distressed. The Statue of Liberty wearing a crown of seaweed. The World Trade Center leaning at a dangerous angle. The lights of Times Square gone dark in great irregular patches, perhaps from recent urban warfare in the neighborhood. (Pynchon 2013, 292)

Their reaction is to prepare in the “realworld” for such an eventuality in ways which seem practical to children, asking for a lifeboat to be moored in their flat as “a necessary for Big Apple disasters to come, including but not limited to global warming” (Pynchon 2013, 293).

Maxine’s boys have previously used gaming as negotiation of realworld problems though playing out alternate scenarios. A first-person shooter, developed as a “Valentine to the Big Apple” (Pynchon 2013, 34) by IT developer friends of Maxine, allows players to clear New York streets of social nuisances, yups mainly, from “the inexhaustible galleries of New York annoyance, zapping loudmouths on cellular phones, morally self-elevated bicycle riders, moms wheeling twins old enough to walk lounging in twin strollers” (Pynchon 2013, 34). These friends have also developed DeepArcher, a “product” described as “journey” more than a “place” on the Deep Web (Pynchon 2013, 37). After 9/11 Maxine’s children use DeepArcher to write their own digital New York: the “personal city of Zigotisopolis rendered in a benevolently lighted palette taken from old-school color processes like the ones you find on picture postcards of another day”(Pynchon 2013, 428) which creates a virtual New York exempt from urban developments of the recent past. In their version of NYC Times Square and other landmarks return to an almost prelapsarian past “before the hookers, before the drugs”(Pynchon 2013, 428) whereas “the cityscapes of Maxine's DeepArcher are obscurely broken, places of indifference and abuse and unremoved dog shit, and she doesn't want to track any more of that than she can help into their more merciful city [...] this not-yet-corrupted screenscape” in which they, unlike her, seem “unconcerned for their safety, salvation, destiny ...” (Pynchon 2013, 428-29). Maxine it should be noted, is less black and white in her own negotiations with and attraction to the seedier, decaying side of the real New York. Though she avoided the pre-sanitized Times Square, in 2001 she misses the lack of “consensus about what life is to be” (Pynchon 2013, 52) which it represented. On

the other hand, Zigotisopolis represents a “nostalgia for the future”: a past futurism insofar as their point of departure is in a back-dated New York which speaks to their mother’s regrets about what urban development erased, rather than being based on a New York they have known themselves.

To Maxine, the innocence and trusting nature of children like Ziggy and Otis, who are “ready to step out into their peaceable city, still safe”(Pynchon 2013, 476) is also nostalgia for a future she believes will never come to pass, because market forces, “spiders and bots” inevitably invade and colonize even DeepArcher “in the name of the indexed world” (Pynchon 2013, 476). Once the creators of DeepArcher opened its source code to users, capitalist forces created a back door into it and, Maxine laments, “there goes the neighborhood” (Pynchon 2013, 355). But are all the “faceless and uncredited”(Pynchon 2013, 355) code writers really just “claim jumpers”(Pynchon 2013, 240) for the indexed world or could they also represent a deserving part of the dispossessed, the amateurs DeepArcher was opened up to give a space? Maxine finds that now, as with Times Square, the “Core is teeming with smartasses, yups, tourists” but also with “twits writing code for whatever they think they want and installing it, till some other headcase finds it and deinstalls it” (Pynchon 2013, 403). Open source democratizes and subjunctivizes the space. It opens up for numerous superpositions, including, necessarily, the one in which it will eventually be sanitized and suburbanized, controlled and indexed. However, this openness to claim-jumping and colonization is also what allows Ziggy and Otis in to create their own version of New York. Ultimately, though DeepArcher’s status as a sanctuary hidden in the Deep Web is compromised, it also comes to host “refugees from the event at the Trade Center” whose status as alive or dead is uncertain “though its creators claim not to Do Metaphysical” (Pynchon 2013, 427). Deceased people are resurrected as avatars with whom communication in the afterlife can happen. They start Weblogs, write code and add these to the

program files (Pynchon 2013, 358). Even past events are edited in ways which flow over into “meatspace” as indicative facts.

One prominent example is when one of the villains of the novel, Nicholas Windust, has good deeds inserted into the dossier of his dark past after his death. This goes counter to the direction of the flow of time, in which we trust outside of sci-fi and experimental fiction. It threatens ontological breakdown like the one Maxine experiences when worlds with different rules for mood and tense leach into each other. We accept that Maxine lives in a world where characters can be rewritten as subjunctive but, unaware of the fictionality of her own ontology, she cannot easily accommodate another. On the other hand, when readers immerse themselves in her world, as part of the reading contract, they have to suspend the rules of their own world and move along empathetically with her experience of a time-space conundrum in which present indicative can still be changed into another superpositional state. It is a kind of time-travel but not as esoteric or science fictional as you might think. It is a property of the Internet when it “has become a medium of communication between the worlds” (Pynchon 2013, 427) across barriers of time. This is not that different to what writing – historically about the past and visionary about the future – has always been doing when we let ourselves be moved and moved along with its flow.

Inside Maxine’s world, she eventually has to cut through the superpositional states and chose one to continue forward in time. The ideal reconstruction of New York City as a past city, Maxine realises, is also as a “city that can never be” (Pynchon 2013, 428), not just because it is an idiosyncratic collage of New Yorks of the past but because a the New York of the past could not - like the Piraeus Diner probably can’t - stay intact, stable or static. It seems a lesson here is that a “static” projection of the past is not an antidote to the uniformity Maxine fears from (sub)urban planning. Both are guilty of denying the diverse and multiverse possibilities or ideas suspended by the subjunctive. She

can hope that when she finally lets her boys go out into the city to take their chances, this will not reduce them. She resisted the idea that the benign nostalgia of their digital refuge inside DeepArcher could also be subject to the same suburban imperative that applies to the realworld. Conversely, when she sees her boys virtually replicate the idyllic scene from Zigotisopolis at the very end of the book as they walk away from her to go down into the New York City streets on their own, she has, reluctantly, to accept their DepArture.

“It's all right, Mom. We're good.”

“I know you are, Zig, that's the trouble.” But she waits in the doorway as they go on down the hall. Neither looks back. She can watch them into the elevator at least. (Pynchon 2013, 477)

Life lived forward is subjunctive – it holds multiple future possibilities as you go forward. Life is only perceivably indicative when you look back. While what New York has actually become since 2001 can be investigated and the value of it opined upon, *Bleeding Edge* itself remains open ended, especially as far as the post-2001 fate of its fictional characters are concerned.

Temporal superpositions: a New York that never will have been

By writing historiographic (meta)fiction, Pynchon is prophesying accurately about the future - but with 20/20 hindsight. Anyone can comfortably do this from the vantage point afforded by predictions made about the past events such as 9/11 in *Bleeding Edge*. Characters, for example, have no particular expectations for the 11th of September - their future is open - but from our vantage point in time we readers know that date will become the iconic “9/11” and so we invest the day with portent, finality and closure as they move unwittingly towards it. This gap not just between what they and we know, and how we have this knowledge, but also the way we rewrite the world of those characters from our perspective creates space for a kind of “Nostalgia for the Future”.

John Miller identifies Pynchon's California novels - *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990) and *Inherent Vice* (2009) – as a “kind of contested writing surface, on which alternative versions of the future (and the past) are in the process of being inscribed” (Miller 2013, 226). Pynchon's latest New York novel does the same. Pynchon shows, not just “alternative versions of the future (and the past)” as Miller said, but alternate spaces being overwritten before and after 2001. His 2001 character, Maxine Tarnow, recalls a New York before the erasure perpetrated in the eighties by urban developers like Donald Trump and political figures like mayor Rudy Giuliani specifically – a recollection which can be wistful, elegiac and nostalgic, but ultimately moot, or which, to the next generation unburdened by history, can literally be a re-collection of lost bits and pieces to form an alternate new New York with the potential for overwriting what New York had become by 2001. The ontological crisis emerges because the subjunctive future such re-collections point to would partially exists in our past – the time between the 2001 setting and the 2013 publication or a 2019 reading. This suggests that the reader has the ability or duty to collapse the superpositions, the multiple future New Yorks which seemed possible in 2001, to one indicative reality of what New York actually became.

The subjunctive future does not always have to be reduced to the indicative mood by the reading process: while 9/11 did happen, some futures projected are left open for the time being: though the fate of the Isle of Meadows is given dire predictions in the 2001 narration, when the landfill site surrounding it had caught the attention of urban developers, it may not have been as degraded in 2013 as feared. Because this sanctuary is a real place, in 2019 or later, readers may actually look into the state of that New York City sanctuary and find the 2001 prognosis closer to realized. As recent criticism is starting to recognize the political and environmental Pynchon (O'Bryan 2016), it is possible that the text would encourage such engagements with the outside, real world and even

politicize readers to have an opinion on whether what the NYC Parks plans for the Freshkills Park Project surrounding the wildlife preserve is an improvement or not.²

Other subjunctives in *Bleeding Edge* may be harder to transport to an indicative mood: Because DeepArcher and Zigotisopolis are fictional by nature, being story worlds in their own right, transcending the chronotope of Pynchon's invention, and because they demonstrate the narrative potential of new digital technologies as source of both social construction of space and spatial construction of the social (Laszczkowski 2016, 14-15), they point to a future outside of the story space of the printed novel. They become genuinely subjunctive because there is no closure we can investigate, neither within the novel in the time passed between the 2001 setting and the 2013 publication, nor in the real world as it has developed up to now. In an act showing the transgressive potential of digital technology which reaches outside of the novel, March Kelleher's weblog "tabloidofthedamned.com", her contribution to politicizing the web, has an internet presence in at least two forms. It is a redirection to the Pynchon Wiki for *Bleeding Edge*, and <http://tabloidofthedamned.blogspot.com/> which allows any claim jumper online to make of it what they want.

To conclude, in Pynchon's text, whatever his intentions with this latest novel may be, the interaction between his characters and readers and between fiction and history, remains somewhat open to interpretation. We cannot help approaching fiction also as another frontier to be indexed; a thought-experiment box to be opened so that the superpositional states of what it may contain collapse. Like real estate developers and colonizers, we cannot resist this instinct the end-result of which could be reduction of diversity though some sort of critical "consensus-building" (McHale 2000, 43). Luckily, the complexities of such

² "The Park Plan", *Freshkills Park - Recycling the land, revealing the future*, The Freshkills Park Alliance, access date, 28 September 2018, <https://freshkillspark.org/the-park/the-park-plan>

intentions, interactions and interpretation cannot be so easily reduced. Where Pynchon texts used to seem so apparently pessimistic and heavily-laden with the indicative determinism of history (Dalsgaard 2001), his Other New Yorks, the Isle of Meadows and Zigotisopolis, keep the subjunctive alive in the interstices between imaginative fiction and the factual world.

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Anthony Bourdain's Cosmopolitan Table

Mapping the ethni(C)ity through street food and television

Shelby E. Ward

I love Tokyo. If I had to eat only in one city for the rest of my life, Tokyo would be it. Most chefs I know would agree with me. For those with restless, curious minds, fascinated by layer upon layer of things, flavors, tastes and customs, which we will never fully be able to understand, Tokyo is deliciously unknowable. I'm sure I could spend the rest of my life there, learn the language, and still die happily ignorant. It's that densely packed, impenetrable layer cake of the strange, wonderful and awful that thrills. It's mesmerizing. Intimidating. Disorienting. Upsetting. Poignant. And yes, beautiful. Like many of our hews, our Tokyo episode is really not about Tokyo, though it takes place there. It tells two, very different stories... (Bourdain 2013).

The Tokyo described above is the city seen through the late chef and television personality, Anthony Bourdain's point of view, in what was his most recent travel/ food show CNN's *Parts Unknown*. This was *his* story of Tokyo. This episode, like most others in the series, can be located and situated within his own questions, curiosities, and interests. This Tokyo episode included, among other things, the connection between sushi and martial arts with former New York chef, Naomichi Yasuda; the "fetishistic desire" of the Japanese porn industry, including, "[p]opular comic books, (manga), toys, films, advertisements and entertainments are loaded with images of bondage (shibari), hyper-sexualized schoolgirls, rape, homoeroticism, violation by demons and tentacles—and more (all

generally referred to as ‘hentai’);” and the over-worked, salary man of the Tokyo business district, including “Karoshi,” or death by overwork (Brigden 2013). It would seem (perhaps, other than the focus of Yasuda) that these elements of the show would only marginally be associated with food. The only apparent feature that they might have in common is that they are in the same geography of food: that is, the city of Tokyo. I would also suggest that in the sequence of Bourdain’s television shows the focus is less and less on food, from *A Cook’s Tour*, *No Reservations*, *The Layover*, and then finally *Parts Unknown*. However, the attention to martial arts, the sex-industry, and the current work environment of Tokyo are all facets and networks that link and intersect within discussions of the serving of, preparing of, and rituals of food. This reveals how food is always political and social, as it operates within and between political and social bodies. As Michel de Certeau posits in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, that “each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (1984, xi), so as we consider Bourdain’s work as a locus of plurality, we can also consider the modes of practices, including those surrounding food as their own locusts of plurality. There are two important points that I use to frame this discussion of Bourdain and his food/travel series. That is, first, these details are limited and situated within his particular narrative, both as host and producer of the show. Second, this locatable narrative uses practices of everyday life, including the eating and preparing food, to introduce social, cultural, and political lives of the Other. The question is: what happens when the practices of everyday life (“talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.”) are made public, and made commodifiable?

This paper thus examines food-television personality Anthony Bourdain as he performs the role of the cosmopolitan moving within and consuming cities of the imagined Other. The city of the imagined Other is what I refer to as the “ethni(C)ity”. Specifically, within Bourdain’s representation of the city as the

cosmopolitan tourist, I look at his interactions and the production of himself as image-on-the-screen and narrator for his CNN show, *Parts Unknown*. His particular narrative highlights the complicated positions of host and guest, within the lines of hospitality and hostility, as introduced by Jacques Derrida. Derrida observes the “cosmopolitan right to universal hospitality”: the cosmopolitan is not only an assumption of the invitation but of the hospitality that is to follow (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000, 69-71). This line between hospitality and hostility becomes increasingly problematic, I argue, as the invitation and hospitality of the cosmopolitan is simultaneously articulated in the same figure. In other words, Bourdain works as both host and guest in the production and narrative of the show. In order to most appropriately address the different positions of cosmopolitanism, this investigation, into Bourdain's portrayal of urban life and Otherness, will require an interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, with interests in political theory, urban geography, cultural geography, cultural studies and food studies, I examine not only the discursive split of the host and guest on screen of the cosmopolitan, but also maintain that Bourdain's specific narrative allows for a self-reflexive and accountable view of the city and Other, while simultaneously allowing for their consumption.

The screen mediates a multiplicity of subject positions, including multiple articulations of Anthony Bourdain himself. I separate these subject positions into two primary positions: Tony-as-image and Bourdain-as-narrator. We can loosely consider Tony-as-image as circulating around the guest position, as he is the image invited into spaces of hospitality: not only in spaces and cities on the show, but also in our domestic lives, as well. Bourdain-as-narrator circulates around the host position, as he works as the considerate mediator speaking, introducing, and situating the image into our homes. The first subject position is the image displayed on the screen, and the second is his author/ial role within the production of the show.

The TV narrator is often presented as a disembodied voice, always in excess of the spatiality and temporality of what is shown on the screen. Here, I look at the production of *Parts Unknown*, indicating Tony-as-image working as an aesthetic subject capable of, or at least revealing, the “micropolitics of managing urban life-worlds” (Shapiro 2010, 8). Traditional political philosophy has historically been interested in state-level thinking, but specifically discussing the ability to “grasp the politics of urban space, Michael Shapiro states that “the arts often render thinkable aspect of politics that have been ignored,” (ibid., 4). This would suggest, firstly, that Tony-as-image has potential for interrogating particular spatial imaginaries: here, the geography of the city. Through proximity and particular modes of visual representation, the viewer can situate, locate, and question this access. However, the proximity necessary to question, is also the proximity necessary for essentialization. Secondly, Tony-as-image can be considered as an aesthetic subject, that is, a subject(s) that is “invented less to reveal their psychic or attitudinal orientation than to reveal the forces at work in the spaces within which they move and to display the multiplicity of subject positions historically created within those spaces” (ibid., 7). And thirdly, all of this is possible through the practice of everyday life, that is, the making and eating of food.

Jacqui Kong notes that “food adventuring” television shows are a relatively recent development, merging travel programs and cooking shows (2011, term coined by Heldke 2003). Kong observes that these “food adventuring television programs thus do not only involve the crossing of physical, geographical boundaries, but the more intimate, personal boundaries built in and around the preparation of food, as well as the consumption of food and is symbolic value intrinsic to particular groups, societies, cultures, and ethnicities” (ibid., 45). Additionally, Kong makes the argument that these shows utilize “difference” as a tool to expose and present the “Other,” and that most existing

theories see travel narratives of the Western “Self” as colonizing/ consuming the Other for the benefit of the Self. Referencing Bourdain’s earlier show, *No Reservations*, Kong posits that he actively acknowledges the Other “as human beings situated within complex contexts and histories” (ibid., 47). Interrogating two episodes, Vietnam’s Central Highlands and Laos, Kong maintains that it is Bourdain’s “self-reflexivity” of his own position and privilege that allows him to present the difference of the Other in way that does not essentialize, but acknowledges the potential agency and co-performativity of the Other-self in front of the cameras. The following discussion confirms Kong’s argument, but also considers the potential limitations in the very *form* that allows this self-reflexive narrative to emerge: the screen itself.

This second possibility is tied closely to the economic production of the show, and the need for the Other in this economic production. For example, Lisa M. Heldke argues that

[t]he authenticity of this Other (indeed, the very project of authenticating) is established against a standard constructed outside the Other’s own culture, in the West, and for Western purposes. Not surprisingly then, given the consumerist proclivities of much of first-world Western cultures, the Other’s authenticity turns out to be a commodity—a spirituality weekend, a meal, a jar of exotic seasonings, a piece of jewelry or an object for the coffee table. (2003, 44)

The same could arguably be said for the commodification of the Other’s authenticity in the city of the Other in shows like *Parts Unknown*. But just as Bourdain’s visual narrative on the show indicates two different positions, both host and guest, both commodification and self-reflexivity are simultaneously possible. Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska further note that “[e]ven the simplest cinematic narrative offers the spectator the fantasy of ‘being in two places at the same time’, or inhabiting the body and point of view of someone else. The escape from the restrictive limitations of the body and place is gratified through a range of symbolic conventions” (1994, 212). In addition to the

possibility of the viewer feeling this reflexive or essentialized split, Bourdain's own cinematic narrative offers a range of geographies to investigate these different reflexive splits of the cosmopolitan: host/ guest; commodified/ self-reflexive; embodied/ disembodied. However, such an investigation would appear to benefit from a geography which also works through refracted mediations.

Henri Lefebvre states that “[t]he city is a *mediation* among mediations” (1996, 101). There is a palimpsest of mediations, as the city mediates between, what Lefebvre describes as, the near order and the far order (ibid., 101). Or, perhaps, also described in Bourdain’s words “*densely packed, impenetrable layer cake of*” various dialectical positions and affects (2013). Both food and television, in addition to the city, are always mediating between these two orders, between the act of consumption, preparation, and ritual as relational between individuals and groups. But these relations are made available through larger the institutions of networks and historical power relations. Additionally, the act of consuming food in a particular geographical assemblage (here, the city) as a produced image on a screen, is itself a very particular articulation between near and far order. It is a meditating instance between bodies eating food, and those consuming the show as part of a larger text: a “text in a context so vast and unarguable as much except by reflection” (Lefebvre 1996, 101). Consuming the city might either confirm this text or open it up for spaces of critique.

This paper follows three different, but intersecting, mapping practices that allow the Other to emerge on screen in the geography of the city: the screen as map, the city as map, and the cosmopolitan (Bourdain himself) as map. To be clear, each one of these mapping practices (the screen, the city, and the cosmopolitan) are all present simultaneously in each one of the episodes examined. I highlight each one separately in order to indicate the various points of mediation. That is, we can see how the screen mediates the relationship between the cosmopolitan and the city, how the city mediates the relationship between the

cosmopolitan and the screen, and how the cosmopolitan mediates the relationship between the city and the screen. We also see how each of these mediations intersect and cross over between nodes and within the additional narratives, images, and bodies. Anthony Bourdain is a productive image and worldview mediating between hospitality and possible hostility, capable of assuming and accepting both invitation and access to cross borders. Indeed, he is a fully realized cosmopolitan, noted for “extensive patterns of mobility, a stance of openness to others, a willingness to take risks and an ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies, both now and in the past” (Urry 1995, 145).

In order to investigate the dual potential of Bourdain's on-screen cosmopolitanism, and also the different politics involved in the simultaneous commodification and self-reflexivity, we can look at what each different map and city reveals. First, in Singapore, the *screen as map* considers the pleasure of viewing the city from above, as discussed by de Certeau. Bourdain subverts this potentially all-encompassing and essentializing view through the use of multiple kinds of camera angles and views, but his voice as narrator remains an omnipresent feature. Second, in Bogotá, Colombia, *the city as map* questions the proposed split between signifiers as “traditional” and “modern;” urban and rural. While acknowledging that a focus on the city has the potential to reify this particular geographical space, the focus on food as it moves between, in and out of the city, blurs these signifiers. And then finally in Hue (Way) Vietnam, *Bourdain as map*, looks at the body of the cosmopolitan as a translation machine in the assumed and produced hospitality of the outsider or guest-as-host.

The Screen as Map: Singapore

Framing Bourdain's production of Singapore as a map means acknowledging the visual mediation of both the city and the screen. Looking at Australian narrative

fiction and film, Peta Mitchell and Jane Stadler state that they are interested in the ways

in which film, literature, and theater are at once mediated and remediated. Cultural narratives not only mediate and represent space, place, and location, but they are themselves mediated representational spaces. Furthermore, films, novels, and plays also open themselves up to further remediation in the form of cross-media adaptation, or, as we will argue, spatial analysis in the form of *geovisualization* (2011, 55, emphasis mine).

A similar sentiment is echoed by Shapiro who looks at film because of the way the form “cross cutting, sequence hosts, montage, depth of focus, and facial close-ups (among other things) — is ideally suited to an urban-oriented mode of apprehending the political” (2010, 11). The form of the screen, through the multiple visions and temporal positions available, has the potential to work against state level or macro political mappings. Through mediations, the geovisualization in Bourdain’s *Parts Unknown* provides a very specific and produced geo-narrative of the ethni(C)ity. This section will indicate the ways in which Bourdain’s own geovisualization of the city evades colonizing totality, while at the same time reproducing an omnipresent host through the onscreen host.

Bourdain’s *Parts Unknown* shifts the gaze easily between expansive aerial shots to point of view on the street. The desire to see the city, not just from the ground, but to in an all embracing way, is not dissimilar to de Certeau’s description of looking down at New York from the World Trade center (1984). Describing the view of looking down on the city from above as “the tallest letters in the world compose a gigantic rhetoric of excess in both expenditure and production,” de Certeau asks, “[t]o what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong? Having taken a voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what is the source of this pleasure of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts” (1984, 91-92). There is a particular pleasure in looking from above, but this view also indicates particular

privileges to knowledge and power. For example, reflecting on Certeau's observations, Rohan Kalyan states that “[v]isual knowledge was tied to power, to be sure, but both knowledge and power were mediated by something else: by desire, carnal and impure” (2017, 3).

Geovisually, this is the same view and lens used by the cartographer. Maps as a production of the visual are also “the product of privileged and formalized knowledges and they also produce knowledge about the world. And, in this sense, maps are the products of power and they produce power” (Kitchin and Dodge 2007, 332). Both the map and city within their “immense texturology spread out before one’s eyes anything more than a representation, an optical artifact?” (de Certeau 2013, 92-93). The cartographic eye is the view from nowhere, as critiqued by Donna Haraway (1988), and as de Certeau describes, “[t]his fiction already made the medieval spectator into a celestial eye. It created gods. Have things changed since the technical procedures have organized an ‘all-seeing power’? The totalizing eye imagined by the painters of earlier times lives on in our achievements” (2013, 92). Or perhaps, these achievements were only made possible by exactly the totalizing eye of the Renaissance painters and imperial cartographers. As this seems to work for the planner urbanist, city planner, or cartographer, so it also works for the producers of *Parts Unknown* and the geovisual narrative of Anthony Bourdain.

We need bodies on the ground to complicate the view from nowhere. The screen allows for the articulation of the function of both: looking down on the city, and eating the city from below. The Emmy-award winning cinematographers of *Parts Unknown*, utilize and oscillate between both. In the opening of the Singapore episode (Osterholm 2017), the shots from above the city are supplemented by images of bodies on the streets:

Nothing. Then a woman’s voice sings elating, piercing the blackness. The camera fades from black onto a woman's face shaded in blue. Mouth open, her voice and

her blue face dissolve into the white lights of the city. The camera floats through skyscrapers. The lights on buildings move, and shift to seemingly motionless boats on the river, splitting the city. The buildings sing blue and gold, with a steady pulse, a drum in the background. A woman watches the city go by in the back of a car, yellow-orange lights blur behind her, she is shaded by the car, and yet the city still leaks through the windshield onto her face. The camera shifts and distorts, until a man emerges with glasses as he walks past the screen, not looking at us. Bourdain-as-Narrator speaks, “What are our expectations?” A man walks towards the camera, down a seemingly empty street with motorbikes and balconies in yellow light lining the way. “Which of the things we desire are within reach?” We now see people are behind the man, as the screen has already moved away, back to the woman in the car, whose face is now lit with red. She moves her head, as if she is going to turn toward the camera, toward us, but her face shadows before we see her eyes. Bourdain-as-Narrator, “If not now, when?” The woman’s face is gone, but we see her outline in red and yellow lights from the streets that she continues to pass. We look up into the face of the man from the street. Everything is dark except his face. His collar is white, and his glasses, (is he looking at us?) reflect two blue lights. He is fading. Bourdain-as-Narrator, “And will there be some left for me?” Nothing. The blue-black face emerges, her head is looking out to the left of the screen, and her hand resting on a microphone, her long nails gleam. She slowly moves her head back, with her mouth still half-opened, until only her blue-black hand over the microphone is left on the screen. Before the abrupt cut to the opening credits, and the spell is broken. (described from Osterholm 2017, 00:00-1:04)

The voices of Bourdain and the woman are both lights on buildings, breaking into the gold and blue that splits the river, the drum beat that pulses beneath, and shadows that illuminate and darken. The city is the backdrop for the bodies that emerge to take the place of buildings. Yellow-blue buildings for yellow-blue bodies. There *is* a disembodied aesthetic to this opening; it is ghost-like. In addition to the images looking down on the river and the skyscrapers, there is an authorial presence: a geonarrative. It is Bourdain’s voice, our host, which produces a presence more pervasive than just the geovisual of the city alone. It is his voice that inscribes, marks, and plans the city in front of us, including the bodies below – the individuals that are already moving out of the frame away from us. The production of this minute-long sequence plays with gaze, narrative, and desire. The screen, through narratives and images, also invites the reader to question their own desires. The shot includes eyes that almost look at the camera,

toward us, so that we become a part of the view from nowhere. The viewer can view, without being viewed themselves. This is what we might call the ideal consumption of the city. But this also brings this desire to the forefront. As the viewer was *almost* seen. These almost-eyes haunt the geovisual consumption of the city.

This montage transitions from disembodied view to the mimetic street level and embodied, everyday practices of the city. On the screen, the city becomes strange, or estranged from the viewer as the gaze shifts from aerial views to those individuals on the street. What is seemingly absent in these operations is the presence of food. However, by association and the relational production of the show, absence of food is also a presence. Food often serves as host for many political, social, cultural, and economically-driven discussions and conversations, but at times the absence of food allows alternative articulations around the gastro-geographical to emerge. In this example, the city itself is the precursor to the meals, conversations, and experiences that the city will provide in the span of the episode. This opener works as an aperitif, whetting the appetite for the city that is to come. It is geovisual foreplay. But does it do enough to make us question those desires?

What this scene does do is indicate the simultaneous subversion of the all-encompassing, colonizing view of the city, while at the same time creating an omnipresent voice of Bourdain-the-narrator. However, this narrative voice in the show is often self-reflexive, posing not only questions to the viewers, as seen here, but also allowing for a reflective space to question his own motives, desires, or even reveal his own doubts and insecurities. While this authorial voice might produce an omnipresent and disembodied presence, it does so to complicate Bourdain's own image in relation to Otherness and the city. It invites the viewer to consume the city, but in doing so, the viewer is also made aware of their own desires to consume. As such, the possibility to both confront and address the

desire of the cosmopolitan becomes just as much a possibility as the consumption itself.

The City as Map: Bogotá

Denis Cosgrove has observed that “[c]artography acts not merely to record the various ways that the city is materially present, but as a creative intervention in urban space, shaping both the physical city and the urban life experienced and performed there” (2008, 170-171). I suggest that the screen, like the urban map, both creates and records the city. Although the city is not the only geographical assemblage explored by Bourdain, it may be the one that best “reflects” the mediating factors of and between the screen and his embodied gastro narrative. As noted before, since the city itself is already a space of mediations of mediations, it is also a space to investigate the multiple and various mapping practices of Bourdain’s narrative.

In order to capture the city, we often need to isolate the city. The potential to once again create an essentialist view of the city presents itself, not dissimilar to the view from above. However, using food to trace the contours of the city, Bourdain also subverts these potentially static urban visions. Considering the historicity of the Spanish-American colonial city, Jay Kinsbruner states “what fundamentally distinguishes the urban settlement is that the economy is centered in nonagricultural activities” (2005, 2-3). In this description, what defines the city is its relation to food. The urban is the space where food is brought in, and the rural is the space where food is cultivated. This also reflects the development of many early cities, as cities had to consider how food was brought in, i.e. streets for bringing in livestock, and the center as a place for markets. Contemporarily, we often think of cities like New York, Paris, or Hong Kong as being “foodie” havens, as the cultural scene is not only dictated by art and music, but by fine dining and gastro-pubs. Perhaps, then if we were going to find a network or trace

of the city/ non-city, that both historically and contemporary defines the city, food would be it. The non-city as the space of cultivation, the city as the space of culture. But both in its travels and in its consumption, food remains liminal. Therefore, we might also ask how does food blur or sharpen the definition of the city? The interactions between food and cities reveal the increasing globalizing structures of capital and gastro-economies, but what does this additionally say about our desire to go to, move through, and consume the city?

In the city market, the transitory social relations of different geographies, both the rural and urban are indicated simultaneously. For one such example, we can look Bourdain's interactions with chef, Tomas Rueda in one of the central markets in Bogotá, Colombia.

The camera zooms to Tony-as-image within a crowd as people move around him. His face pale. Bourdain-as-narrator states, "Did I mention that this city is over 8,000 feet up?" Its back to Tony-as-image following Tomas who is talking expressively with his one A butcher gets selects a hunk of meat from the bright red hanging slabs for a customer. Tony-as-image remarks, "This place is huge." A woman grinds something into a juicer. "You want some juice?" Chef Tomas asks as he and Tony-as-image approach the counter, with yellow, red, orange, green and pink containers line the front. "Yes. What do you have? "A large bowl of limes. One is already being juiced. "I love orange juice with carrots." A plate of large skinned carrots. Music continuing all the while orange liquid is juiced and sifted into a clear, plastic cup. The gentlemen are served their beverages as they sit on stools surrounded by the greenery of herbs and produce. They both take a drink as Tony-as-image says, "It's probably the healthiest thing I've had in a while." "Good for the high altitude." "Yes." "This is better?" People continue to shop around them, moving through the green and colored backdrop of the market. "I'm feeling better every hour." "Yes?" "The first hour is killing me." "But you have a better face." "I didn't think I was going to make it out of the airport." Tomas laughs. "Most of the mornings, early in the mornings, 5:00 to 6:00 in the morning, I climb the mountain." "Why?" "Fresh air." "OK." "You have to come with me." "Hell no. Ain't happening." (described from Freeman 2013, 12:31-14:14)

This scene in Bogotá indicates the fluid articulations between urbanity and rural, through the interactions of the market itself. As both a contemporary and historical site, the market is a space where the rural meets the urban. But because the market is an integral part of the social relations, consumptions, and productions of the city itself, the lines dividing the two cannot so easily be separated.

In Bogotá, the city's geography is connected to the mountain landscape. The urban body is articulated in rural spaces, e.g. Tomas hikes the mountain as part of a morning ritual. Neither the city, nor the surrounding landscapes are necessarily separate in this scene: each is articulated in the other, as each exists as part of the lived experience of the other. This is only further inscribed by the oscillating images of flowers, greenery, and produce interspersed with signs of the 'modern' glass structures, vehicles, and capital. The city itself is only situated where it is as it is also a part of the landscape, as indicated by Bourdain's embodied reaction to the high altitude of the place. Bourdain's sickness, as he walks and moves through the city spaces of the market, laced with produce and flowers, also marks and embodies the topography of the region. The city becomes the space that bodies, capital, and landscapes are all mapped out. We could just as easily flip this mediation and see how the rural maps out the urban spaces and the urban bodies. The easiness of Tomas and the uneasiness of Tony in the altitude of the city additionally says much about the lifeworlds of each within the city, which we might describe as untranslatable differences (more on this in the next section). Often television makes the host appear at "home" or "not out of place" in the city of the Other, but in this example Tony-as-image is made strange and very much out of place. His own body is untranslatable, and his position as "guest" is made explicit. As noted before, the authorial voice of Bourdain-as-narrator also helps to make this discomfort and out-of-placeness explicit.

Later in the episode, Tomas and Tony-as-image sit down again to have dinner at Tomas' restaurant. Discussing the up-in-coming restaurant scene in Colombia, Tomas explains:

It's a new stuff, it's a new business, it's a new world. There's two great bodies from Colombia food, the mixture of the culture, yes?, and follows it with this answer, "Black people, Indian people, white people. That mixture is beautiful. And the other one is all of this region of the mountains, all the valleys, all the rivers, all the sea, we are like a big farm, a beautiful farm to send all these products to the world. I believe more in a beautiful carrot than a great recipe, yes? (Freeman 2013, 21:43-22:22).

Tomas' idea of sending food all over the world should not just be taken as a passing fantasy of an individual. Diversification of food and access to various gastro-geographical contact zones are now realities of development and globalization. Jane Jacobs notes of the historical expansion of Tokyo in the late 1950's, that "Tokyo's expanding solvent markets for new and different imports opened up, in its own city region, practical possibilities for crop diversification," as "people in Shinohata found they could make good money for things never in demand from them before: table peaches, grapes, tomatoes, ornamental shrubs and trees for city gardens, and oak mushrooms, a delicacy commanding a very high price in the city...Diversification had a side effect on local diets" (1985, 49-50). In both Jacob's and Tomas's examples, as cities change, so does the food within the city change. The changed diets, tastes, and capital surrounding food in the city is, likewise, indicative of larger political orders. Food, like the city, is also a mediation between near and far orders.

Heldke chooses the term "cultural food colonialism" to describe her own awareness of her appetite for "ethnic foods." As she writes, "I could not deny that I was motivated by a deep desire to have contact with, and to somehow own an experience of, an Exotic Other, as a way of making myself more interesting," and how "cultural colonialism helped to support and normalize economic colonialism," as she writes about being able to eat Mexican strawberries in

January (2003, xvi). Perhaps, there is a connection between our increasing desires to consume diverse foods (if I might not say ‘diversity’ proper), to finding pleasure in watching Others eat. The city is not the only gastro-geographical assemblage where the desire to consume the Other is met, it is also a part of our globalized lives. But the city does help elucidate the mimetic articulations and mediations of the near order and far order which allow these desires to be satisfied. Food is a part of the social relations of the city. It is therefore an identifying marker of urbanity, but it is also, through the relations of production, capable of blurring any thread that would also attempt to define the city as a coherent, bounded entity. This includes the example of a carrot, which according to Tomas is as much a facet of cosmopolitanism, and has the subsequent right to cross borders, as the different ethnicized bodies that make up the city. Therefore, even in the very potential of essentializing the city, Bourdain’s narrative simultaneously subverts and blurs these particular cosmopolitan boundaries.

The Cosmopolitan (Bourdain) as Map: Hue

Although a myriad of topics and conversations, both radically personal and political, are introduced in *Parts Unknown*, Bourdain is always the revolving, ever-present focal point of the narrative, the structure, and the camera – and if we consider his role as producer, the production of an episode. Therefore, the other bodies that are presented on the screen are not only translated by a produced narrative, they are translated by their relation to Bourdain. Bourdain, then, if we are to talk about representations of the everyday, makes these representations and positions possible by his own association. Bourdain is a translation machine. We read and see the world through his worldview. De Certeau states that “[i]n translation, analyses that an author would fain believe universal are trace back to nothing more than the expression of local or — as it almost begins to seem— exotic experience...within the bounds imposed by another language and another

culture, the art of translation smuggles in a thousand inventions which, before the author's dazzled eyes, transform his book into a new creation" (2013, ix). In the act of translation, the text is made "new," indicating not only the fluid, unstable differences of language, but for our purposes here, the instability and fallible notion of re-presentation in general (De Certeau is obviously not the first to make this observation on language nor on representation). The act of translation can make the common seem strange or exotic. Bourdain additionally, working as a translation machine, functions to translate the exotic into the common.

Although Jacques Derrida's theory of hospitality has helped to frame the discussion of Bourdain as host and guest thus far, this section will more overtly turn to Bourdain's position in the city as the guest-as-foreigner. As discussed thus far, Bourdain's cosmopolitan narrative invites the desire for the ethni(C)ity. It also questions it. It locates the geographic contours of the city, as it also blurs them. This section will overtly look at the limitations of both the cosmopolitan and on-screen representations. In thinking about the guest-as-foreigner, Derrida posits in *Of Hospitality*, that "[a]mong the serious problems we are dealing with here is that of the foreigner who, inept at speaking the language, always risks being without defense before the law of the country that welcomes or exiles him" (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000, 15). In terms of language, the dominant language for the Bourdain's show is English (with subtitles or translators when necessary). However, Bourdain-as-foreigner does not have exactly the same language problem that Derrida identifies. Or, perhaps it is better stated that he is made to *appear* to have the same problem. Everything seems to be translatable by the time it reaches the screen. Derrida recalls the two Latin derivations for foreigner, *hostis*, which could mean "welcomed as guest or as enemy. Hospitality, hostility, *hospitality*" (45). When do the images around the screen invoke hospitality or hostility within the cosmopolitan's representation?

One instance of the lack of language comes in the absence of ordering food, as seen in the Vietnam episode:

Tony-as-Image rides his white bike down the street, "I've been all over Vietnam," passing street vendors and tables, "a place I feel a special connection to." Another street stall, a woman dishes food from a large silver pot, yellow fabric drapes between wooden beams, as a single industrial light emits yellow light. "My first love," garlic sautés in black pan, "a place I remain besotted with, fascinated by." The camera looks up to a woman in a red shirt string the pan. Tony-as-image then appears sitting down at one of the street vendors, the contrast of the lights are bright. He is sitting alone. Looking at the camera, Tony-as-Image states, "[s]o back in Vietnam, one of my favorite places on earth. And all of the things I need for happiness. Little plastic stool, check. Tiny little plastic table, check." A woman comes into the screen. Tony-as-image briefly looks up, makes a brief motion as if he would say something to her, but then back to the camera, "Ooh..." Images of motorbikes driving in the street, I'm back. Back in Vietnam." Bourdain-as-Image looking down and smiling, "shit-eating grin for the duration." Moving chopsticks around in the bowl, "a giddy, silly, foolish man beyond caring," as Tony-as-image continues to eat, states, "and a cold local beer. My preferred brand, in every way. Ah. Clams with pork cracklings. How could that not be good? This is the way so many of the great meals of my life have been enjoyed. Sitting in the street, eating something out of a bowl that I'm not exactly sure what it is. Scooters going by. So delicious. I feel like an animal. Where have you been all my life? Fellow travelers, this is what you want. This is what you need. This is the path to true happiness and wisdom." The camera pans out to another angle of Tony-as-image taking a long drink of beer, as music plays, he gets up leaves. (described from Selkow 2014, ~1:50-4:39)

Although we see Bourdain-as-image driving around the city before his dinner on the small, red, plastic table, there appears to be no destination, other than the experience of the city itself. This is further articulated by the fact that there is no transition between the bike ride and sitting down at one of the street vendors. The scene transitions with the help of the disembodied voice of Bourdain-as-narrator, the screen's all-pervasive host. This seems appropriate, given that what we miss by the lack of transition of Tony-as-image is the process of ordering. Thus, the host in the scene is unquestionably Bourdain, as the would-be host as the street-stall vendor is absent in the ritual interaction of ordering. Tony-as-image is already sitting down when the scene transitions, already assuming hospitality.

What is also not conveyed by the lack of interaction of the order is the issue of language. This seems to be only further articulated by the fact that Bourdain-as-image doesn't know exactly what he is eating – although Bourdain-as-narrator already seems to and can explain in detail, which further emphasizes the role of host in the post-production process. But the not-knowing seems to simulate the language barrier, again, an interaction of which is missing, and is here played out by the unfamiliar bowl of food. It is this untranslatable bowl of food which is presented as “true happiness and wisdom” for the traveler. But what should the traveler exactly take as true happiness and wisdom? To accept the position of ignorance and fulfillment from untranslatable food? Or, to accept the position of assumed hospitality without concern for translation, because your desires will be satisfied regardless? These questions approach the liminal space of such a global table, that the global table is a little red table and plastic chair, where we don't know what we're eating or how to say “thank you”, but that hospitality is already assumed, finding pleasure in the global city. Therefore, even as food, television, the screen, the city, and the cosmopolitan mediate and at times subvert instances of essentialization, there must also be times when these mediations cycle back confirm the very things they would otherwise subvert. That is, even though those very features of the show which help to subvert reified images, including a self-reflexive narrator and a subject matter that highlights the complex life and interactions of individuals (food), at times the show is limited by the production of the show itself.

Conclusion: Oscillating Limitations of a Global Table

Ananya Roy writes of Calcutta that a “world-class city” as an icon is better understood “as more than a fetish, as more than a commodity-on-display or a commodity-in-circulation,” (2003, 260). Instead, she conceptualizes the “world-class city as a phantasmagoria, the dream world of postcolonial development. Yet,

this phantasmagoria is also a ‘dialectical image,’ containing within it the radical potential of disenchantment and critique” (2003, 260). The dialectical images presented on the screen of both the city and the cosmopolitan and also contain the possibility of both disenchantment and critique. The distance and proximity of a city are always oscillating. The screen also becomes a mediating point, a discursive map of near and far order. It is a mediation of mediation. As each one of these mediations: screen, city, Bourdain, already functions in oscillations and mediations, then so too do their possibilities for subversion or resistance in the consumption of the Other. Each both allows and limits hospitality. The city, the screen, and Bourdain are all locations/positions of hospitality and cosmopolitanism. It is the consumption of food both literally and through visual modes which help to define these relations of condition of guest and host. At times, these geographical relations allow us to question and critique our assumed relations with each Other. At other times, they reaffirm the cosmopolitan’s assumed right to the city.

Bourdain’s image on-screen confirms the cosmopolitan’s already-extended invitation “to come,” “to experience,” “to consume,” that it might also provide a space to critique such a position, by finding alternative positions around the liminal, global table. As the cosmopolitan already has this invitation, Bourdain’s renewal of his privileged position is also a re-tracing of this performance. As re-tracing reveals difference within repetition, the possibility emerges of different rituals, different patterns of *how to eat the city*. I suggest that such possibility emerges in the reflexive split between Bourdain-as-Image and Bourdain-as-Narrative. These two split personalities of the cosmopolitan within the ethni(C)ity, are more productive if followed within diffracted articulations. As Karen Barad, suggests “diffraction is not only a lively affair, but one that troubles dichotomies, including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries, such as organic/ inorganic and animate/inanimate,” and in this case, I position guest/host,

hospitality/ hostility (2014, 168). The diffraction of the narrator's voice is sometimes needed to question, to situate, and pose doubt for both Bourdain's own experience and those watching. Likewise, it is sometimes the proximity of his own image in the lifeworlds of others that indicate the vast complexity and untranslatability of the Other.

Finally, within all of these diffracted positions emerging in the city and the city-on-screen, I suggest that a new conceptualization of "the table," the mediated space between the guest and host, is needed. The table has historically been the space where the social, cultural, and political rituals of hospitality, consumption, and hierarchies are performed. What might this space now look like in the ever contested space-time articulations between the city, the screen, the individual, and food? "Table", additionally, invokes a Western-Euro-centric materiality of hospitality and dining, as opposed to a number of shared arrangements of food and bodies. However, the fluid, ever-changing, articulated space that is more analogous of the street vendor might hold a more accurate representation of the diffracted table that is a space of mediation and encounter, within a global-becoming-unbecoming world. The three cities investigated included different understandings, therefore, of "street food," including, at times, when the city itself is consumed through street views and skylines. At the cosmopolitan's table, both subversive and essentializing views of the city are always possible.

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Eyeing Fear and Anxiety: Postcolonial Modernity and Cultural Identity in the Urban Space of *The Eye*

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Images of Hong Kong as “haunted” have often taken center stage in horror cinema as representative of urban concerns. Hong Kong horror films often situate supernatural forces in the city’s everyday social spaces specifically to embody a sense of dread and uneasiness among its dwellers of modern life’s consequences. The filmic rendition of Hong Kong is especially menacing when the urban space becomes a character or an essential geographic problem in the narrative, as in *Dumplings* (Jiao zi, Fruit Chan, 2004), *Home Sweet Home* (Gwai Wu, Cheang Pou-soi, 2005), *Re-cycle* (Gwai Wik, Danny and Oxide Pang, 2006) and *Dream Home* (Wai dor lei ah yut ho, Pang Ho-cheung, 2010). The films offer critiques of the city’s spatial disparities by capturing panoramic vistas of spectacular high-rises meant for the affluent to reside existing alongside more dilapidated structures in denser, underprivileged neighborhoods. Hong Kong is further characterized as a liminal, transient state with porous borders that enable cross-boundary movement of population from Mainland China. Most of the films are notably set in the urban domestic sphere, thus lending themselves to be read as a bleak commentary on the traumatic exploitation and displacement of Hong

Kong's othered, indigent population as the threat of land shortage and urban development persists over time.

This cinematic impression of Hong Kong echoes the terrain of everyday life in the megalopolis, capturing the collective anxiety and fear of the socio-political changes resulting from the 1997 Handover of the British colony to China. The idea of Hong Kong returning to its "original" home is akin to the psychoanalytic concept of the "return of the repressed"—the ambivalence that continues to haunt its residents stems from their reluctance to be subjected to an unaccustomed authority of Chinese socialism after 156 years of British rule. The loss of their colonial past coupled with an uncertain future of a new cultural paradigm exacerbate the dreading of the unfamiliar in the urban environment. The Pang Brothers' 2002 film *The Eye* (*Gin Gwai*¹) articulates this notion of spatial uncanniness that affects Hong Kong by unveiling culturally specific construction of its urbanity as the space intersects with the supernatural. Released five years after the official Handover, the film acts as a discourse of Hong Kong's critical period of acclimatization among the city's earlier generations of residents to the changes of the state's political trajectory. Existing Hong Kong residents saw the need at the time to negotiate their cultural identities and sense of belonging, especially considering how the Handover inevitably allowed larger influx of Mainland Chinese immigrants to integrate with the urban community.

The Eye follows revolves around a violinist with a small Chinese orchestra named Mun who undergoes a corneal transplant to cure her childhood blindness. Along with her newly restored vision, she acquires the supernatural ability to foresee deaths and witness dead spirits linger at numerous haunts in the city of Hong Kong. Steve Pile (2005a, 136) suggests that "...haunting ought to be antithetical to modernity, yet ghosts seem to claw at the heels of the living, of modernity." Similarly, the film positions the city as a quintessential space that

¹ The official film title in Cantonese is translated as 'seeing ghosts'.

breeds ghosts while portraying sight or awareness as an accursed gift that subjects the protagonist to witness and confront the unseen and unspeakable. The aim of this article is to consider how the ghosts of which Mun encounters are cultural signifiers of the repressed, othered identities which are largely eschewed from the collective consciousness in post-Handover Hong Kong. The film draws attention to the grim reality of life in the modern megalopolis through the encroachment of supernatural agency and further problematizes the traumatic experience of otherness by bringing the issue of Hong Kong's irresolute postcolonial identity to the forefront. Moreover, the decaying cityscape of Hong Kong as imagined in *The Eye* functions as a reminder of the impending urban mutation following the "foreign" socialist influence from its motherland China.

Ghosts that haunt urban sites may in fact reveal to be a certain past that lingers in the present to presumably resist the challenge of being forgotten. "Ghosts in the City," a seminal essay on the architecture of renovation by Michel de Certeau (1998) explains the tendency for uncanniness to lurk in modern cities as emerging new buildings begin to replace the old. Cities are continuously haunted by the "stubborn" past that "intersect[s] with the present imperatives," such as the existing older buildings that interfere with new urban planning (ibid., 133). This is what makes the city of Hong Kong, as depicted in *The Eye* especially, haunted due to its constant destruction and reconstruction, leading to what Ackbar Abbas (1997) identifies as the "culture of disappearance." The old Chinese rituals in Hong Kong, for example, are replaced by new Westernized ones because of the rapid changes to "living styles" that negotiate modernization and urbanization (Lam 2008, 21). When the "newness" of the city is unable to compromise with the old remnants of Hong Kong's past, all that exists in the city's presence becomes a "collective memory" that creates cultural anxiety (ibid., 23). The ambivalence felt after the Handover is induced by Hong Kong's nostalgic predisposition— a place of memory, trauma and loss in which its

colonial past has indeed become a ghost or ghostly. Although *The Eye* does not qualify as a nostalgia film, it invokes the “postcolonial nostalgia” of Hong Kong, which according to Natalia Chan (2012), has been a social phenomenon since the 1980s. This significant trend captures the social feelings of discontent, depression and yearning for the past. Hong Kong’s postcolonial nostalgia is complex and encompasses the anxiety not only of the Handover but also the terror of Communist takeover and late capitalist technological advancement (ibid., 252).

Hence, this article also meditates on the ghostliness of the Hong Kong cityscape by approaching Henri LeFebvre’s philosophical reflection on how modern built environment tend to distress the lived space and social welfare of any urban community. In his masterpiece *The Production of Space* (1991)², LeFebvre ruminates on the pervasiveness of capitalism as a system controlled by bureaucratic- technocratic elites in any given city that continuously commodify space through the real estate market, thus encouraging social-spatial and economic segregation. He lists the “state, of political power, of the world market, and of the commodity world-tendencies” as the malefactor of unequal societies in fragmented modern cities (ibid., 65). The centralization of power relations affects any space that is produced under its system; each space will become hegemonic and exemplify the ideals of the dominant culture. In the era of global capitalism, Hong Kong certainly exhibits characteristic complications resulting from free market practices including socio-economic imparity, commodification of land and building as well as the creation of citizen-consumers. It is also important to note how the ocular theme of *The Eye* resonates with LeFebvre’s (ibid., 19) critique of contemporary architects’ tendency to concentrate on the graphic and visual qualities of buildings rather than envision a space of comfort for individuals to dwell in. The surface of the modern city is meant to be a mere spectacle that

² For LeFebvre (1991, 33), space refers specifically to the ‘space of the city.’

pleases “the eye” at a distance that is far from the ideal space) despite the discomfort it causes to the social well-being of its inhabitants.

LeFebvre also notes that everyday spaces, from public localities to private dwellings, are constructed without any regards to the lived experiences and spatial practices of individuals for they are only meant to be privatized in due course. Those responsible for conceiving space, or more specifically the architects and urban developers, are only capable of envisaging an immaterial “representation of space” that does not necessarily translate into actual space that can be socially or even individually appropriated (ibid., 44). Both public and private housing, for instance, are to be perpetually conceived as products instead of buildings which are suited to be dwelt and experienced. For LeFebvre, the dominant culture and norms resulting from the prevailing capitalist system has effectively impressed upon the urban developers, thus coercing them to shape the city based on the hegemonic positivist and scientific approaches rather than building upon human nature everyday habits (ibid., 165). The positivist hegemony in the production of space is often equated to “positive” modernity and progressiveness despite the urban distress that it has simultaneously created. Similarly in *The Eye*, there exists an underlying tension among the Chinese people of Hong Kong as they negotiate their traditional, pre-modern beliefs with the demands of rational modernity. Advancements in biological technology, for instance, is central to the film’s narrative premise as seen through Mun’s ocular surgery and the depiction of suicide deaths caused by modern-day pressures all suggest that the traditional Chinese way of life is asynchronous to the demands of contemporary urban Hong Kong. *The Eye* depicts the struggle an individual undergoes between embracing modernity and adhering to traditions, all framed against the backdrop of the cityscape. These two conditions coexist and intermingle with one another, similar to how the dead assimilate with the living in the city.

Haunting Modernity in Hong Kong

Surrounded by South China Sea, the territory of Hong Kong amasses a total land area of approximately 2754 square kilometers and currently boasts a population of 7 million people. Bordering the city in the north is Shenzhen – China’s southeastern metropolis in the province of Guangdong and separated by the Pearl River estuary to the west is Macau, a Special Administrative Region with a colonial past similar to the harbor city. Postcolonial Hong Kong is a booming megalopolis of hybrid cultures made up of traditional Confucian beliefs and Western democratic values. This hybridity is shaped by Hong Kong’s past different powers and ideologies, particularly British colonialism, Western capitalism, China’s communism and Hong Kong’s own nationalism, all of which complicate the question of Hong Kong Chinese identity (Mennel 2008; Teo, 2001). Due to its strong colonial background and globally integrated economy, Hong Kong (alongside Tokyo and Singapore) was one of the first few Asian cities to reach the status of a “global city” similar to those in the West (Breitung and Gunter, 2006). Hong Kong’s development as an urban space surpassed Mainland China’s cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing (ibid., 104). Hong Kong’s early global position embodies advance Asian modernity that exceeds many other urban developments of postcolonial nations within the region. At present, Hong Kong has the greatest number of skyscrapers, towers and high-rise residential as seen in its signature visually-compact skyline, making it one of the most spatially-complex cities to exist.

Despite this progressive exterior, postcolonial modernity in Hong Kong has caused collective anxiety among its people over the concepts of national and cultural identity. Barbara Mennel (2008, 84) asserts that the people of Hong Kong often question their “vague notion” of Chineseness. Steven Teo (2001, 225) outlines Hong Kong’s situation as a space that is “caught” between the foreign modern world introduced by its Western colonizers and the local traditional

Chinese values that come from its motherland China. The Handover has further deepened its people's identity crisis as they try to negotiate a new, geo-political identity that straddles both the modern and the traditional (Yeh and Ng 2009). Abbas (2001, 624) points out that to many commentators of the Handover, this negotiation is a form of "postcolonial resistance" against both Britain and China; indeed Hong Kong is more interested in positing its own unique postcolonial identity as a "third space." In other words, the need for the Chinese people of Hong Kong to define their own distinct identity has less to do with its past colonial relationship with Britain or its current affiliation with China. Hong Kong's return to China indeed suggests as an act of reclaiming the past while positioning itself, along with its hybrid postcolonial culture, as a newfound nation.

This hybridized, post-Handover existence has led Hong Kong to become more fragmented as a culture, thus resulting in a lack of collective sense of its people (Gan 2010, 111). The Hong Kong Chinese also continue to struggle to preserve any forms of collective memories that are based on their culture as more (old) sites and buildings are demolished to make way for more public housing as migration from Southeast Asia and South China continues to be on the rise (Cheung 2012, 7). This concentration of "compressed" urban population, in turn, degrades the city's community spirits and gradually erases the people's memories of their distant past (Huang 2004, 24). This certain loss only serves to alienate individuals from one another rather than foster communality in such a modern society. LeFebvre (1991, 97) believes that such feelings of alienation which pervade the urban society engender "disillusionment" that "leaves space empty—an emptiness that words convey." This spatial emptiness eventually devastates the city with the lack of social interaction due to modernism's emphasis on individualism.

The Eye opens with blurry, unfocused shots of Hong Kong's skyline at its busiest. The effect of this blurred perspective is parallel with a myopic vision that

foreshadows Mun's eventual recovery from blindness. Mun sits alone in the corner of a ferry; her voiceover narrates her optimism as we see indistinct glimpses of the city: "Some people say that this world is ugly, yet it is beautiful at the same time³." The following shots gradually become crisper and sharply focused, showing Mun navigating the congested city with her walking stick among throngs of people. Throughout this opening scene, the urban surroundings of Hong Kong are bathed in a drab gray tone, suggesting a foreboding sense of alienation and estrangement. Framed from the point-of-view of Mun, the visual geography of the cityscape once again appears deathly in the scene where Mun and her sister Yee are riding the taxi after her successful surgery. Skyscrapers and high-rise structures which compose the skyline of the city materialize as ominous, vertical tombs against the overcast sky. From the corner of her eye, Mun sees a deserted, male figure dressed in a suit standing in the middle of the highway. She finds the sight to be unsettling as the cars that pass by rapidly seem to ignore the man's desolate existence. Bereft of the city's attention, the ghostly figure metaphorically signals the concrete jungle as a space devoid of human connection. The manifestation of such ghost is due to this pervading sense of a lack of community that directly culminates the urban dread.

The majority of the film's ghosts and hauntings take place in the dilapidated neighborhood where Mun resides with her grandmother. Their home is a small, nondescript apartment unit located in crammed public housing estate. The space of her unit and the apartment building's surroundings are rendered as constantly limited and limiting. Such living arrangement reflects the form of housing, mainly overcrowded high-rises subsidized by the government, that are made available to half of Hong Kong's population to solve the issue of space (Huang, 2004). The changing of family institution during post-Handover and the rise of inequality in the age of rapid globalization have also attributed to a

³ Based on the film's official English subtitles.

dramatic increase in land and property prices (Wong 2017, xv). The overcrowding and over-construction of Hong Kong's urban space exacerbates the increasing disconnection between people, thus exemplifying "a paradoxical kind of alienation" (LeFebvre 1991, 308) seen commonly in consumerist capitalist cities. Mun epitomizes many Hong Kong inhabitants who are conditioned to live in overcrowded accommodations because of the high population density (Breitung and Gunter 2006, 102). A city's density, according to Pile (2005a, 242), is what attracts ghosts to gather and haunt in "greater numbers" and in "wider variety." Ghosts can also be read as a symbolic outcome of the capitalist practice of commodifying every single element, from buildings to individuals, in the urban space. LeFebvre's (1991, 340) description of commodity takes on a ghostly appearance— "divorced, during its existence, from its materiality" yet desiring to materialize in any given opportunity. Adam Knee (2009b, 73) also contends in his discussion of *The Eye* that the city is imagined as a place where ghosts call it "home" as much as the city dwellers. He highlights the fact that there are many "disused public spaces" even in concentrated sites that appear desolated, causing an unpleasant feeling of unease that is often associated with being haunted (ibid., 73).

In many scenes, the hallway of her residence is shown as poorly lit and claustrophobic with cold, steel-gray walls. The rows of end-barred doors of each unit appear homogenous and columbarium-like; it is difficult to distinguish the homes from one another. This image can be interpreted as a manner in which the lines are blurred when the dead inhibits the realm of the living, reflecting the ambiguity of life and afterlife. The repetitiveness of the apartment units as well as other modern high-rise structures which appear in the film are all products of capitalist commodification whereby the built environment (including living quarters) bears a reproducible quality that LeFebvre (1991, 75) criticizes as "artificial and contrived" and without traces of "spontaneity and naturalness."

Additionally, modern architecture in urban space gravitates toward homogeneity in which the [con]fusion “between geometrical and visual” (ibid., 200) conjures only a sense of discomfort for the city’s inhabitants. The cityscape of Hong Kong, in this regard, is an exchangeable product in its entirety.

This indistinguishable quality also hints at the homogeneity of the Chinese population in Hong Kong, with recent immigrants being those who came from China itself (Breitung and Gunter 2006, 102). But as the megalopolis becomes more heterogeneous in the age of globalization, the Hong Kong Chinese now desires to retrieve the lost community that stems from a “homogenous social space” (Huang 2004, 38). *The Eye* casts the postcolonial city as an unspeakable third space that still remains oblivious to the implications of social otherness. In the film, modernity offers a range of fears to the city’s population as suggested by the different ghosts that manifest before Mun’s eyes. Her initial blindness shelters her from seeing these ghosts, or otherwise, the othered bodies. In the scene following her violin recital, Mun reacts uneasily to the sight of an albino man who works for the orchestra organization. His physical appearance is symbolic of otherness—one whose presence seems unfamiliar and foreign in a space where homogeneity reigns. The gaining of eyesight for Mun is symbolic of gaining awareness of herself and the other bodies, especially those which are trapped in the liminal “realm of otherness and of becoming-other” (LeFebvre 1991, 187). She cannot tell if he is a ghost or a living person after encountering several spirits in her surroundings since regaining her sight. This scene depicts Mun’s confusion as her sight strengthens for she finds great difficulty in drawing a distinction between the living and the dead. What this implies is that city life is made in the context of “misrecognition of people by people” (Pile 2005a, 246).

Mun’s ability to see the departed souls demonstrates her ability to see beyond Hong Kong’s modern, affluent façade. Her grandmother has always recognized Mun’s special disposition—that she “can see what others can’t see and

feel the pain that others can't feel⁴." Her capacity for seeing and feeling the pain becomes a burden because part of this is witnessing the victimization of certain types of bodies within the city. The dead in *The Eye* are predominantly women and children. Leonie Sandercock (2005, 219) argues that many urban fears are based on social bodies that produce disorder and "dis/ease" particularly bodies of women and children. The majority of women in modern Hong Kong are no longer conforming to traditional roles, therefore radically changing the familial patterns in the fabric of its society. Their distant, unreachable status is othered by traditional Confucian gender paradigm. The film insinuates that Mun has been brought up by a grandparent instead of her own mother. In one scene, she is shown viewing a video recording of her as a blind child. Her grandmother indicates that Mun's parents have since divorced and that her father has migrated to Canada. The maternal figure is clearly absent from Mun's life and replaced instead by an aged grandparent. The character Ying, a young cancer patient, also shares a similar situation with Mun. Throughout the film, she is seen wandering the hospital without her parents in sight. When she finally succumbs to cancer, Ying Ying dies alone.

The maternal has become a symbolic ghost of feminine past. From a Confucian perspective, motherhood implies power and agency for women whose primary responsibilities include child begetting, bearing and rearing (Tao 2004, 166). Within the traditional Chinese framework, mothers command high respect because of their commitment to the family. Traditionally, the mother acts a "cultural transmitter" early in the lives of her children (Tu 1992, 72). The lack or absence of mother(hood), as the film suggests, shows the "lost state" that Hong Kong is in at the point of returning to Mainland (motherland) China, after having been separated by politics (communism/capitalism) and colonization for many years. As China's child, Hong Kong has "mixed feelings" toward its mother due

⁴ Based on the film's official English subtitles.

to postcolonial ambivalence (Ng and Yeh 2009, 150). China, in this light, has nurtured Hong Kong and holds its distant, cultural past; the Handover, however, subjects the citizens to negotiate this with their hybridized, urban identities. The desolation of bodies and identity crises depicted in *The Eye* represents the outcome of Hong Kong's separation from its cultural origin, China and the peoples' difficulty in threading the liminal state of the city. Here, the lack and postcolonial ambivalence that Hong Kong suffers is apparent. China has long been absent from the political consciousness of Hong Kong prior to its return to motherland and as a putative "maternal" figure, it is aligned with the general "unfamiliar", difference and otherness in the collective consciousness of the residents, leading on to their ambivalence.

Sandercock (2005) also sees children as fearful or threatening bodies in the urban space. This is because children in cities are divested of the qualities with which they are traditionally associated with, such as innocence and purity, and have instead become agents of violence. The city affords them with experimentations that often veer toward the dangerous (Tilton, 2010). Conversely, children are also often victims of cultural conditions. Despite Hong Kong's modernity, its education system is still based on a traditional Confucian framework, one that is based on examinations and merit-based performances. Due to the increasing commodification of education, many Chinese adolescents are forced to become competitive and subjected to the pressures of achieving academic excellence in hopes of improving their socio-economic status (Banks 2012, 1109). This situation also hosts a space for the growing trend of suicides among the young in Hong Kong. According to a study by Lai and McBride-Chang (2001) on suicide ideation in Hong Kong, the common factors that influence adolescents' suicide behaviors include depression, poor self-esteem, family problems and most of all, poor school performance.

In the film, the ghost of the schoolboy who lost his report card speaks of this social ill in Hong Kong. The schoolboy continues to haunt the apartment building and repeatedly jumps off a window during nighttime⁵. In one scene, the parents of the schoolboy express their remorse over their loss. Mourning lanterns are hung at the entrance of their apartment unit. A medium shot shows the schoolboy's framed photograph placed on an altar and surrounded by joss sticks. The living space is filled with memories of him such as live action figures and *Playstation*. The lost report card signifies the boy's fear of academic failure, and ultimately, disappointing his parents. There is also a clear breakdown, as suggested in this scene, in terms of the relationship between children and their parents, which also can be interpreted as a causational factor of his repeating deaths. One of the important Confucian obligations for a child is filial piety to his parents; the mother is, in fact, the main credit for a child's achievement (Birge 1989, 352). The obligation remains an instrumental yet intricate part in becoming a virtuous and successful person by subordinating oneself to the parents, typically by being diligent in achieving academic excellence (Li 2014, 105-106)⁶. This filial obligation is what draws the schoolboy's ghost back to his parents, where he can be seen eating the food offering laid out for the departed in front of their apartment unit. But the manner of which the schoolboy haunts demonstrates such submissiveness to his elderlies. He continuously asks Mun in the stairwell to see if she has seen his lost report card in fear of his living parents' (strict) expectations.

Finally, offerings and appeasement to the dead are portrayed as a common social practice among the Chinese in Hong Kong. Performed within the modern high-rises, such depictions represent the conflicting constructions of cultural identity that emerge in contemporary Hong Kong. *The Eye* illustrates how modern

⁵ In Chinese folk beliefs, ghosts who have been wronged or have transgressed are therefore trapped in this world and cannot proceed to the next unless they are pacified.

⁶ Filial behavior needs remonstration by the child if the parents do any wrong. Without this, respect for the elderly tend to become mere submissive obedience, hence disrupting the harmonious relationship needed in the family (Li 2014, 106).

biological technology (in the form of ocular surgery) has exposed Mun to the horrors that surround the city which no positivist medication can help erase the spiritual disturbances. Ancient Chinese medicine, sorcerers or masters are often looked into to “cure” such occurrences despite the availability of legitimate, Western medication. The developments following Mun’s constant encounter with the dead schoolboy reveal some interesting manifestations of traditional (Mainland) Chinese culture in postcolonial Hong Kong. Mun’s grandmother has witnessed her grandchild conversing with the ghost of the schoolboy, who was a neighbor. When Mun returns home later in the evening, her grandmother and Yee are seen burning joss paper to appease the spirit of their neighbor’s dead child. According to Eva Wong (2011, 114), this ritual is done in appeasing or placating the restless spirits with such offerings. In Taoism, some spirits of the dead are believed to be roaming the earth in disgruntlement because their former manifestation was killed, mistreated or led to committing suicide (Wong, 2011). Likewise, Hong Kong horror films often features ghosts who linger on earth when reincarnation becomes impossible for them. The recurring theme of reincarnation is metaphorical for Hong Kong’s hybridity that makes its people caught between modern worldviews and traditional Sino beliefs (Teo 2001, 225). Reincarnation suggests that the old persists in what seems to be in new forms.

An intense exorcism scene ensues after the grieving parents invite a Taoist master to conduct the rigorous ritual. The goal of such exorcism is not to destroy the spirit but to prevent it from returning in a displeased state by capturing, rehabilitating and sending it to the underworld (Wong 2011, 112). In a very elaborate cross-cut sequence, the exorcism shows the Taoist master performing the ritual with close-ups of joysticks and talisman, accompanied with the forceful, violin tones deriving from Mun’s performance at her recital. Medium close-up shots of the boy’s photograph on the altar are interspersed with those that show Mun rapidly bowing on her violin. The intensity of both the master’s exorcism

and Mun's performance mirrors their need to put the ghosts at bay from the living. Once the exorcism ends, Mun passes out on stage. The Taoist master serves as a symbol of history and tradition, thus overshadowing Hong Kong's modernistic values of science, logic and reasoning. By presenting this ritual, *The Eye* overtly and actively addresses the citizens' desire to address certain needs by way of the prism of the Chinese past.

Isolation and Indifference

In his analysis of Hong Kong culture, Abbas writes:

Hong Kong's history is one of shock and radical changes. As if to protect themselves against this series of traumas, Hong Kong people have little memory and no sentiment for the past. The general attitude to everything, sometimes indistinguishable from the spirit of enterprise, is cancel out and pass on. (1997, 26)

Hong Kong's particular "cancel out and pass on" approach to life was prevalent among its citizens before the island state's return to China. The city is often perceived as "transitional" and many of its inhabitants do not see Hong Kong as a final destination but instead a place to acquire wealth before moving on to the West. According to Abbas (1997, 26), any changes in the socio-political climate quickly disappear just as they appear, making the cultural space of Hong Kong unpredictable and subjective. Emilie Yeh and Neda Ng (2009, 147) also describe Hong Kong's reluctance to go "home" to its motherland as a fear of "re-encountering an alien "origin"." Having little memory of this particular "origin" makes China seem a "strange and familiar" place to call home, and one way for the Chinese in Hong Kong to negotiate a sense of belonging is to suppress such anxiety, to take a "wait and see" attitude, and move forward in isolation. The

yearning for the past happens to be a common method of coping among the residents of Hong Kong.⁷

The film stresses isolation and the lack of connection not only between the ghosts that haunt the living but also between the living themselves. Each ghost haunts separate sites and hidden corners of the city of Hong Kong. The motif of having a solitary existence is, as the narrative suggests, a crucial link to the condition of modern living in a consumerist society. The inhabitants of Hong Kong may be a part of a huge, metropolitan crowd yet the film renders them as isolated individuals who only happen to live in close proximity to each other. Despite Mun's overcrowded living condition, for example, she is often seen alone in the vicinity except on occasions when the ghosts appear before her. Empty spaces are shot at canted angles; the use of predominantly long shots, medium shots and selective focus⁸ throughout the film mirrors the loneliness of the living as their deceased loved ones continue to linger unseen. The painful separation between life and death is unbearable, and the living must continue to cope with loss.

A separate scene shows the ghosts of a mother and child haunting an old restaurant where Mun goes to have lunch. Although they haunt as a pair, the mother seems alone and unconnected to her child. The ghostly pair also functions as a powerful metaphor for absent maternalism that is on the increase in a modern society like Hong Kong. We learn from the waitress that they frequently pay a visit to the reserved restaurant owner, who is the husband and father. The monotonous, almost soulless moves of his meat-chopping, his stoicism and his silence do not easily externalize the pain of losing a wife and child. Instead, his longing for them can only be seen through their family photographs lining one of

⁷ This explains the social phenomenon of nostalgia, which according to Chan (2012, 257), has been entrenched in Hong Kong since the 1980s and becomes, ultimately, a profitable "popular genre."

⁸ The image of each ghost tends to be blurry in perspective.

the walls of the restaurant. His refusal to sell his shop to developers who wish to demolish it in order to make “way for modern construction” (Knee 2009b, 73) alludes to Hong Kong’s politics of disappearance as expounded by Abbas (1997). *The Eye* articulates the issues of isolation and alienation that pervade Hong Kong and the indifference that the city breeds, which is further symbolized by the restaurant owner’s selling the meat to feed the city’s insatiable capitalistic desires.

Pile (2005b, 1) reiterates how the city is a space made up of social relations, and which supposedly “bring[s] together people.” Yet, the reality is that many modern cities intensify the psychological and physical distance between them (ibid., 8). Technology such as telephones, Pile (ibid., 18) writes, allows people to connect with one another, but it also absolves the need for them to meet face to face. In fact, a number of public crowd scenes in the film depict Hong Kong as a city of strangers despite the importance of communal living amongst Asians. For example, the film introduces Mun as an unassuming blind girl at the beginning of the film, who finds her way in the cold, crowded streets of downtown Hong Kong. Each pedestrian in the crowd seems to be preoccupied with his or her own thoughts. A woman walks alongside Mun only to speak into her cell phone than being mindful of her surroundings. Each person in this scene, including the protagonist herself, seems alone, detached and indifferent to one another. In one of the recital scenes, Mun sits alone among her blind colleagues after a rehearsal—they do not engage in any forms of communication, preferring instead to concentrate on packing their instruments and leaving the auditorium.

In a later scene, Mun retreats into her bedroom and draws the curtains shut to replicate the blindness that she is familiar with to drown the overwhelming feeling of fear from seeing the dead. She refuses all contact with her family and does not leave her bedroom until her psychotherapist, Dr. Wah forces his way in and breaks her isolation. Modernity is exemplified in this scene as “blinding” and

overwhelming—seeing what lies in the city has been an uncanny, painful and challenging experience for Mun as she has to deal with this quandary alone. Her eventual isolation is a declaration of discontent but also indicative of wider social problems of disconnection. Abbas (2010, 25) notes that such unhappiness is not only relative to the emotional state of mind but also related to the structure of space and time that has become disjointed. Thus, an unhappy city is a place that is disconnected from its historic past and present relations. These all emphasize the unfavorable living conditions of Hong Kong, thereby denying the urban space as a place fit for human survival. As Andrew Lees (1985, 215) observes, cities in general has been vilified historically due to its propensity to bring large numbers of people into close proximity yet urban living fosters fear and reduces social contact. The Hong Kong megalopolis only maintains a façade of sociality while the inhabitants remain profoundly alone and lost, with no roots to hold on to—much like the lost souls of the ghosts we see in the film. *The Eye* focuses on the lack of a sense of belonging for both the ghosts and the city's inhabitants alike, thus implying a denial of Hong Kong's cultural identity that is dependent from China's (Leung 2002, 227).

Thailand: Romanticizing the Past

The drawback of postcolonial Hong Kong that we see in the film is further illustrated with the inclusion of Thailand as another prominent setting. Knee (2009a, 87) writes that Southeast Asian countries, especially Thailand, are often represented in Hong Kong cinema as fearful places with “strong association with the supernatural,”⁹ particularly sorcery, witchcraft and black magic. He asserts

⁹ Thailand's film portrayal, in fact, seems to accord to the supernatural beliefs of the Thai race that the dead indeed live among us. Ghosts and spirit cults are still carried out in present-day Thailand to assure agricultural fertility, maintain family and communal cohesion as well as to ease social anxiety and tension (Kitiarsa 2012). The supernatural remains an important part of the everyday life whereby the ritual processes involving ‘ancestral ghosts’ are shown to be the core of the Thais’ traditional institutions (ibid., 205). Ancestor worship and spirit possession in mostly rural

that Thailand is often cinematically imagined as a site that is also “socially and technologically backwards, less developed and less prosperous” when framed against Hong Kong (ibid., 88). *The Eye* is partly set in Thailand to elucidate the binary opposition between the modern, rational and positivist Hong Kong with its biomedical technology and Thailand as the source of “inexplicable forces” that threaten to disrupt Mun’s life (ibid., 85). What is important to realise is that Thailand is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that was never colonized—a circumstance that is in sharp contrast to modern postcolonial Hong Kong.

The Handover has also rekindled a form of consciousness among its people to reclaim their traditional Chinese roots while negotiating a distinct, modern identity of their own. To decode and to understand this “strange” yet “familiar” past is to imagine what the past must be like. This re-imagination of history is portrayed in the film through Thailand, a space that has long become an emblem of the diasporic dimensions of modern Chinese identity in many Hong Kong films (Knee 2009b, 84). Knee writes:

This identity is herein implicitly characterized as involving supportive emotional ties to a larger quasi-familial community but subject to constant movement, uncertainty and instability, a function of the geographical, national, social and temporal dispersal of the community. (ibid., 84)

Chinese ethnicity, in this context, is flavored by its geographical situations. Therefore, the identity of the Chinese in Hong Kong is imagined and constructed by certain regional space and culture—that of rural Thailand. Their identity is unstable or “floating” due to the internal struggle between upholding modern, rational values and preserving traditions which are rooted in cultural history (ibid., 84). LeFebvre suggests a need for resistance of power and reformation of urban social and spatial structure—this, includes the necessary changing of space, architecture and the arrangement of the city, in order to ameliorate living

Thailand are also perceived by some scholars as a “site of resistance” toward modern development centered in Bangkok (Horstmann 2012, 184).

standards, consolidate everyday conditions and ultimately, “change life” (1991, 190). Only with those changes can an alienating city be made habitable and exists as a Utopian alternative to “existing ‘real’ space” (ibid., 349). This notion of Utopia points to “the return of an idea to an ideal state” where “work spaces, leisure spaces and living spaces” (ibid., 59) are no longer divided into private/public dichotomy nor controlled by bureaucratic power agents and dominant hegemonic ideologies. He acknowledges the “obsession” with a certain “space of history” (ibid., 122) that describes traditional dwelling spaces and social practices which are considerably lost in contemporary modern settings. The traditional social relations and structure are believed to be founded predominantly on kinship and group ties whereas the urban, consumerist community in which LeFebvre describes tend to express a clear lack of socialization and communal existence. In such a context, rural Thailand serves as a romanticized space for the Chinese of Hong Kong to imagine how the past could serve as the panacea for all the anxieties brought forth by the modern.

The Eye’s narrative extends to show Mun traveling to Thailand with Dr. Wah to determine the source of her ocular gift. The corneal implants that Mun receives in Hong Kong once belonged to the late donor Ling, a Sino-Thai woman who had the same ability to foresee deaths. The eyes of Ling that Mun inherits are symbolic of the alterity of a ghostly, foreign past. The inheritance of sight is a conversation between the diasporic Chinese in Thailand and those who share common lineage within China’s boundaries. *The Eye*’s motif of haunting vision also gauges the commensurability of Chinese transnationality in present-day Thailand and Hong Kong (Furhmann 2008, 94). Notions of Thai nationhood and modernity had in part depended on the Chinese exclusion since the early 20th century (ibid., 95). Traumatic aspects of Sino-Thai history are revived through the connection that Mun has with her Thai donor. The uneven history of anti-and-pro-Chinese sentiments in Thailand has in fact caught the Sino-Thais in the middle of

denigration, denial and current reassertions during the process of cultural assimilation (ibid., 106).

The main backdrop of Thailand in *The Eye* is Siem Rach, an underdeveloped province where Ling once lived. As the narrative moves into the countryside, the colors of the environment become more sepia-toned, suggesting an antiquated feel of space itself. To contrast Hong Kong's modernity with rural Thailand, Mun and Dr. Wah are seen riding an old Volkswagen bus to the Sayam Rat hospital where Ling's documents are housed. The space appears decrepit with its wooden walls and spinning ceiling fans; its hallways are narrow and congested with patients. The dark wood interior of the hospital indicates that it is a timeworn government building. Meanwhile, a black crow perches next to a curtain moving in the wind. In contrast, the hallways of the hospital we see earlier in Hong Kong appear to be an ordered space with a professional, albeit sterile and dispiriting ambiance. This hospital scene in Thailand reflects from the point of view of a patient in a state of traumatic injury rather than the seclusion and remoteness that the hospital patients endure in Hong Kong (ibid., 102).

Furthermore, unlike Mun's cramped residence in Hong Kong, Ling's home is a two-story wooden house located amidst the tropical backwoods of a village where her surviving mother, Aunt Chui lives. This is where Mun learns about Ling's mysterious foresight. A black-and-white photo of young Ling is placed in the living room¹⁰ and a marked-up Chinese calendar hangs on the wall, showing how Aunt Chui has been counting the days since Ling's death. Later that night, in a form of a flashback sequence, Ling's spirit emerges and reveals to Mun that her uncanny gift of seeing the future has caused the villagers to perceive her as an unwelcome bearer of misfortune. She also regrets her failure in saving them from a catastrophic fire she had earlier foreseen. A series of abrupt cuts shows

¹⁰ This is a Chinese way of commemorating death as previously shown in the family apartment of the schoolboy who committed suicide in Hong Kong.

Ling stepping up onto a chair and repeatedly hanging herself every night. Mun realizes that Ling is caught in a “time warp” of suicides, similar to the schoolboy back in Hong Kong. This suicide is inevitably linked to the law of Buddhist karma that many Thais adhere to. Peter Harvey (2003, 286) notes that suicide is deemed ineffective according to Buddhist principles because the next rebirth may be a severe one, and a devout Buddhist should be willing to live patiently through despair or unpleasant experiences. The rebirth can exist in the form of hell or a “frustrated ghost,” leading to a more “intolerably painful” existence afterlife (ibid., 286; Mulder 2000, 84). Ling exemplifies this suffering and continues to reach out to Mun to bring her back to her past or her “home” so she can be united again with her grieving mother.

The representation of Ling’s desires to return to her mother resonates with the Confucian beliefs in filial piety. According to Niels Mulder’s (2000) observation on Thai education, the mother is the most important person in a child’s life for she has given life to the child, suffering for and feeding it at great psychological and physical cost to herself. While the idea is similar to Confucianism, the mother inherently becomes a moral debt upon her child that can never be repaid (ibid., 70). Ling’s suicide is deemed disrespectful to this principle for her suicide is an unappreciative gesture to her mother who has “produced” her life beforehand. Aunt Chui is initially portrayed as unforgiving in her disappointment and grief after Ling’s death. She insists that Ling was the one who left her when she was always trying to protect Ling all her life. Mun steps in as a substitute for Ling and hangs herself to help reconcile Aunt Chui and her daughter. The film climaxes with Aunt Chui finally relenting and running to save Mun from suffering Ling’s fate. Subsequently, Ling is released from the tormenting cycle once her mother has forgiven her.

Conclusion

The communal rural Thailand is a space where Mun gets the opportunity to “see” an ideal world where human connection is greatly valued. Unlike Mun’s absent mother in Hong Kong, Ling’s mother remains emotionally and physically available to her daughter even after the latter’s death. The reconciliation gives a sense of relief and fulfillment for Mun, thus enabling her to appreciate the beauty of her surroundings as she has earlier speculated in the film’s opening scene. This fragile relationship between mother and child is analogous to Hong Kong’s postcolonial ambivalence toward China. Regardless of the Handover, *The Eye* necessitates the need for Hong Kong (as a “child”) to return to its motherland China as well as to correspond with its own precolonial past that will help heal the collective anxieties stemming from estranged, modern mechanism. Thailand’s rural space can also be read as the LeFebvrian solution to the drawbacks of urban life— a topography that consolidates a “harmonious whole, as an organic meditation between earth and heaven” (1991, 271). The idea of peacefulness is further reinforced when Mun and Dr. Wah visit Ling’s grave in the lush countryside. The green space is a far cry from the alienating darkness of urban Hong Kong as clear sunshine alights the burial ground. Mun also sees children swimming in the murky river and playing football in the muddy fields while the adults communicate with one another in a tiny market. Her smile is reflected on the window of the bus, suggesting that she has found peace within herself away from the suffering and pain that seem characteristic of modernity and urban spaces. This idyllic environment of Thailand mirrors Hong Kong’s imagination of what their (human) roots are meant to be.

Pattana Kitiarsa (2012, 184) notes that while tradition and modernity are generally interconnected and complementary to one another in Thailand, the nation-state often perceives Western-style modernity with caution and doubt. Thais are generally receptive to science, technology and development but they

have also been conscious of the growing tensions created by the conditions of being modern (ibid., 184). Urban Bangkok, for example, is portrayed in the film as a space that bears striking resemblance to the skyline of Hong Kong, with its concrete flats and billboards (as seen during the arrival of Mun and Dr. Lo in Thailand). Toward the end, horror begins again in downtown Bangkok where Mun forecasts an explosion that will kill many lives. In her attempt to warn the others, Mun loses her sight again from a flying shrapnel. The film seems to suggest that big cities such as Hong Kong and Bangkok are fraught with dangers and drawbacks of modern life. Indeed, modernity in the Thai context implies something imported, “foreign” and also the “radical break-up” of social life (Horstmann 2012, 204). This form of cultural nostalgia is a way to retrieve ideas that a local past is better than the present modern. *The Eye* evidently romanticizes rural Thailand as a desirable space that is associated with simplicity and connectedness while Hong Kong’s progressive disposition is rendered anomic.

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Miraculous Migrations throughout a Chicanx Los Angeles:
Negotiating Othered Spaces in John Rechy's *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*

Michael Moreno

The developments, commercial centers, and neighborhoods that comprise what has long been spatially identified as “Los Angeles” have for countless decades simultaneously co-existed without interacting with other communities; have collided with each other because of ethno-classificatory altercations; and have coalesced into intercultural networks serving as socio-spatial landscapes. Historically, the city of Los Angeles (post U.S.-Mexican War) and its environs “was sold as a real estate development for settlement rather than developed as an industrial or commercial center,” Aaron Betsky argues. “Thus, developers created towns, cities, or communities all across the Southland with little interest in their adjacency to either one another or downtown Los Angeles” (1994, 101-102). These reconfigurations of community throughout Los Angeles have made it more than just a decentralized, post-modern metropolis; they have created the model

21st century heterotopia, which has always had an influential impact on the Latinx/Chicanx community in this region.¹

Unlike other minority populations throughout Los Angeles' history, Mexican Americans (or Chicanxes) have endured a "psychohistorical experience" of "subjugation" by the dominating U.S. white community within "what the indigenous peoples considered to be their own land" (Rodriguez 1994, 69). Since the close of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848 and subsequent U.S. annexation of Mexico's northern lands, Mexican Americans in Southern California and the American Southwest have been marginalized socially, economically, and politically as "others": outside of the white, dominant, and conquering culture. Moreover, their historical colonization has generated a loss in identity through cultural fragmentation and constant mobility throughout these regions for over 170 years. What this means for Chicanxes is that Los Angeles has developed into

a nexus of borderlands and border criss-crossings. The city is an urbanized suburban kaleidoscope that grafts multiple, competing cultures and histories into a heterotopic system which often generates violence while paradoxically providing a vehicle through which to critique this violence....In his work "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault argues that a heterotopic site is an *other* space, one "that lies outside of all places and yet is actually localizable" (352). Likewise, such places, or "heterotopologies" as Edward Soja maintains, are distinct in and of themselves as separate sites and can serve as micro-reflections or embodiments of the larger cultures which produced them while acting as prolific insights into the system and ordering of such cultures (13-15). Comprised of a matrix of freeway systems that create an intricate landscape of borders and borderlands, Los Angeles becomes the ultimate urban heterotopia. When read as a borderland, this postmetropolis functions as a heterotopic site, a truly vibrant amalgamation of spaces that reveals the simultaneous co-existence, collision, and coalescing of cultures and communities (Morales 24). Moreover, Los Angeles has become synonymous with [Chicanx] activism while it remains as an interstice from which a broader [Latinx] discourse, identity, and culture can be recalibrated and then rearticulated. (Moreno and Brunnemer 2017, par. 3)

Rather than keeping Chicanxes silent or marginalized, their systemic displacement has cultivated a critical production of art which serves to articulate

¹ The twenty-first century terms "Latinx" or "Chicanx" are gender neutral markers to demonstrate greater inclusivity whereas "Latino/a" or "Chicano/a" are gender specific.

new sites of discourse and involves “the processes that shape how these places are understood, envisioned, defined, and variously experienced” (Brady 2002, 7). This is particularly significant when creative works and spaces (e.g., Chicana literature, performance art, music, murals, art installations, etc.) can offer intra-cultural critiques and articulations of the Chicana community itself and demonstrate the importance of molding an identity, both individually and communally, against the grain of the dominant discourse. In Rafael Pérez-Torres’s critical analysis *Movements in Chicano Poetry*, the author posits that identity construction for Chicanas (and Latinas by extension) involves a process of becoming rather than being (1995, 12). As such, this process develops innovative cultural-lexicons to communicate experiences and thoughts occurring simultaneously and manifested through art, music, performativity, and literature.

The borderlands have always been an active site of cross-exchanges and othering, particularly for Chicanas throughout the Los Angeles basin and American Southwest. In this space of otherness and othering, the Chicana has cultivated a sense of identity and self-definition, drawn from the spatial-fragments of cross-cultural discord and displacement.

The borderlands represent the multiplicity and dynamism of Chicano experiences and cultures. They form a terrain in which Mexicans, Chicanos, and mestizos live among the various worlds comprising their cultural and political landscapes: Euramerican, Mexican, pre-Cortesian, indigenous, barrio, suburb, city, country, field, kitchen, boardroom, and stockroom. Viewing the borderlands as an interstitial site suggests a type of liminality. The betweenness leads to a becoming, a sense of cultural and personal identity that highlights flux and fluidity while connected by a strong memory of (a discredited) history and (a devalued) heritage. (Pérez-Torres 1995, 12)

Seminal to articulating Chicana voices through forces of disenfranchisement and erasure, is the reconfiguration of traditional images and narratives of domination within the community itself, namely, the Chicano patriarchy and the Roman Catholic Church. While members of the Chicana community have actively deflected violence generated by the dominant culture in the United States, which

since the nineteenth century has been “locked into the fiction of white superiority” (Anzaldúa 1987, 7), Chicanxes in the 1960s and 70s sought an artistic, political, and ideological return to (and return of) the lands known as Aztlán. Historically, the regions of Southern California and the American Southwest are native geographies of the Nahua, forerunners to the Mexicas, or Aztecs. Around 2000 BCE, groups of the Nahua migrated to central Mexico while others remained in Aztlán. Thus, Chicanxes maintain that their lands have been occupied through a calculated history of colonization and genocide. The articulation of the Chicanx people and the reclaiming of Aztlán as their ancestral homeland was further empowered in the drafting of the manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* in Denver, Colorado, in 1969. “The naming of the homeland created a Chicano spiritual awareness,” celebrated Chicano novelist Rudolfo Anaya explains, “which reverberated throughout the Southwest, and the naming ceremony was reenacted wherever Chicanos met to discuss their common identity” (1989, 232). However, the pursuit of inspiring and unifying the diasporic peoples of Aztlán, “el movimiento,” as it is called, has empowered Chicanos at the expense of marginalizing and silencing Chicanas and queer and transgender Chicanxes, thus excluding them from fully participating in the realization of Aztlán.

What makes space important when discussing Chicanx literature is the change in sites of empowerment that has occurred in the late twentieth century. According to Monica Kaup’s article “Architecture in Chicano Literature,” the shift of emphasis in writing was away from land — that is, the ancestral homeland — to the barrio and the house, thus generating new constructions of Latinx identity (1997, 363). Indeed, both the dwelling and the landscape are ephemeral sites, for these can be de/constructed easily (Jackson 1984, 8). By the 1980s, there is a significant shift from the land, which was organized by the old hacienda system of the late nineteenth / early twentieth centuries, to the new house or new location brought about by either “barrioization” or migration. The home is

privileged over the land since the land no longer exists but in myth, hence *el movimiento*'s emphasis on "Aztlán" as the lost homeland (Kaup 1997, 363).

As such, the search for a miraculous and more inclusive Aztlán within the ideological rubble of intracultural discrimination and violence is at the center of John Rechy's *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* (1991). The recovery of one's place/ position in Los Angeles as a material site, a psychological location, and cultural sanctuary is an integral aspect in generating individual and collective narratives within Chicana identity construction. Indeed, "the concept of home seems to be tied in some way to the notion of identity—the story we all tell ourselves and which is also the story that others tell of us" (Sarup 1996, 3). Rechy challenges Los Angeles' cultural cartography and the tensions it creates with identities. As a queer Chicano, he has focused on how gender and sexuality are represented and othered throughout the Latina community. His literature demonstrates, in unique, unconventional ways "how such peoples and spaces can persist alongside hegemonic society within that larger nation-space and in spite of continued oppression, repression, and violence" (Hamilton 2011, 47). As such, *Miraculous Day* reveals the spiritualized spaces of the "suburban barrios" hidden beneath the shadow of freeways, painted along neighborhood streets and walls, and sequestered behind domestic havens of those discredited and devalued within the Chicana community.

In articulating the relationship between space and violence in Chicana literature, one must understand the origins of such violence and the varied definitions and spatial manifestations which have historically generated this trauma: the home, the barrio, the church, the street, or the freeway. In her examination of Chicana identity, Norma Alarcón writes that Chicanas have been historically and culturally incarcerated within the mother/ whore dichotomy since the early sixteenth century, while being denied other identities or voices through which to define themselves on their own terms. While La Malinche/Malintzin, the

noblewoman “given” to Hernán Cortés during the sixteenth century Spanish conquest of what becomes New Spain/Mexico, has symbolized betrayal, the Lady of Guadalupe, on the other hand, who “appears” in the same century, serves as an icon for material nurturing and obedience; both images have served to legitimize and sustain the power and dominance of Latino patriarchy for generations. “Consciously or unconsciously the Mexican/Chicano patriarchal perspective assigns the role of servitude to woman particularly as heterosexual relationships are conceived today and in the past” (Alarcón 1983, 186). The othering role of betrayer to Chicano society manifests itself in many hypermasculine, Chicano narratives, thus cultivating and perpetuating a dominant position of heteronormativity, machismo, and entitlement for the Chicano patriarchy and the Latin American Catholic Church. In contrast, Chicana literature challenges this second-class status in the community’s discourses on gender and sexuality.

In Rechy’s *The Miraculous Day*, Amalia Gómez, a Chicana maid and the novel’s protagonist, criss-crosses the trichotomous borders of the domesticated mother, the criminalized whore, and the suffering “virginal” saint. Her unsuccessful history with husbands and domestic violence has isolated her in many cases. Amalia’s “lush” beauty and her unabashed desire to express her sensuality (Rechy 1991, 4), likewise, renders her both object and Hollywood-like persona, while marking her as a woman with loose morals by the abusive men who enter her life. As she attempts to cultivate a sense of spirituality on her own terms and to seek out a Los Angeles home in which she can nurture her children as a liberated woman, she is, time and again, prohibited from actualizing her dreams and hopes. Because of her status as a divorcee in the eyes of the Catholic Church, she has socially disgraced herself beyond redemption, according to Teresa, her cold and unforgiving mother. The violence, the physical assaults, the verbal abuse, the disenfranchisement and patriarchal control over her body all underscore the marginalization and othering the Chicana experiences in her

community. However, she learns that redemption comes through self-empowerment and agency and not through suffering or victimization. “The question, then, of whether or not Amalia can persist within this world, and thus this novel’s textualization of ‘persistence,’ depends upon altering, for herself as well as for the reader, the role these forces and their world enforce on her and her reaction to them” (Hamilton 2011, 57). She discovers, in fact, that challenging hegemonic powers of domination can reverse the erasure and silencing despite the normalizing endeavors of the Chicano patriarchy, the Church, or the dominant white culture.

Amalia’s desire to keep her family together and to control her own destiny draws her from her home in El Paso, Texas, to the suburban metropolis of Los Angeles. After living in East Los Angeles, for a stint, she escapes the growing gang and drug violence there to a Hollywood bungalow, the site of manufactured dreams and myths, and attempts to secure her position by creating a viable space for her children and herself, a unique place within “the ubiquitous clutches of stucco courts that proliferate throughout Los Angeles” (Rechy 1991, 73). Denied her position in the Chicano Aztlán for being a woman, barred from ritual participation in the Catholic Church for being a *divorciada*, disowned by her mother for “being promiscuous” and having an abortion resulting from rape as a teenager, and stigmatized for being poor and brown, Amalia creates her own miraculous Aztlán in the suburbanized barrio she inhabits.

For Amalia, Los Angeles offers a new life, distanced from the brutality of rape, rejection, and degradation from her childhood home in Texas. Los Angeles was protected by the divine presence and ubiquity of the Catholic pantheon, as Amalia believes. “It would delight her to discover how many streets, plazas, nearby cities are named after saints—Nuestra Señora del Pueblo, San Vicente, Santa Monica, San Diego, San Juan Capistrano. She would come to love the city of angels and flowers and saints’ names” (Rechy 1991, 41). Moreover, because

she has been relegated to the edges of her culture and the dominant system, Amalia insists that a direct encounter with the divine will absolve her of the pain she has endured and the violence and othering which she has long suffered.

To witness a sign from God, then, would elevate her and bring a sense of purpose and hope to her immediate world, she maintains. *Miraculous Day* opens with Amalia awakening with a slight hangover from the evening before to the surreal vision of a vibrant, glowing cross in the sky, high above the omnipresent gaze of the famous Hollywood sign. The dazzling cross is visible “past the screenless iron-barred window of her stucco bungalow unit in one of the many decaying neighborhoods that sprout off the shabbiest part of Hollywood Boulevard” (Rechy 1991, 3). The mundane world in her working-class, suburban neighborhood is suddenly transformed into a sacred space. Hidden from the high, incarcerating walls of the nearby Fox Studio and in the shadow of the Hollywood Freeway, Amalia’s neighborhood possesses nothing of the glamor or filmic magic which resonates with the legacy of Tinsel Town. What Amalia dwells in is merely the palimpsest of a once prosperous and promising suburban ecology eventually abandoned by whites escaping waves of immigrants and the de-territorializing freeway networks of Los Angeles’s sprawl.

In *Miraculous Day*, Rechy reveals an alternative literary image to the suburban topography of Los Angeles. This representation challenges the suburban compositions of earlier depictions of more privileged or fanciful versions of the city. Rather, Amalia’s Hollywood neighborhood underscores the reality of decaying suburbs, neglected and abandoned by the city through the red-lining of poorer districts and blighted by *barrioization*, “the formation of residentially and socially segregated Chicano barrios and neighborhoods” (Villa 2000, 4). The immobilization and decentralization of peripheral communities, like the Chicano one, throughout Los Angeles, further ensured their political erasure, thus rendering them inconsequential to the visual landscape or collective memory of

the city. “Racist spatial practices are thus part of the fabric of the transformation of cities like Los Angeles from formerly Mexican villages to global cities” (Vázquez 2018, 26). This broader cultural amnesia of decaying suburban neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles was also, in part, guaranteed by the “dense landscaping or concrete walls alongside freeway arteries [...which] obstructed the driver’s passing glance at the sights of the city.

This kind of visual screening sustained ignorance of, or indifference to, the surrounding built environment and negated the sense of passing through the city’s landscapes of work and community” (Avila 2014, 213). The evidence of unchecked crime and civic incarceration proliferates through Rechy’s noir-like images and snapshots of a suburban postmetropolis entrapped by economic and ethnic evisceration. Amalia’s neighborhood is one which defies the pockets of privilege and safety historically occupied by the upper classes.

Daily, the neighborhood decayed. Lawns surrendered to weeds and dirt. Cars were left mounted on bricks. Everywhere were iron bars on windows. Some houses were boarded up. At night, shadows of homeless men and women, carrying rags, moved in and left at dawn. And there was the hated graffiti, no longer even words, just tangled scrawls like curses. [...] A few blocks away, on Sunset Boulevard, along a strip of fast-food stands and seedy motels, exaggeratedly painted women paraded the streets. (Rechy 1991, 6, 73)

Nevertheless, Amalia’s ability to detect the miraculous in the dank and dismal portraits of her community provides her with the hope and persistence that if the spatial systems around her can be redeemed, then perhaps she, too, will participate in this redemption. Buying into the mirage of Hollywood, however, where all fantasies are allegedly possible, gives her a sense that her life with her two children, Juan and Gloria, and her live-in boyfriend, Raynaldo, could be different. The idea of upward-mobility, despite her economic status as a maid and a sweat-shop seamstress, resonates with Amalia and underscores the miraculousness of her quotidian landscape.

Still, she was glad to live in Hollywood. After all, that *was* impressive, wasn't it? Even the poorest sections retained a flashy prettiness, flowers pasted against cracking walls draped by splashes of bougainvillea. Even weeds had tiny buds. And sometimes, out of the gathering rubble on the streets, there would be the sudden sweetness of flowers. There were far worse places inhabited by Mexicans and the new aliens. (ibid., 7)

By re-reading the city along her walks, Amalia is able to sense sacredness and preciousness in the darkest of voids, underscoring her desire to map a miraculous Aztlán in her life. This is a psycho-spiritual realm where she becomes visible and relevant not only within the Chicana community but wherever she moves in Los Angeles. Thus, her pilgrimages as a *flâneuse* throughout the heterotopic armature of Los Angeles indicate that Amalia believes in the ancient Nahuatl “‘place in the middle,’” the “*nepantla*,” (Mora 1993, 5). This other place, for her, exists between the degrading identity of La Malinche and the perpetually suffering mother-figure of La Dolorosa – the black-draped image of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Sorrow, whose pain and loss are never redeemed.

Throughout *Miraculous Day*, sacred and secular rituals, images, and icons are replete in the characters' experiences and function as a means for articulating or reconceptualizing the spaces around them. At the center of Amalia's sphere of interactions are the multi-manifestations of Mary, the Madonna, the Immaculate Conception, the Queen of Heaven, Miraculous Mother, Mother of Sorrow, Our Lady of Guadalupe, etc. From television shows, Hollywood films, and street murals to domestic altars, shopping malls, and church niches, the ubiquity of the Virgin serves as a geographical compass that charts Amalia's comprehension of events which (con)textualizes and navigates her movements throughout the heterotopic cartography of Los Angeles.

Amalia derives great pleasure from her walks through the clusters of neighborhoods near her Hollywood home and her work place near Boyle Heights. Along with the growing presence of anonymous police cruisers prowling through

the streets, she is cognizant of the socio-spatial aesthetics of the Chicana communities throughout Los Angeles, despite their diasporic arrangement. Strolling down the sidewalks of these places, Amalia, the Chicana *flâneuse*, begins to understand how these public strips “bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion” (Jacobs 2000, 16). And yet, it is only through Amalia’s wanderings that she can confront this otherwise fragmented and disparate ordering of Los Angeles. She also senses that “[p]eople these days tended to keep separate even though this was still a predominately Mexican-American neighborhood” (Rechy 1991, 111-12). Whereas Amalia’s access to public sites serves to educate her about the disenfranchising hegemony, her mother’s own strolls demonstrate that within a heterotopic realm such as suburban Los Angeles, it is still possible to remain a stranger, cut off from what has been familiar in a rapidly transforming space. “Life in the chaos of heterotopia is a perpetual act of self-definition gradually deterritorializing the individual. The individual becomes an ambiguity” (Morales 1996, 24) and must seek out new methods for orientating oneself with new lexicons for negotiating the cultural, linguistic, and spatial systems continuously othering and redefining the Chicana community.

Soon after [the Gómez family] had moved into their new [Los Angeles] neighborhood, [Teresa] set out to investigate her surroundings. She came back indignant. “Who would have thought I would come to live so near Filipinos and Protestants.” She had discovered that several blocks away from this area that was populated mainly by Mexicans, there were pockets of other groups—Armenians, Asians, a smattering of black people. To Teresa they were all “Filipinos” because there had been some in the tenement where she had lived and they had been Protestants. “I saw stores with names written in God knows what language. Certainly not Spanish. And all those Protestant churches—one with a star instead of a crucifix. (Rechy 1991, 74)

Teresa’s xenophobic (mis)interpretations of the heterotopic Hollywood (sub)urbanized neighborhood are significant because they reveal a model of

cultural and ideological orientation which has weakened the wider Chicana community. Because the members of the collective community have been historically and politically severed from the land and forced into migratory patterns throughout Aztlán, they have been fractured. They have been “made [...] strangers in their own land, not knowing who they are, where they come from, nor where they are going. They fail to understand that identity is not fixed, that nothing is certain in the Southwestern heterotopia border zone” (Morales 1996, 24). Despite the historical and contemporary transformations and in light of the dynamics of a heterotopic realm, “Chicana/os need a cultural foundation, a recognizable cultural place composed of memory, nostalgia, history, mythology, spirituality, tierra, family, the elders’ world” (ibid., 24). A multivalent base comprised of these elements does not so much fix a community of displacement — such as with the Chicana community — as it provides its members with a language enabling them to interpret signs that are only “perceptible by change” (ibid., 22) in the spatio-cultural composition of the neighborhood.

Amalia’s attraction to the countless murals, “paintings as colorful as those on calendars, sprawled on whole walls” (Rechy 1991, 45) and dispersed through the neighborhoods, brings her time and again to a particular piece of work. This one, which she recalls during her tenure in East Los Angeles, depicts a powerful looking Aztec prince flanked by warriors who watch mounted conquistadores emerging from the horizon. An old Chicano notices Amalia’s engrossment and proudly offers a running commentary of the artwork: ““The *conquistadores* are about to subdue the Indians with weapons, as they did, but over there [...] are the *revolucionarios*, who will triumph and bring about *Aztlán*, our promised land of justice”” (ibid., 45). While the old man retells his narrative about historical injustices and violence committed against the community, Amalia can only notice the absence of women in the composition. “Where were they,” she wonders. “Had they survived?” (ibid., 45). The man utters “no mas [no more]” to signify that

Chicanxes will no longer tolerate the socio-political erasure of their “barrios, campos, pueblos, lands, [their] economy, [their] culture, and [their] political life” according to *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (qtd. in Anaya and Lomelí 1989, 2), and this phrase lingers with Amalia, and she finds herself uttering it to herself.

For the old Chicano, “no mas” is the community’s call-to-arms; however, Amalia recognizes it as her own appellation to challenge the silencing of women by the Chicano patriarchy, the Catholic Church, and the white-dominant culture. It is this initial act of resistance to the multi-layers of colonization that, “[i]n memory and cultural movement, Amalia recreates her world” (Leon 1999, 214) and recognizes that *Chicanismo* is not a monolithic ideology, but rather a heterotopic one in which multiple identities can exist and declare agency. This is the threshold to her own miraculous Aztlán.

Rechy, however, reminds us that *Miraculous Day* is still a novel that takes place within a fragmented urban constellation, one in which Hollywood images and simulacral illusions culminate in a whirlpool of Disneyfied spaces and monuments to capitalism and consumption. Furthermore, *Miraculous Day* demonstrates the miraculousness in syncretizing and juxtaposing the cultural wealth of many groups and ideological systems that simultaneously complement, compete with, and contradict one another. “[This novel] is also a place where a vision from God appearing over the Hollywood sign can be just as real, just as comforting to Amalia Gómez—who survives in a world of empty pockets, gang violence and revolving-door husbands—as the bougainvilleas in front of her stucco bungalow” (Easton 1993, 14). Indeed, as Alejandro Morales argues, “[p]eople [throughout the Los Angeles communities] cling to the dream of utopia and fail to recognize that they create and live in heterotopia” (1996, 23). Standing on the corner of Sunset and Western, Amalia wonders if it is possible to misunderstand Marian signs sent to a person. However, Amalia fantasizes that she is called to construct a shrine in the midst of her urbanized stage.

She had imagined that the Blessed Mother had asked her to tell the priests that a chapel must be built on this lot, to replace Carl's Jr., M. Zolotow's All-Week Check Cashing, McDonald's, Tommy's Famous, El Pollo Loco [...] "I understand, Blessed Mother. The chapel must be right here, in this shopping center. (Rechy 1991, 130-1)

The thought of being chosen like this, of being worthy of such a mission, creates a sense of value and purpose within Amalia who fantasizes through the language of media tabloids—"AMALIA GÓMEZ OF HOLLYWOOD CLAIMS VISITATION BY THE HOLY MOTHER!" (ibid., 131)—to rectify her losses and terrify "some of the other men she had known" (ibid., 131) who were cruel to her.

Although most do not experience a first-hand encounter with the Virgin as others have claimed throughout the centuries, "the apparition is the primordial experience that is kept alive in the cultural and psychological memory of the community" (Rodriguez 1994, 47). Indeed, Marian apparitions have long been a spiritual portal for many, allowing generations to participate in a collective consciousness centered on religious renewal, and "Mexican-American women share in the memory of the orientating experience. [In fact, s]ome internalize the memory so that it becomes for them a personal religious experience" (ibid., 47). This process often leads to imbuing a Marian relic, image, or representation with life-like qualities or miraculous abilities. In a Los Angeles church, kneeling intently before a Marian statue, Amalia closely watches its shifting eyes and inspects the statue's body for some sign of acknowledgment or reciprocity.

Amalia placed her hands on her forehead, pressing her palms over her eyes, resuming her prayers, words out of sequence now: [...] *You're a woman, like me!* In reaction against that assaulting thought, Amalia reached for the top of her dress, to raise it still farther. But she didn't—her fingers had brushed her full breasts. She allowed her eyes to flow back to the statue. *Your woman's body is always hidden in the folds of your beautiful dress.* The Blessed Mother had turned away from her. No, the weaving light of candles had created that impression. No, there *had* been a frown on the face, and then the Madonna had looked away. (Rechy 1991, 195, original italics)

Imagining the Virgin Mary as a sentient woman transforms this divine presence into one which is tangible, sensual, and relevant to Amalia's troubled and fractured world. Eyeing another image in the church of Mary holding her dead son further confirms Amalia's connection to Mary's historical experience, for Amalia, too, has lost her oldest son, Manny, to gang culture and alleged suicide in prison. Believing that she has always remained faithful to Mary and to God, Amalia accounts for her own suffering and the sacrifices she has made because of men, family members, strangers, and children in her life. In her state of confession and defense, she realizes how important her living children, Juan and Gloria, are to her as never before. Juan, who propositions other men for money, and Gloria, who now associates with gang members, need a deep sort of love only a devoted mother could give.

Humanizing the Marian experience illustrates that while Amalia is "rejecting the Virgin as the church's embodiment of chastity and hence someone who would condemn her" (Leon 1999, 223), she embraces Mary by redefining her as a tool of affirmation and empowerment. This act designates the Virgin Mary as a model of fortitude, perhaps even resistance, against forces that would otherwise silence a woman's voice and render her invisible. "Against the tremendous potential and limitations of the [Chicano] movement, Chicanas opened up new spaces of participation through fostering a culturally rooted feminism" (Bobout 2011, 114). Like a number of "Chicanas seeking a feminist nationalism" they, as exemplified in Amalia's example, "embraced the strengths and cultural significance of La Virgen but criticized the idealized and passive interpretation of her. These Chicanas created a feminism of their own, by incorporating and reconceptualizing nationalist tropes in a new, more liberationist vision" (ibid., 122). For the difficult road Amalia has been given, she now "*demand[s] a miracle*" (Rechy 1991, 199, original italics) from the Miraculous Mother.

In an instant, *Miraculous Day* transports the reader and Amalia to the sleek and shimmering shopping mall apparatus “at the edge of Beverly Hills” (Rechy *ibid.*, 199). With its dazzling paradoxes of climate-controlled vegetation, gleaming signs and images of whirling color, and its sanitized surfaces, this cathedral of consumption is an architectural and social masterpiece of illusion, committed solely to manufacturing public mingling and “the glory of triumphant capitalism and neo-American living for business” (Lévy 2006, 56). The indoor mall, an answer to the decaying downtown of urban America, has become the Disneyfied version of a Main Street gathering, predicated on hyper-consumption and popularized by its private status as a secure, privileged, and purified experience for family consumers. In reality, this middle-class system of private space seeks to homogenize individuals, and through its litany of consumption along its tiled and waxed streets, “THE HARD ROCK CAFÉ [...] EPISODE ... LAURA ASHLEY ... LENZO OF PARIS [...] EDDIE BAUER ... ABERCROMBIE & FITCH ... PRIVILEGE” (Rechy 1991, 200, 201), the indoor mall fosters a culture of coercive advertising that makes even the “young Mexicans here [look] prosperous and untroubled in this world of chrome” (*ibid.*, 200). Amalia carefully observes these late twentieth century signs and symbols of American culture while strolling through its vortex of floating escalators and translucent mezzanines.

In this illusive space of material dreams, Amalia fantasizes that she has credibility here and belongs to this spectacle of privilege and prosperity. From the vantage point of the escalator, Los Angeles gives the impression that “it was all cleansed by night, turned lustrous by thousands of lights” (*ibid.*, 200), and made linear and unfragmented through the homogenizing lens of the mall. This illusive acumen generated by this spatial façade further magnifies the mis-navigation and misperceptions which occur within the very heterotopic complex of the mall. Because she is exhausted both mentally and physically, Amalia fails to notice that

the shopping patrons who pass her by are bewildered, if not bemused, by her unkempt and desperate looking deportment. Amalia mistakenly enjoys the attention and believes that the surveillance from consumers and security guards alike comes not from ridicule or suspicion, but admiration, if not envy. Like the game she would play with her live-in boyfriend Raynaldo, the one of picking out the house of her dreams while driving through expensive Los Angeles neighborhoods, Amalia “imagine[s] she had come here to shop, [and] exhausted from all she had purchased, would resume her buying” if she could “dredge up the energy” to leave the comfort of the benches (ibid., 201). Along with the other inhabitants of this multivalent space, Amalia’s belief is temporarily suspended like a Hollywood mirage, and she finds herself participating in the cult of consumption that places her, if only psychologically, in alignment with the wider constellations of consumerism that scintillate across the firmament of the suburban metropolis. For a fleeting moment, she is among the privileged and no longer the other.

As she dreams within the simulacral grip of this Disneyfied enclosure, one that “disrupts this unity and juxtaposes several spaces upon a singular stage” (Hamilton 2011, 58), Amalia continues to grow more and more weary, unable and unwilling to go on. While she remains invisible on one level and as someone who does not have purchasing power enough to belong in a privileged space like this, she now becomes cognizant of her othered position as a poor brown Chicana:

She stood in the middle of the mall, aware of herself in this glistening palace. So many people...Did they see her? Yes, they saw a woman who looked out of place, tired, perspiring. But did they see her? She felt invisible [...] as if her life had been lived unseen and in silence filled with unheard cries. [...] At the same moment, she felt the paralyzing fatigue she recognized so well, which came with fear and then surrender. (Rechy 1991, 203)

Stripped of her delusions, Amalia slowly enters a social death as the weights of suffering and the long-sought after miraculous moment of redemption acquire a

lighter, yet somber, resonance that unleashes a chain reaction of private epiphanies. She recognizes that her children have “*been suffering for me, too, because they do love me, and they need me, because without my help they can’t survive, I have to teach them how to survive—if I can find how to myself—If I can find the strength*” (ibid., 203, original italics). This sagacity of maternal resolution, however, does not resurrect her, for she moves on through the mall, taking the escalator down to the ground floor as though descending into the underworld depths of consciousness from the heaviness that continues to deplete her energy and psychological reserves.

However, it takes a sudden violent disruption in the sanctuary of consumption for Amalia to recognize that her own re-scripting of Marian associations can also serve as “[h]idden...or submerged feminist insurgencies, [which] are vital practices within feminism that often go unrecognized” in mainstream feminist discourses (Blackwell 2001, 25, 24). In an explosive rush that causes Amalia to imagine a California earthquake, suddenly “everything was in jagged motion, a whorl of faces and bodies and colors” (Rechy 1991, 204). The monotonous and predictable serenity governing the mall is transmuted instantly into a movie-like set of flashing lights, replete with crouching police officers, fearful patrons, and pending doom: Amalia is taken hostage by a screaming gunman. Her world of suffering, of bearing ethnic, class, and gender marks of discrimination—like a secular stigmata that inscribes her martyr’s status—miraculously dissolves in a public protest: “*“No more!”* she commands, thrust[ing] the man away from her with ferocious strength” (ibid., 205). This proclamation is the long-lasting echo from her moment at the Aztlán mural. “*No más*” is what the old man recollects shouting in protest against the indignity of the community. “*No more!*” to “a thousand policemen [who] gassed us, beat us with their clubs. Yes, men, women, children” (ibid., 45). Like a howl embodying the mytho-historical protests of La Malinche or La Llorona, the pronouncement emerges from Amalia

not only from her inner being, but from the very center of the Chicana community, othered and rendered irrelevant by the Chicano patriarchy, the Church, and the white-dominant culture.

Reclaiming power over her mind and body is integral to Amalia's transformation into an agent of independence and significance. Born into the negation and suffering endured for a life time, Amalia must move toward resurrection and redemption, Rechy believes, through the crucible of androcentric violence and pain. While Amalia lies on the ground between the assailant and the authorities, rounds of ammunition are discharged, and in the end, the gun-man is wounded in the chest. A final shot explodes from his chamber, and in an instant "Amalia saw a beautiful spatter of blue shards that glinted and gleamed like shooting stars as they fell on splotches of [blood] like huge blossoms, red roses," (Rechy 1991, 205). Astonishingly, the young man asks Amalia to bless him as he dies. In an unconventional Pietá image, Amalia cradles a criminal in the midst of a shopping mall and absolves "a man who wanted to kill her" (ibid., 205). The ritual act she performs provides a "startling clarity" for her that signifies an awareness that "she would be blessing away something in her whose death she welcomed" (ibid., 205). It is within the surreal, movie-like set that Amalia believes she sees the Virgin Mary, and "felt resurrected with new life" (ibid., 205). In short, her social protest and benediction release her from the othered identity of a disenfranchised Chicana and from a negated position in society. This subsequently places her on a course of activism that will render her not only visible, but powerful. As a spectacle in the mall, Amalia, as both the interloper of middle-class sites and the priestess of absolution,

[her] public performance represents a process of world reconstruction whereby space and time are symbolically remade through ritual to envision a world that coheres with a condition of marginality—one that sometimes enables religious agents to struggle and to overcome the oppressive conditions of their lives; at other times, it simply allows people to endure oppression. (Leon 1999, 224)

Amalia's actions transform the spatio-temporal site of the Los Angeles mall, intertwining subject and space into a sacred receptacle in which the ritual of empowerment and agency is exercised. This sacred-secular gesture activates Amalia's entire being and raises her beyond the confines of the public theater of which she is materially a part. "For those who participate in the realm of popular religiosity," as Amalia does in the novel's final scene, "religious experience permeates all space and time. There are spaces and times of special strength and power that are part of the religious experience" (Rodriguez 1994, 147-8), and Amalia mandates that she be given control over her own destiny and mode of self-articulation. As a Catholic Chicana, she uses the vernacular of the Church to impart to herself the miraculousness of her experience.

When she finally receives that long anticipated visitation from the Virgin Mary during the novel's final dramatic moments, it is through the flashing lights of news cameras intent on capturing the scene for widespread television consumption. In an instant, the image of Amalia cradling a criminal, arm raised in benediction, becomes yet another Marian portrait in the pantheon of reproductions available for mass-broadcast and religious veneration. Still, on this miraculous day of Amalia Gómez, it is the action of refusing to be colonized and othered while severing oneself from the psycho-physical pains of suffering that is Amalia's true miracle. Redemption is achieved not through victimization nor the suffering and societal negation that has consumed her life, but it is manifest through activism and agency as she no longer recognizes nor accepts an othered status. The alleged appearance of Mary to Amalia alone becomes a cultural catalyst for this activism and an instrument for articulating Amalia's progress and pilgrimage toward her own miraculous Aztlán. The vast array of sites and locations in this heterotopic city—the Hollywood bungalow; the courtyards and alcoves in the churches; the Hollywood sign; the Chicanx murals; the tangled freeways, streets, and sidewalks of barrios—become ritual spaces for Amalia that

reflect a sacred secularity which speaks to her as a Chicana. “Mary’s cult appeals strongly to the oppressed because she gives dignity to downtrodden people and thus renews their energy to resist assimilation into the dominant culture. [...] [T]he cult not only liberates downtrodden peoples but also liberates us from a restrictive idea of God” (Rodriguez 1994, 154-5) and of the othering or self-chastising of the body and mind.

Eradicating and erasing the trichotomy of the virgin/ mother/ whore that has incarcerated and stigmatized Amalia — and other Chicanas — since childhood, enables her to perceive the miraculous Aztlán. This is a state of being more than it is a physical site of political consciousness: “if we are truly living in an era of a new consciousness, we must reach further into our human potential and consider Aztlán a homeland without boundaries” (Anaya 1989, 240). It is also a homeland where Chicanxes are recognized features of the landscape, despite classificatory, sexual, or gendered constructions.

Although it cannot be psychologically erased, the spaces we inhabit as children and adolescents weave together layers of memories from our past and serve in directing, framing, and constituting our present and future. John Rechy’s *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* suggests the racial, cultural, religious, and political spheres which have determined our identities are forged by cyclical acts of violence and leave their marks on the physical and spiritual bodies of the individual and the community. As such, the link between memory and the stigma attached to these violent experiences makes it difficult to break the cycle of wounding and initiate a process that is both healing and empowering.

The legacy and practice of othering which informs all Latinx literatures is an evolving and revolving tension that fosters objectification while inviting revolt. Employing spatial constructions to examine Los Angeles’ Chicana literature is significant in comprehending how the identity of individuals and communities alike change and transform while responding to a history of barrioization. This

can occur with “the increasingly visible presence of multiple social subjects [making] heterotopias of difference more visible” (Cenzatti 2008, 82). Undoubtedly, there is a calculated history of socio-spatial containment of Latinxes, and the uninterrupted, discriminatory design and evolution of Los Angeles is a testament to how barrios can resemble suburbs, yet function as sites of othering. At the same time, however, the ongoing and disruptive “layering of different spaces in the same physical location brings counter-publics in contact and confrontation with each other” (Cenzatti 2008, 83). Essentially, Amalia’s “epiphany [by the novel’s end] is about seeing the world clearly—her coming out of a deep denial about her racial, sexual, and gendered self” (Aldama 2005, 70). Even though she has been prohibited from accessing a suburbanized version of Aztlán because of her stigmatized status, her intersectionality allows her to confront and critique the spaces through which she moves—not simply to “*demand a miracle*” (Rechy 1991, 199, original italics), but to demand recognition and agency.

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Interrogating Identity in the City of Chicago

Geography as Culture in Susan Power's *Roofwalker*

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“I’ve always been Native first and American second ...” (Power 2017, 76). This quote comes from an essay written by Susan Power titled “Native in the Twenty-first Century,” in which Power asks what it means to be Native; particularly, what it means to be Native in a culture and place that denies Native peoples the ability to exist on their own terms. Complications arise when studying the relationship between urban environments and Indigenous identity.ⁱⁱⁱ Within dominant Western thinking there is a tendency to presume that reservations and tribal lands serve as the “only truly comfortable homes” of Native peoples in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere; thus, as Lindsey Claire Smith asserts: “urban environments have not been explored as having any particular cultural force or relevance for Indigenous-centered narratives or for scholarship” (2009, 144). Despite this, there is growing recognition that works written by Indigenous authors that take place in and interact with urban environments are significant.

Roofwalker also by Susan Power, is a collection of stories and histories that juxtaposes fictional and non-fictional writings. In the *Roofwalker* collection, Power demonstrates a nuanced understanding of identity, place, and community, as well as the complicated relationship Native tribes and peoples have with these concepts. Throughout the anthology, stories and histories are set in or reference both Chicago and tribal land in North and South Dakota. These two settings are

simultaneously written as intimately connected and irrevocably fragmented. Power utilizes the physical differences between the two settings as well as the community aspect commonly associated with tribal lands to interrogate Native communities and identities in both her fiction and non-fiction. What Power does not do, however, is condemn urban environments; nor does she inherently praise tribal land. Such dichotomous thinking would be too simple for the reality of contemporary experience and sense of place. In this paper, I will explore two stories from *Roofwalker*, one fiction and one non-fiction, in order to demonstrate the complicated importance of geography in relation to culture, particularly regarding histories of forced relocation and imaginary boundaries. By focusing on the creation of home in Power's work, I show how the urban Chicago setting of these two stories significantly impacts the characterization of the main characters and how they relate to their family and cultural history.

Finding the "Roofwalker"

In "Roofwalker," the titular and opening story of Power's collection, "Grandma Mabel Rattles Chasing [comes] down from the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota to help deliver" the main character, who is born in Chicago—or, more specifically, "in [a] third-floor apartment, which was little more than a chain of narrow rooms resembling the cars of a train" (Power 2002, 5). To avoid having the past cruelties of the white hegemonic medical institution enacted upon her, the main character's mother refuses to follow a hospital and doctor-centered path of childbirth. Instead, the birth of the main character is within the home, which returns childbearing to its original roots and allows the occasion to be a family affair. However, since the birth takes place in the city of Chicago rather than in the ancestral and current homeland of the family, the sense of displacement during the scene is heightened. This displacement is not meant to imply that the family is doomed due to their separation from the Dakotas nor is it meant to argue that life

would have been better for the family if they had stayed on a reservation. Instead, as indicated by the narrator and unnamed protagonist, there is another specific reason for the mother having a home birth rather than giving birth in a hospital, intimately tied to the violence enacted upon Indigenous women on reservations, tribal lands, and beyond.

Although there is a contemporary trend wherein home births are on the rise for Non-Hispanic white women, this increase in popularity did not begin until 2004, two years after the publication of *Roofwalker*. Further, the rate of American Indian women having at-home births, according to the statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has remained relatively stable between the years of 1990 and 2012 (MacDorman, Mathews, and Declercq 2014). These statistics are significant because they solidify the narrative's rejection of modern, white understandings of who is involved in childbirth, where childbirth takes place, and how it is conducted. Even though contemporary white elite women are creating subgroups that support and condone home births, the depiction in "Roofwalker" is not only a precursor to these prevalent subgroups, it also stems from a complicated and traumatic experience of institutions including the hospital. "Roofwalker" is decolonizing in its depiction of birth and explicitly addresses the symbolic and literal violence of the white medical institution against Sioux and other Indigenous women and families: "Grandma Mabel came to help with the delivery because my mother was terrified of going to the huge maternity ward at Chicago's Cook County Hospital. She was convinced that the white doctors would sterilize her after she gave birth, a practice once routine at many reservation hospitals" (Power 2002, 5). The main character's mother is haunted by the traumatic history of violence enacted upon the Sioux people, which follows her throughout her life and in all the geographical spaces that she occupies.

Christopher B. Teuton, in a theory of Indigenous literature that borrows from W.E.B. Dubois, identifies three geographical spaces in which Indigenous

literature takes place: the Symbolic City, the Symbolic Center, and the Symbolic Reservation (Teuton 2009, 45-64). Within Teuton's theory each of these three geographical spaces interact in special ways; Teuton asserts,

The following symbolic geography of Indigenous narratives situates Indigenous experience within two poles, the Symbolic Center and the Symbolic City, which are mediated by a third space, the Symbolic Reservation. The quest for an individual and communal voice that is in conversation with both Indigenous traditions and Western modernity is developed through negotiating this symbolic geography, which illuminates fundamental issues in contemporary Indigenous experience. (Teuton 2009, 46)

Within these three spaces, the Symbolic Reservation is never an untarnished or uncorrupted space. Instead, the Symbolic Reservation is "a site where Indigenous and Western cultural values contest each other in an Indigenous communal context," and although "the Symbolic Reservation exists most obviously on reserves, reservations, and tribal lands in Indigenous literature," the entirety of "North America ... is a site of the Symbolic Reservation, as it is comprised of Indigenous land differentiated only by the degree to which its title is contested by colonial and Indigenous national governments" (Teuton 2009, 50). As mentioned, the Symbolic Reservation exists between the Symbolic Center, which is "both a literal place and a psychic space" that serves as "the space from which a people originate and continue to self-define through culturally specific patterns of thought," and the Symbolic City, which is "not limited to actual urban space" but rather is "expressed whenever and wherever characters engage the colonialism of the West and its supporting values of modernity" (Teuton 2009, 48-49). All of this is significant as it provides, for Indigenous literature and the scholars of this literature, a theory that stresses the inaccuracy of identifying reservations and tribal lands as places of unquestioned tribal sovereignty or as areas that can avoid entirely Western influence and the traumas of colonialism. Power's "Roofwalker," while avoiding an uncomplicated or outright praising of urban environments, indicates the multiplicity of identity and space through the

reference to various issues that occur in all geographical spaces regardless of their legal categories.

Urban environments and reservations or tribal lands, in both the fiction and non-fiction of Power, are never entirely separated from one another, and to be in an urban setting does not inherently separate one from an Indigenous identity or community. As Smith indicates, “Indigenous governments have a stake in what happens in cities for many reasons: large numbers of members are located there; negotiations with provincial, state, and federal governments usually occur there; and cities often span traditional Indigenous homelands, which, in their natural features, may have spiritual and historical significance” (Smith 2009, 151). The lines that separate land legally deemed the property of sovereign tribes from the land legally deemed owned by the United States government are not clear-cut. The communal and spiritual history of Indigenous people does not and cannot abide by legally constructed geography, especially when this legal construction is overseen by colonizing forces.

In this vein, Grandma Mabel’s presence embodies the complicated dichotomy of constructed geography versus the reality of how people and cultures move throughout the world. Grandma Mabel, the only named character in the story, serves as the conduit through which access to the reservation and the past, present, and language of the Sioux is granted to the main character. Furthermore, the naming of Grandma Mabel—specifically the fact that she is given a full name and not just a relationship marker—indicates the main character sees Grandma Mabel as her own person with a life and existence that goes beyond her relationship with her granddaughter. Grandma Mabel is presented as an individual and a powerful one at that, while simultaneously representing the main character’s desire to maintain a connection to the Sioux culture and history of her family.

The main character of “Roofwalker” is, of course, physically separated from the Dakotas, the Sioux tribe, and her grandmother. However, even though

this separation is deliberate on the part of her father and mother, who moved for her father's career writing "proposals for the Indian community," the separation is always at the forefront of the story and is difficult to bear (Power 2002, 9). Furthermore, the physical separation is underscored by the visible manifestation of the main character's separation from her family and heritage. As described in the legend detailing the main character's birth:

As far back as anyone in my family could remember, both sides were Indian—full-blood Sioux on my mother's side and full-blood Sioux on my dad's. Yet I was born with red hair the color of autumn maple leaves. Grandma Mabel looked at me sideways and began to recite stories of the Viking invaders. (Power 2002, 6)

From birth, the red hair of the main character serves as a visible manifestation of the main character's confusion about her own identity. Despite her parents both being "full-blood Sioux," the main character, when examining the woman her father is leaving her mother for, observes, "She's only a part-blood Indian, like me" (Power 2002, 6,12). It does not matter that it is scientifically impossible for her to be only part-blood while her parents are both full-blood; what matters instead is that she is the one with the hair that marks her physically as "other."

The story itself, however, does not depict the main character as someone who exists outside the Sioux tribe or outside her family. Regardless of the red hair—which is as much a haunting of the family in its entirety as it is a haunting of the main character—her primary characteristic is her hunger for her own heritage and the stories of her grandmother. As Grandma Mabel educates the main character about the Sioux traditions, histories, and language, the protagonist not only listens intently, but also unquestioningly believes, in the stories she hears from her grandmother. It is significant that Grandma Mabel implies it is main character's father—not she herself—who is "truly lost", because he, like many others, "try too hard; they think they've found the old-time trail leading them to the heart of our traditions, but if they looked down, I think they would see only

their footprints” (Power 2002, 10). Rather than the main character being the one who is isolated from her familial past and heritage, it is her father who is seen as “lost” due to his inability to understand where he comes from and how he should live his life. Moreover, although her father is “lost,” it is because Sioux and other Indigenous peoples “have gone through many things, and now it’s difficult to find the right road.” It is not because he has willfully denied his family or shown any animosity toward them (Power 2002, 10). Even the main character’s mother explains his leaving by saying: “Just because your father took off on some crazy adventure doesn’t mean he stopped caring about us. He’s just mixed up. He thinks he’s doing the right thing, but he’s forgetting that a Sioux man’s first duty is to his family” (Power 2002, 21). Still, although the father believes he is leaving to “make a difference” by “going back to his own reservation in South Dakota,” the effects of his leaving are immediate and damaging to the family he leaves behind (Power 2002, 11).

The main legend told by Grandma Mabel concerns the roofwalker, “the hungriest of all [Sioux] spirits” who “lived to eat dreams, and when he feasted on the dream of his choice, it always came true” (Power 2002, 24). The roofwalker, as the title of the short story suggests, becomes the most significant manifestation in the story due to the narrator’s equation of the roofwalker with her father. When she first sees the roofwalker with her own eyes, she describes him: “I wasn’t surprised that he looked just like my father, although his thick waist-length hair was trimmed with feathers. The handsome face and the strong arms and torso were my father’s. Only the legs were different” (Power 2002, 26). Despite not having any physical evidence of the spirit’s presence in Chicago, the protagonist cannot find it in herself to doubt the reality of what she sees and the “family legends” that are recited by Grandma Mabel (Power 2002, 26-27). She has direct access, through her own faith and her own belief, to the stories of her

grandmother, particularly that of the roofwalker which plays out in the rest of the story through her attempts to interact with the spirit and the memory of her father.

While the main character's two younger brothers (twins) feel the effects of their father leaving as well, the focus remains on her and her mother. She explains, "That week my mother became her own ghost, and I became more real," signaling a shift in the dynamics of the home as the main character is forced to serve as caregiver to her two brothers and her mother due to the absence of her father (Power 2002, 16). Both at the outset of the story and at its conclusion, the main character falls. The first fall occurs at her birth when her grandmother sees the red hair that marks her as other: "What she saw made her scream, and I slipped out of her fingers like buttered dough. My father caught me. He went down on one knee, and his slim hands with long fingers stretched beneath me like a net" (Power 2002, 6). The second fall, which ends the narrative, mirrors the first; however, the outcome of the second fall is dependent upon the careful reading of the text. The concluding paragraph narrates another fall from "somewhere high enough to test faith, but not so high as to be dangerous" (Power 2002, 27). As she explains, the fall is meant to call the father back to the family—the main character is attempting to use her "blind faith in family legends" to prove to herself that her father can and will be returned to her (Power 2002, 26-27). However, the narration holds within it the caveat that this "blind faith" was held by the main character "when [she] was little," implying that she either grew out of the belief or, at least, became more skeptical of some aspects of the stories and her father's return (Power 2002, 26). Though subtle, this phrase signals that the second fall, unlike the first, did not end with the main character safe in her father's arms. In this instance, the main character is ultimately safe from extensive physical harm, as she carefully considered where the fall would take place, but this is due to her own actions and not those of her family or her father.

Despite the subtle clues that the fall did, in fact, occur and the main character was not saved by her father or the roofwalker, who represent the same being in her psyche, it would be irresponsible to disregard the ambiguity of the story's ending line: "I waited for Dad to catch me, for the roofwalker to throw back his head and open his mouth, letting my dream float up from his throat into the breeze rolling away from Lake Michigan" (Power 2002, 27). The image one is left with is not a failing or broken child who has come to realize her father will not return to her. In fact, whether the main character is caught by her father/the roofwalker is not the point. Rather, what matters is the main character's dedication to her heritage and her family. As mentioned above, her mother explains to her after her father leaves, "he's forgetting that a Sioux man's first duty is to his family" (Power 2002, 21). Although her mother uses the male gender as a qualifier in this statement, the main character embodies the sentiment; at the loss of her father, when her mother must grieve and subsequently leave the household to provide, the main character serves as the new caretaker in more ways than one. She is simultaneously the mother and the father of the home, the solid ground on which the family stands, and most importantly the conduit to the larger history of her family and tribe.

Her sincere and continued belief in the roofwalker and other stories told to her by her grandmother gives her strength and fuels her visions of herself. She is able, through her knowledge of her grandmother's stories, to enact revenge (albeit imaginary) upon her father's girlfriend, whom she sees as the catalyst of his leaving: "I wished I could become a bird of vengeance. I curled my toes inside my sneakers, feeling their terrible grip, and imagined the fierce sweep they would make at that part-blood girl's hair" (Power 2002, 13). Key to this statement is when she addresses her father's girlfriend as "that part-blood girl," implying a distaste for her lack of full-blood heritage alongside the bitterness that comes from her father's impending departure. Despite her earlier assertion that she too is

“part-blood” due to her red hair, or perhaps because of that fact, she now separates herself from the girlfriend with this later assertion (Power 2002, 12, 13). Furthermore, it is significant that she pictures the first attack being inflicted specifically upon the hair of the girlfriend. When she identifies the girlfriend as “part-blood,” the only clue provided to the reader about the appearance of the girlfriend is that her eyes are “muddy green ... the color of the Chicago River” (Power 2002, 12). Likewise, the main character casually refers to the red color of the girlfriend’s hair throughout the short story.

As mentioned, the red hair of the main character creates a physical appearance that does not match stereotypical depictions of those of Sioux descent, particularly those deemed “full-blood.” This explains the main character’s ability to look at the girlfriend and automatically determine that she is “part-blood.” However, the main character reveals her own insecurity when she first identifies herself in the same category then imagines a violent reaction to the girlfriend that involves a direct attack on the girlfriend’s hair. The main character’s decision to target the hair of her father’s girlfriend signals a conflation between the color of her hair and her father’s abandonment of his family. Throughout the short story, the narrator displays negative emotions (albeit in subtle ways) when referring to her hair. She calls the color of her hair a *burden*, one that the rest of her family does not have to bear (Power 2002, 8). Nevertheless, except for the incident that occurs at her birth when Grandma Mabel almost drops her from shock, the other characters who interact with her red hair seem more in awe or indifferent to it. Even the girlfriend does not recognize the main character upon seeing her, asking, “Which one are you?” (Power 2002, 12). Instead of being able to tell by the color of the main character’s hair which child she is, the girlfriend seems unable to see a difference among the protagonist and her siblings. Such a question would not be necessary if her red hair automatically gave her away, or if the red of her hair had been a point of conversation between the father and his girlfriend. In fact, the

father himself seems unconcerned with her hair from the beginning. He writes it off as “different,” but does not go as far as Grandma Mabel, who calls it “the color of the devil” (Power 2002, 6). As the story progresses, however, both the main character’s mother and Grandma Mabel grow accustomed to the red hair of the main character, going as far as to explicitly compliment or lovingly touch the hair. When her mother is explaining the new responsibilities the main character must undertake due to the absence of her father, she becomes distracted by the red hair: “She leaned against me to bury her face in my hair. ‘Boy, it sure smells sweet,’ Mom said, ‘and it’s real pretty. Always was pretty’” (Power 2002, 21). In fact, the main character’s mother compares the red color of the hair to “Black Hills Gold,” stating, “Three different colors woven together” (Power 2002, 21). The red color of the main character’s hair is thus redefined as the narrative progresses to be representative of a sacred landscape rather than of any separation between her physical appearance and her identity as Sioux. Likewise, when Grandma Mabel first tells the main character about the roofwalker the narration draws attention to her red hair once more: “‘Yes, he did,’ she said. She smoothed the hair off my forehead. ‘I dreamed you’” (Power 2002, 25). In this case the main character’s hair is neither a burden nor a curse for the family, rather she is the fulfillment of her grandmother’s dream.

Overall, the main character of “Roofwalker” displays a desire to return to her heritage and be connected to the stories of her grandmother. Prior to her father’s leaving, she does so out of a desire to grow closer to her grandmother. She stresses the importance of Grandma Mabel throughout the narration. It is Grandma Mabel who “was a presence in [her] life even though she returned to the reservation shortly after” her birth (Power 2002, 5, 7). Without Grandma Mabel, she would never have learned the language of her Sioux tribe. Though Grandma Mabel is only physically present for a short time, passing on the Sioux language and tradition is a priority. As she tours the home of her granddaughter she points

to and identifies items around the home using the Sioux language, teaching the protagonist (Power 2002, 22). Despite the light tone of the scene, the image shows a duality in the main character's identity, and a connection that she has to her family that her brothers, at least textually, lack. She is being groomed by her grandmother to take on the position of matriarch, as she is the one being taught the stories and language that she must pass down as it was passed down to her.

Finding the Real Chicago

Moving from the fictional narrative of "Roofwalker" to the nonfiction piece "Museum Indians," Power writes about regularly visiting the museum in Chicago. The museum, Power explains, has within it her "great-grandmother's buckskin dress," and Power and her mother visit this dress to pay their respects (Power 2002, 163). Her mother, while looking at a Picasso painting, states, "He did this during his blue period," and Power subsequently implies that the visits to the museum put her mother in a similar "blue period" as she is forced to see family belongings placed in an exhibit that neither accurately describes the life of her great-grandmother nor pays tribute to Indigenous ways of life (Power 2002, 162). Due to this, and due to a narration that focuses in on the mother's grief in the city, it seems that there is a feeling of regret in the mother at leaving her family's home and settling down in Chicago. Furthermore, Power recounts her mother's interactions with a buffalo near the buckskin dress, which she talks to periodically on her visits; "'You don't belong here,'" her mother says, "'I am just like you, ... 'I don't belong here either. We should be in the Dakotas, somewhere a little bit east of the Missouri River. This crazy city is not a fit home for buffalo or Dakotas'" (Power 2002, 164). Her mother has a complicated relationship with the environment in which she lives; more specifically, the urban environment. Power, however, is rooted in the urban city of Chicago. The story ends with her explaining, "I take my mother's hand to hold her in place. I am a city child,

nervous around livestock and lonely on the plains. I am afraid of a sky without light pollution—I never knew there could be so many stars. I lead my mother from the museum so she will forget the sense of loss. ... I introduce my mother to the city she gave me. I call her home” (Power 2002, 164-165). Power’s story does not reveal a girl who is desperate to reconnect with her homeland. She feels connected to her homeland because her homeland is not the Dakotas but, rather, Chicago.

As Teuton states, “It is within the Symbolic Reservation that new, alternative narratives to the discourses of colonial dominance and Western modernity may be imagined and put to use” (Teuton 2009, 50). In both “Museum Indians” and “Roofwalker” the protagonist—whether it be the unnamed main character of “Roofwalker” or Power in the nonfiction “Museum Indians”—exists in the space of the Symbolic Reservation. The Symbolic Reservation, Teuton insists, can only be used effectively when “characters ... become fluent in the languages of both the Symbolic Center and the Symbolic City, moving back and forth between cultural locations and vocabularies” (Teuton 2009, 53). In “Museum Indians,” Power proves fluent in both of these symbolic geographical locations. She, like her mother, feels connected to a larger identity. She serves as her mother’s “small shadow and witness,” and she attends a number of events with her mother that center around Indigenous political rights and freedoms (Power 2002, 161). Although Power describes herself as “the timid daughter who can rage only on paper,” she is always depicted as proud of where she has come from and aware of her own complicated relationship with the world around her (Power 2002, 161). Likewise, in “Roofwalker,” the unnamed protagonist, despite her love of her grandmother and her grandmother’s stories, can be a part of the stories and legends within the city; she does not have to return to tribal lands for her connection to be strong. Instead, as mentioned earlier, the roofwalker and other characters from her grandmother’s stories come to her (Power 2002, 5-27).

As Powers claims in “Native in the Twenty-First Century,” the presence (or absence) of the roofwalker and other spirits in her stories do not make them more or less realistic: “It’s not ‘magical realism’ to see how time resists those easy straight lines. Can’t you see how the past shapes the present and the future? How we live what our grandfathers said and our grandmothers sang?” (Power 2017, 76). Seeing “how the past shapes the present and the future” is the key to both “Museum Indians” and “Roofwalker,” particularly with a focus on communal ties that are created through familial bonds and shared heritage.

Mishuana Goeman, in “(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women’s Literature,” explains, “critical Native feminisms will reassess and assert spatial practices that address colonial mappings of bodies and land and remap our social and political lives according to cultural values and contemporary need” (Goeman 2008, 295). Although Goeman primarily discusses Esther Berlin’s work, Power likewise attempts to “(re)map” the geographies in her writing in her collection *Roofwalker* and elsewhere. In “Museum Indians,” Power claims that the city “belongs to” her because she had free range within it as a child (Power 2002, 161). Similarly, the main character of “Roofwalker,” claims ownership of the Chicago home in which she resides. She does not appear frequently outside of this home and within it she grows, develops, and learns. Each story, thus, provides female characters an ownership of the settings around them, and in both stories the female characters (in the case of “Museum Indians,” the only characters) take charge of the narrative. There is no question of their agency. Despite the seemingly stereotypical setting of the home in “Roofwalker,” and the focus on the mother’s place in it, it is the power of Grandma Mabel and the events that conclude the story, which lead the protagonist to learn to have faith in herself. That she does not rely on her father or another male figure allows for a redrawing of social norms and traditions that place women in a position of prominence.

What Power calls for in both stories as well as the entirety of her *Roofwalker* collection, is what Teuton also describes in his theory of symbolic geographies and what other Native scholars call for in their work as well: a new way of shaping Indigenous identity that incorporates an understanding of how colonizing forces have influenced and continue to influence every corner of the world. However, the call includes a demand that this identity not disavow the traditional aspects of various Indigenous cultures, and not ignore the colonialization and westernization of concepts and spaces. To rethink and reshape an identity should not mean ignoring, forgiving, or forgetting past traumatic experiences. Power's work manages to fulfill the above demands, particularly through her tendency to approach uncomfortable topics about identity and place in her work, and her inclusion of unanswerable questions, particularly when these questions involve what it means to be Native and how one can both fit into Indigenous modes of being, while not ignoring the violence and change brought about by colonization.

In "Roofwalker," the indeterminate conclusion creates ambiguity in the story, as a sign of the success of the protagonist. She remains always in both worlds: the world of Chicago and the world of "family legend" (Power 2002, 27). This enables the retention of her heritage and the Sioux culture of her family while also allowing her to come to terms with her own identity; in a way forgiving herself for the color of her hair and accepting her father's abandonment. Without the crisis that results in her fall at the end of the story there would be no moving past the traumatic experience of her youth. The "test[ing of] faith" that occurs is less about the outcome, as stated earlier, than it is a testing of herself and her dedication and trust in the roofwalker and Grandma Mabel. On the surface it may seem to break or reveal broken familial ties with the father, as he is not there to catch her, but upon further examination this fall simply offers closure on that section of her life, which in turn opens new opportunities.

New opportunities are also a big part of “Museum Indians.” Power is unlike her mother; she does not see herself as the loud and powerful political force that her mother embodies. Rather, she “rage[s] only on paper” (Power 2002, 161). There is no indication that either her mother’s or her own method is the better option. Power lovingly describes the actions of her mother and idolizes her for not only the life she has given her and also the life she leads herself. “She is so tall, a true Dakota woman; she rises against the sun like a skyscraper,”... “and when I draw her picture in my notebook, she takes up the entire page” (Power 2002, 161). In the narrative, Power seems, at first, to discount or at least belittle her ability to only show her anger and emotions in writing rather than in person, as her mother does. However, the simple fact that her “raging” is eventually published and read by Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers alike reveals the decolonizing power of writing. Two paths of resistance are presented within the text, and the fact that neither is prioritized is significant. No one form of decolonization is privileged as greater, or more powerful, than the other. Each is necessary to successfully navigate Teuton’s Symbolic Reservation (Teuton 2009, 53).

Claire Lyndsey Smith reminds those studying Indigenous literature in North America that “there is no ‘post’ to the colonized status of Indigenous nations within North America” (Smith 2009, 147). As anyone who claims to be a scholar of Native Studies must keep in mind, occupation of the land that once rightfully belonged to various tribes of Indigenous peoples continues to this day without an end in sight. Tribal sovereignty is never a guarantee and can be dissolved at any time, although pushback and resistance would obviously occur. Just as “there is no ‘post,’ “there also is no going back, no pure and untainted return. Instead, what Power provides in her collection of what she terms “Stories and Histories”, and what is often directly called for or hinted at in most Native Studies scholarship, is a combination of resistance and acknowledgement of the above facts.

How Power comes to this conclusion, and what is displayed in “Museum Indians” and “Roofwalker,” comes primarily from in-depth and complex negotiations of community and belonging. As discussed throughout this paper, familial ties and familial relationships are emphasized in the two pieces, mostly because it is through these familial ties that community and belonging is established in relation to Indigenous culture. However, this is not and cannot be separated from the spatial aspects of community and the effect of geography on family and culture. Power in “Museum Indians” is, in fact, a “city child” (Power 2002, 164). The geography and the psychical location where Power feels comfortable is Chicago, and not the Standing Rock Reservation where her mother was born (Power 2002, 161). Her mother feels a disconnect with the place that surrounds her that she herself does not, and this results in Power feeling as though it is her responsibility to ensure that her mother is happy within the city (Power 2002, 162). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Power does not see the colonizing aspects of her home, even at a young age. Rather it is a recognition that home and location are not permanently tied and that Indigenous identity is not rooted in the physical space that one calls home. Still, Power grew up in Chicago because her mother came in search of work, and it is made clear that the financial situation that Power and her mother found themselves in was not one of wealth or even comfort. Although her mother did the best she could according to Power, it is clear from the narration that times were hard in terms of finances, both on and off the reservation (Power 2002, 161-162). Just as it was for the protagonist of “Roofwalker,” Power’s childhood and the physical location of that childhood is determined directly by monetary needs of the family, decisions of the parent(s), and the direct targeting of Indigenous people for (usually) lower paying jobs in the city.

The geography of “Roofwalker” is likewise significant because it keeps the protagonist’s relationship with her grandmother from developing as

completely as it could if they lived in the same space. When Grandma Mabel is visiting the family, as discussed earlier in the paper, the grandmother and granddaughter can enact a relationship centered on teaching and learning, particularly the learning of language (Power 2002, 22-24). While there is the possibility that some teaching could be done over the phone when they call one another, the main character displays regret that the phone calls can never last as long as she would want them to (Power 2002, 8). The physical distance between the two characters directly affects their ability to interact with one another as they would if they were within the same space.

Physical geography, therefore, does effect community and belonging in the narratives through its interference in the relationships of characters and their ability to understand or be near one another. This cannot be avoided, even within Power's fiction, and the borders and boundaries of these geographical spaces are highlighted by the tense and ever-changing political relationship between the sovereign nations and tribes (some but not all federally recognized) within the United States and the United States government, which historically ignored and abused Indigenous nations and peoples. Thus, in the fiction and nonfiction of Power, geography, politics, and interpersonal relationships all combine, to create convoluted understandings of community, particularly for Indigenous communities that operate on all of these levels while widely being viewed (if inaccurately) as an ever-diminishing minority population.

The protagonist of "Roofwalker" certainly struggles with her own identity in its many forms: as a red-headed Sioux, as a daughter to her father and mother; as a granddaughter; as an Indigenous girl growing up in Chicago. All of these identities conflate, mesh, and counter one another in ways that prove the impossibility of self-definition in homogenous terms. Power, herself, deals with this because she is both Dakota on her mother's side and white European on her father's: "[I] felt like a Dakota spy perched at my listening post to gather

information on what the dominant society *really* felt about us, whatever term it is we're using now, 'minorities,' 'people of color,' the tired, inadequate labels that obliterate the rich histories of America's other-class citizens" (Power 2017, 76). If the protagonist of "Roofwalker" did not have red hair, or if Power did not have a white father and a Dakota mother, community and identity would still be just as intense and complex a question, but it is through the manifestations of the multiplicity of identity that the stories and histories of Power's collection underscore just how ambiguous community can be.

Power's attempts, in *Roofwalker*, to combine fiction and non-fiction in a way that develops and continues serious conversations about identity and past traumas within the United States creates complicated depictions of living and existing as an Indigenous person and as a woman. In "Roofwalker" and "Museum Indians," she examines the ways that geography and family coincide and conflict with one another. Stories and histories are told, but there are no clear answers and there are no obvious solutions. A part conclusion offered by Power is that there is more than one way to live and there is more than one place. Community becomes communities; physical communities, cultural communities, and more. In Power's fiction and non-fiction there is a plethora of ties that people create with the areas and communities that surround them. Power shows in her family histories the reality that she mimics in her fiction, and this provides a deeper look at how urban geography influences the way that Indigenous people write, speak, and think about their place in the United States, in their tribes, and in their communities.

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ⁱⁱⁱ For more on this topic, see Bonita Lawrence, *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Lincoln: U. of Nebraska P., 2004); Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 2008); and Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: U. of Minneapolis P., 1999).

Uncanny Retrofuturism and Urban Otherness

Victorian London as Steampunk Cyber-City

Helena Esser

Very soon the face of London begins to convulse into a Freemason's wetdream of the City as a monologue of temples: parks and homes are demolished to make way for entrepreneurial edifices decorated with pharaonic runes and dedicated to Progress: new thoroughfares slice through the heart of town, steam gurneys choke the roadways and poison the air; and everywhere one can hear the *sound* of the new order being born. (Clute 1991, 244)

Science fiction critic John Clute describes how Bruce Sterling and William Gibson's 1990 steampunk novel, *The Difference Engine*, transforms the imagined geography of London as enshrined in collective memory (cf. Assmann 2008), into what Umberto Eco calls a *uchronia*: imagining "what would have happened if what really did happen had happened differently" (Eco 1985, 174). In doing so Sterling and Gibson radically re-structure the once familiar urban environment into something both new and anachronistic. Clute, notably, draws attention to the physicality of urban structures, as the "literary *place*", a "virtual world that interacts in a modular fashion with the world of reference" (Westphal 2011, 101) is defamiliarised into what he terms a "heterotopic interference", a space of alternative history (ibid., 104). Gibson and Sterling's London, re-mapped and re-imagined, becomes a never-was, an Other London, a *steampunk* London. It is a London that creatively mobilises speculation and anachronism to re-evaluate Otherness and identity in new ways through the prism of urbanity.

Anachronistic re-constructions are an intrinsic part of the steampunk mode, which Mike Perschon has defined as a tripartite aesthetic which assembles an eclectic neo-Victorian collage infused with technofantasy and retrofuturism (Perschon 2012, 12). We may now find our newly imagined “Victorian” London teeming with airships, Babbage Engines, and automata. In light of the Anglo-centric implications of the term “Victorian”, Perschon has recently revised his vocabulary from “neo-Victorian” to “hyper-Vintage” (2018, 2-3). Considering, however, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewelyn’s seminal and field-defining definition of “neo-Victorian” as fiction which must “in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*” (2010, 4 original emphasis), and dealing expressly with (re-)imaginings of London in the nineteenth century, I will employ the term “hyper-Victorian” instead to denote acceleration and excess.

Through its speculative, and often counterfactual collage, inspired, in the words of the Catastrophone Orchestra and Arts Collective, by the “smog-choked alleys of Victoria’s duskless empire” (2006, 5), steampunk re-creates the Victorian city as retro-speculative playground, disrupting and re-mapping the urban imaginary. “Our mental and cognitive mapping of urban reality, and the interpretive grids through which we think about, experience, evaluate, and decide to act in these places, spaces, and communities in which we live” (Soja 2000, 324). As such, the steampunk city not only interrogates the city as an externalised structure which equally maps our collective, imagined ‘self’ by creating as well as harbours the ‘other’, it also examines the city’s own potential for Otherness, framing past and present as potential self and other. In this article, I want to explore how steampunk fiction may creatively harness an urban imaginary of Victorian London in order to re-evaluate identity, alterity, and hybridity through the metaphor of city.

Steampunk, with its recombinant mode, holds the potential for a wide

spectrum of storyworlds, ranging in tone from escapism and nostalgia to radical ecocriticism (cf. Siemann 2016). I will focus here on *The Difference Engine* and S.M. Peters' novel *Whitechapel Gods* (2008) and the way they re-imagine Victorian London infused by cyber-technology, seeing that, as Tom Gunning posits "discourses shap[e] how we perceive and use technology, while technologies function not simply as convenient devices, but refashion our experience of space" (Gunning 2003, 51).

Different Engines and City Circuits

In *The Difference Engine*, cyberpunk heavyweights William Gibson and Bruce Sterling abandon the stylish, but gritty postmodern hyper-cities of the digital future for Victorian London, but also disregard both Victorian and neo-Victorian (or psychogeographical) traditions of (re-)writing London as a haunted Gothic city (cf. Mighall 1999, Wolfreys and Gibson 2000, Wolfreys 2002, or Luckhurst 2002). Considering the recourse to the industrial age, we must ask why it does not tap into the wealth of available Gothic tropes or conjure up the endlessly haunted cityscape. In order to answer this question, we must first trace how the novel re-writes the urban imaginary.

In the storyworld of the novel, Babbage's Engine is successfully built and induces a radical paradigm shift which transforms society into a meritocracy dominated by Lords Darwin, Huxley, Babbage, and Brunel. It inscribes itself into the cityscape: South Kensington teems with Scientific Palaces as urban space and alternative history are (re-)built in tandem. Control over topography here equals control over cultural memory and imaginative geographies (cf. Said 1978). Nowhere is this more clearly embodied than in the Central Statistics Bureau, an institution profiting from "a full-blown information order, complete with massive databases on citizens, surveillance apparatus, photo IDs, credit cards, rapid international data transmission via telegraph [...]" (Clayton 2003, 110). The

Statistics Bureau is a vast pyramid “squatted solidly in the governmental heart of Westminster” (Gibson and Sterling 1990, 144) and a space of socio-political resonance. Its pseudo-Egyptian architecture, exemplified also in the “fortress-doors, framed by lotus-topped columns and Briticized sphinxes, loom[ing] some twenty feet in height” (ibid., 145), hints at the godlike, central power of the pharaohs and ancient, perhaps even spiritual knowledge, kept hidden and guarded there. Here, in divisions named “Quantitative Criminology”, “Deterrence Research” (ibid., 149), or “Criminal Anthropometry” (157), data is collected on “[e]veryone who’s ever applied for work, or paid taxes, or been arrested” (160). “We naturally keep a brotherly eye on the telegram-traffic, credit-records, and such” (152) says one head of division to Mallory, our focal character, with a nod to 1984’s all-seeing Big Brother (cf. also Jagoda 2012).

The Bureau’s physical character likewise enacts its functional demands: On the outside, it is haphazardly “riddled top to bottom with thick black telegraph-lines, as though individual streams of the Empire’s information had bored through solid stone” (Gibson and Sterling 1990, 145). Inside, every space and every behaviour is subservient to meticulous cleanliness, as a single crumb or speck of dust might contaminate the “giant identical Engines, clock-like constructions of intricately interlocking brass, big as rail-cars set on end” (ibid., 156). Everything inside this space, from the “dry and static” (147) atmosphere to the clerks on wheeled boots, shooting up and down the corridors delivering decks of punch cards like data in an information circuit, seems to be an extension of the engines at the building’s core. As a windowless, dustless, highly efficient structure in which humans are dwarfed and determined by looming, awe-inspiring machinery, the Bureau reads as a gigantic processor of human information. It is installed at the primal intersection of an urban infrastructure from which it collects its data. The city itself, by extension, is configured as one vast information-processing machine and in it human interactions, from telegrams and telegraphic

communication, to arrest, and employment records, act as data.

Unresolved tensions overheat this ultimately unstable processor, as the ‘Great Stink’, a historical eco-catastrophe, erupts over the city. Mallory envisions Darwin’s earthworms, “always invisibly busy underfoot, so that even great sarsen-stones slowly sank into the loam” as a distinctly Victorian allegory for the streams of data traversing the city, “churning in catastrophic frenzy, till the soil roiled and bubbled like a witches’ brew” (148). This produces a demonic energy that eventually transforms the city into a distorted, apocalyptic vision. We encounter “a canopy of yellow haze” hanging

above the city in gloomy grandeur, like some storm-fleshed jellied man-o-war. Its tentacles, the uprising filth of the city’s smokestacks, twisted and fluted like candle-smoke in utter stillness, to splash against a lidded ceiling of glowering cloud. The invisible sun cast a drowned and watery light. (205)

The image of the “storm-fleshed” tentacle, described by Roger Luckhurst as “that limb-tongue suggestive of absolute alterity” (2017, 1054), with its somewhat Lovecraftian imagery, alerts us to the increasing Otherness of the cityscape as its designated urban functions break down. Its networks are congested by traffic, its citizens give way to animalistic frenzies of looting and riot, and the urban machine descends into “roiling chaos” (Gibson and Sterling 1990, 273). Mallory becomes overwhelmed by the city’s utter, unfathomable vastness:

It was a very weariness of London, of the city’s sheer physicality, its nightmare endlessness, of streets, courts, crescents, terraces, and alleys, of fog-shrouded stone and soot-blackened brick. A nausea of awnings, a nastiness of casements, an ugliness of scaffoldings lashed together with rope; a horrible prevalence of iron street lamps and granite bollards, of pawn-shops, haberdashers, and tobacconists. The city seemed to stretch about them like some pitiless abyss of geologic time. (ibid., 131)

His vision of London is one of an eternal, a-chronic physical structure, man-made and yet also independent from, and eerily devoid of, humanity. Through Mallory, we the readers, become susceptible to the inherent Otherness of urban structures. Urban space is disassociated from its purpose and its meaning.

Consequently, courts, streets, and shops become grotesque when deserted, and we are left to contemplate the newly strange cityscape as an illegible, unknowable labyrinth stretching endlessly through time and space. In his moment of cosmic dread, Mallory perceives the city as an indifferent, Other entity, and imbues it with faint notions of sentiment; it is nauseating, nasty, and uncanny. The urban environment itself, decoupled from the self, becomes alien. However, this is merely one stage in a larger process of transformation which fully realises the city's speculative potential for embodying Otherness. Soon we realise that this is but a foreboding glimpse at a larger truth hidden beyond the city, as the narrative voice begins to rise above and then merge into it in a meta-narrative moment of self-awareness:

Recede.
Reiterate.
Rise above these black patterns of wheel-tracks,
These snow-swept streets,
Into the great map of London,
Forgetting (450)

This sudden dissolution of our mediative tether is performed through a movement away from the concrete structure of the street and the urban traces of wheel-tracks, into the more abstract realm of the map. This illustrates how literary urban space can make visible interconnections and inter-relations, such as the Statistics Bureau which acts as a gigantic processor, but may also provide an imaginative geography of confusion, disorientation, and potential alienation. This is most clearly articulated in the final section of the novel, called "Modus", in which, as Gibson explained in a 1991 interview, the narrative reveals itself as "a long self- iteration as this thing attempts to boot itself up, which it does in the final exclamation point. [...] But, yeah, the author of the book is the narratron; it's sitting there telling itself a novel as it studies its own origins" (Fishlin, Hollinger, et. al. 1992, 10).

The city is a vast and uncanny entity whose networks resemble

information circuits. It is not merely a visualisation of data flow in a cityworld transformed by burgeoning computer technology, but in fact the vehicle through which the city self-actualises into a sentient Artificial Intelligence: the entity “narratron” of Gibson’s description. The final scene, in which Ada Byron, “Enchantress of Numbers”, looks into a mirror and sees London in 1991, illustrates this:

It is 1991. It is London. Ten thousand towers, the cyclonic hum of a trillion twisting gears, all air gone earthquake-dark in a mist of oil, in the fractioned heat of intermeshing wheels. Black seamless pavements, uncounted tributary rivulets for the frantic travels of the punched-out lace of data, the ghosts of history loosed in this hot shining necropolis. Paper-thin faces billow like sails, twisting, yawning, tumbling through the empty streets, human faces that are borrowed masks, and lenses for a peering Eye. And when a given face has served its purpose, it crumbles, frail as ash, bursting into a dry foam of data, its constituent bits and motes. But new fabrics of conjecture are knitted in the City’s shining cores, swift tireless spindles flinging off invisible loops in their millions, while in the hot unhuman dark, data melts and mingles, churned by gear-work to a skeletal bubbling pumice, dipped in a dreaming wax that forms a simulated flesh, perfect as thought- (Sterling and Gibson 1990, 485)

In this vivid, hyper-real vision, city and Engine become indistinguishable, then synonymous when the narratron realizes what it sees is “not London—but mirrored plazas of sheerest crystal, the avenues atomic lighting, the sky a super cooled gas, as the Eye chases its own gaze through the labyrinth, leaping quantum gaps that are causation, contingency, chance” (ibid., 486). London becomes a cyber-city, putting into play Christine Boyer’s notion of the CyberCity which “turns the reality of time and place into an imaginary matrix of computer nets electronically linking together distant places around the globe and communicating multilinearly and nonsequentially with vast assemblages of information stored as electronic codes” (Boyer 1996, 14).

This is only fitting considering that “there has been a predilection for drawing a parallel between the virtual space of computer networks and post-urban places of disorder and decay” (ibid., 14) ever since Gibson’s seminal novel *Neuromancer* (1984) conceived of cyberspace as

a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, [...] A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights receding... (Gibson 1984, 59)

Whereas Boyer's *CyberCities* are real-world spaces theorised in abstract terms, Gibson and Sterling literalise the cyber-city as their fantastic Victorian London increasingly dissolves into informational patterns in a process of self-recognition. This is enacted, all through the novel, through the metaphor of city, operating as a visual analogy for space, movement, data, and patterns out of which the "Eye" finally emerges sentient:

In this City's center, a thing grows, an auto-catalytic tree, in almost-life, feeding through the roots of thought [...] up, up, toward the hidden light of vision,

Dying to be born.

[...] The Eye at last must see itself

Myself...

I see:

I see,

I see

I

! (486)

This is a vision worthy of two cyberpunk authors: City and computer become allied, then intertwined as fellow non-human entities, both human-made yet fundamentally Other. They are seemingly legible in their patterned structures and infrastructures, acting as circuits, yet are ultimately unknowable. Both the city and the computer, the novel suggests, contain secret potentials for autonomy and define our lives in ways as yet invisible to us. But why (re-)construct an alternative genealogy of computer history set in Victorian London to enact such a cyber-city? Why shift gears towards an industrial paradigm? The answer, I want to suggest, lies in steampunk's approach to the Victorian design aesthetic and technology.

My Machine, my Comrade?

“Steampunk’s key lessons are not about the past”, claims Sterling in his *User’s Guide to Steampunk*: “They are about the instability and obsolescence of our own times” (Sterling 2012, 12). This statement becomes particularly interesting if we consider that steampunk, a term half-jokingly coined by K.W. Jeter in reference to cyberpunk in 1987 (cf. Gross 2007), was first consciously being written as neoliberal governments re-aligned historical narratives (cf. Margaret Thatcher’s infamous “Victorian Values”), and the industrial paradigm ended with the decline of the Rust Belt in the US and the closing of mines in the UK.

Since then, however, steampunk has grown into a diverse subculture and active maker scene. The collective Obtanium Works driving the Neverwas Haul, a Victorian House on wheels, across Burning Man Festival and Jake von Slatt’s computers, re-furnished in Victorian brass-and-gold design, are but two examples of how steampunks re-purpose an industrial (hyper-)Victorian aesthetic for their fantastic creations (cf. Bowser and Croxall 2010, Forlini 2010, Barber and Hale 2013, Danahay 2016). Behind this “funereal theatre” that selectively resurrects “the dandified gear of aristocrats, peculiar brass gear, rather stilted personal relationships, and elaborate and slightly kinky underwear” (Sterling 2012, 12), however, lies a quest to re-capture a knowability of the technology that surrounds and defines us. In a much-quoted manifesto, the Catastrophone Orchestra proclaims:

First and foremost, steampunk is a non-luddite critique of technology. [...] It revels in the concrete reality of technology instead of the over-analytical abstractness of cybernetics. [S]teampunk machines are real, breathing, coughing, struggling and rumbling parts of the world. They are not the airy intellectual fairies of algorithmic mathematics but the hulking manifestations of muscle and mind, the progeny of sweat, blood, tears and delusions. The technology of steampunk is natural; it moves, lives, ages and even dies. (Catastrophone Orchestra 2006, 4)

In an attempt to “rediscover the inherent dignity of created objects”

(Calamity 2007, 27), steampunks humanise and revel in technology that can be experienced through the senses - seen, heard, and touched- in opposition to the streamlined digital black boxes that refuse us users access or agency over their inner workings. Their “hulking manifestations of muscle and mind” promise accessibility and excitement through their levers, gears, and boilers. As Rebecca Onion explains: “Through the recovery of the everyday danger of interacting with volatile objects, steampunk practitioners desire to re-engage with the physical world, subverting the sterile and safe relationships they perceive to exist between people and objects in contemporary society” (Onion 2008, 151). “We love what our devices do, but they’re cultural blanks”, states James Carrott. “They’re empty. If you drop your smartphone in the toilet, it goes from magical communication node and life repository to useless piece of glass” (Carrott 2013, 105).

Alienated by the minimalist objects of the digital age, steampunks seek to redeem the fundamental Otherness of such technology, invisibly alive and uncanny, through re-encoding machines in physical forms that at least simulate kinship and accessibility through physicality (cf. Ferguson 2011, Huxtable 2013). Such a yearning for tangibility and knowability responds to postmodern anxieties about disembodiment, posthumanism, and a perceived lack of authenticity in the age of mass produced commodities. By reclaiming the creative process of making and building knowledge communities, steampunks seek to resist the consumer culture in which only a hegemony of experts may operate beneath the impermeable surfaces of digital devices (cf. Boswer and Croxall 2010, Forlini 2010, Huxtable 2013). Turning instead to fantastic, self-fashioned metaphors and impossible, alternative worlds, steampunks re-purpose the “weird and archaic” (Sterling 2012, 13), yet reassuringly physical Victorian aesthetic in order to negotiate boundaries in human-machine relationships. As Katherine Hayles notes in her seminal study: “When information loses its body, equating humans and computers is especially easy, for the materiality in which the thinking mind is

instantiated appears incidental to its essential nature” (Hayles 1999, 2). As we are “compelled daily to face the breakdown of the distinction between the mechanic/technological and the organic/biotic” (Orbaugh 2002, 436) in our use of social media, navigation systems, intelligent cars, drone technology, or simply devices such as “Alexa”, steampunk relocates the debate about self-hood, alterity, and hybridisation with the Other back into a physical realm. As such, steampunk is engaged in an unending (re-)negotiation of the fundamental Otherness of technology.

Similarly, Sterling and Gibson translate the uncanny possibilities inherent in cyber-technology back into an (imagined) re-embodied, physical city, into busy urban networks, appropriately looming architecture, and towering, sublime Difference Engines. In doing so, digital processes and possibilities become visualised in a defamiliarised, hyper-Victorian aesthetic which, in this case, relies on the urban imaginary of Victorian London as its conduit. The once familiar Victorian industrial aesthetic has become strange, if not other, in the digital age, but steampunk productively re-combines both: Here, the aesthetic of an earlier industrial paradigm becomes an evocative shorthand for the hyper-Victorian Other, and as such opens up possibilities to creatively re-examine how notions of Otherness may migrate across temporal and spatial axes through the imaginary of the steampunk city.

Urban Gothic, Marxist Body Horror, and the Cyber-City

Whitechapel Gods, too, is concerned with human identity in the (hyper-)Victorian city, especially in the face of transformative cyber-technology and capitalist production. In its fantastic re-construction of Victorian Whitechapel, the novel relies on the resonance and legacy of Victorian narratives about London, and the East End in particular. Leading us into the text is a quotation from Arthur Morrison’s 1889 essay on Whitechapel for *The Palace Journal*:

A horrible black labyrinth, thick many people, reeking from end to end with the vilest exhalations; its streets, mere kennels of horrent putrefaction; its every wall, its every object, slimy with the indigenous ooze of the place; swarming with human vermin, whose trade is robbery, and whose recreation is murder; the catacombs of London darker, more tortuous, and more dangerous than those of Rome, and supersaturated with foul life. (quoted in Peters 2008, 5)

Whereas this colourful description steeped in Gothic rhetoric forms part of Morrison's attempt to dismantle popular stereotypes about the East End, it also epitomises the same urban Gothic vocabulary which conflated poverty, criminality, and atavistic degeneration and posited the East End as heterotopic Other within (cf. Mighall 1999, Werner 2008). Social geographer Henry Mayhew (1848) and artist Gustave Doré (1872) pioneered a discourse about the East End as *terra incognita*, in whose obscure labyrinthine alleys the civilising effects of modernity were given no foothold. They therefore remained significantly "behind the times". In accordance with popular post-Darwinian notions of races, cultures, and societies as teleologically evolving, theories endorsed by personalities such as Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor, or Francis Galton, the urban Gothic mode configured the social ills – disease, crime, and poverty – as atavistic regressions in an evolving, enlightened society and city. In Mighall's seminal definition, the "Gothic in the City" becomes a "Gothic of the City": "Its terrors derive from situations peculiar to, and firmly located within, the urban experience" (1999, 30, original emphasis).

How such imaginative geographies converged with cognitive mapping may be exemplified by Charles Booth's *Poverty Map* (1889-90), in which the notorious rookery, the Old Nichol, appeared characterised in dark blue ("Very Poor, casual. Chronic want.") and black ("Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal"). An imagined correlation between poverty and crime (cf. Warwick and Willis 2007, Werner 2008), likewise informed Morrison's own slum novel *A Child of the Jago* (1896), which fictionalised the Old Nichol as a lawless, predatory place which humans inhabit like vermin (cf. Wise 2008). By the end of the century, the

haunting, degenerated monsters of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), could rely on a shared urban Gothic imaginary which was further catalysed through Victorian London's most notorious spectre: Jack the Ripper, whose sexual violence both epitomised and concentrated contemporary anxieties and re-affirmed an imagined London topography. In this topography the East End was the anachronistic Other against which the cosmopolitan Victorian identity was defined (cf. Curtis 2001, Begg 2003, Warwick and Willis 2007, Werner 2008, Gary 2010). "Jack", the "Man Monster" (Chisolm n.d.). Eradicating the boundaries between human and beast, Jekyll and Hyde, the serial killer whose sudden violence might erupt from any and every seemingly respectable face in the crowd, epitomised anxieties about life in the city and became the essential urban monster.

The Gothic mode, employing aesthetic strategies such as distortion, fragmentation, or obscuring in order to summon the uncanny, the repressed, or the abject, is intrinsically linked to the negotiation of the increasingly unstable boundaries between self and other, familiar and strange, homely and hostile. Uncanny, or *unheimlich*, literally translates to un-home-ly, and as such is intrinsically connected to identity and how we inhabit spaces (cf. Heidegger 1927, Freud 1919). *Whitechapel Gods*, as the paratext implies, taps into this rich legacy, but employs fantastic, retro-speculative impulses to re-imagine a hyper-Gothic nightmare city, closed off from the rest of London through walls. It becomes a world onto itself, dominated by the supernatural entities of Father Clock and Mama Engine. The Stack, their lair, faintly echoes *The Difference Engine's* Statistics Bureau:

Bailey stood a long minute with the door open, staring out. His gaze was dawn upwards, past the rotting rooftops of the neighbourhood [...]. He felt his jaw tighten as his eyes came to rest on the top of the looming iron mountain barely visible through the blackened air: the Stack, home to the gods. (Peters 2008, 10-11)

This is a space of “soot-stained streets and thick air” (ibid., 12), noisy factories, fizzling gaslights, and drab public houses - all of which are stacked over one another in infinite levels: “Oliver scanned the building lining the streets, apartments stretching the entire five storeys to the roof of the concourse. Some even went higher, tangling themselves in the braces of the next level” (14). Evidently, once-familiar urban imaginaries of Gothic London are twisted out of proportion until Whitechapel grows into a boundless, overwhelming monstrosity:

Ahead, Stepneyside Tower slowly faded into life from within the clouds and the swirling ash. Its thick steel beams arched gracefully together, crossing and tangling, and at the top spilled back down in all directions, giving the tower the appearance of a huge black flower. The scattered lights of human habitation blinked between them like orphaned stars. [...] Oliver turned to look but saw only more grey sky, with the twisted shades of other towers lurking in that direction. Somewhere beyond stood the impassable wall separating Whitechapel from the rest of London, topped with electric defences and guarded by untiring Boiler Men. Just beyond it, human soldiers of the British army stood ever ready [...]. (35)

Whitechapel becomes a literal Other, physically separated from the rest of London, its borders treated as impenetrable gateway into hostile territory, its citizens trapped in a sort of intra-urban exile (cf. Pike 1981, 101).

Below the endlessness of steely towers in a miasma of ash and smog, we find the Underbelly:

The floor of the Underbelly was like a giant bowl of concrete, warped and misshapen to conform to the vagaries of the tower’s steel supports. He traced the three strangers between two- and three-storey tenements, inexpertly constructed of whatever spare wood and plaster could be scrounged from the city above. The place had a ruined graveyard quality about it, enhanced by the few ghostly street lanterns that Missy had always detested. (Peters 2008, 53)

This vertical geography literalises social hierarchies into physical space, where the Underbelly is a dark slum which supports the towering structures above, not only economically, but literally. This layering is also evidence of a palimpsest, considering that all this is built on Old Whitechapel, now an empty abyss under

‘the maze of beams that held up the Shadwell Underbelly and went on to support the Concourse above’ (ibid., 129). The old city “had long since decayed into lumps of sodden debris” (154), and we find “[n]othing below but a mass of near-vertical pipes slick with condensation; nothing to the sides but silent ashfall”, with an occasional “angular assortment of pipes and wires that resembled a ladder as one may have looked in an opium dream” (142). Nothing populates this abysmal counter-space but mechanical wild hounds, waiting to prey on lost wanderers. Here, urban dwellers are dwarfed and orphaned among the concrete; lost in the noxious smoke. Navigation becomes an act of resistance, as exemplified by Oliver and his rebellious allies who traverse all layers of this endless cityscape in their quest to dismantle the tyranny of the local gods of machinery and industry.

Again, as in *The Difference Engine*, domination by a machine-Other is literalised into urban space. However, the boundaries between organic and urban matter, that is self and city, become unstable: Peters’ Whitechapel is at once disturbingly inorganic in its vast materiality of steel, bricks, and concrete, but also seems somewhat organically grown. From the abyss’ maze of beams that grow from the ground like a forest, to the makeshift wood and plaster constructions of the Underbelly and the gracefully tangling, flower-like steel beams of the towers, there is a paradoxical imagery at work. This makes the cityscape difficult to navigate. It is alien, and hostile. Such imagery acts as to foreshadow the cyborgism and body horror through which Whitechapel citizens are increasingly subsumed as self-Other boundaries are complicated and eradicated in dangerous ways.

Father Clock, for example, is an entity with Orwellian powers of surveillance that represents a mechanised order whose paradigms are “efficiency over emotion” and “for all parts to work together according to a single Purpose” (223). His minions, the cloaks, let themselves be crafted into cyborg automata with “brass bones and copper nerves” (233) or porcelain eyes (33): “Their

mechanisms were their thirty pieces of silver, the price of their souls” (34). In accordance with this imagery of computer automation, bodies and minds of dissenters are subsumed into the gigantic machinery of the Stack:

He hung now in a chair, arms and legs supported by thin scraps of brass, six copper tines penetrating his neck. He spasmed randomly. He drooled. He bled dark oil from his eye and ears. To his left and right, above and below, thousands more trapped souls shuffled mindlessly, their bodies jerking in the indecipherable rhythm of the Great Machine. (49-50)

From here, the rebel Aaron’s mind escapes into a virtual void, a sort of cyberspace: “Aaron flaked apart and drifted away. What remained tightened securely, then began to spin at its designated frequency. It became part of a work greater than itself, part of an infallible string of physical logic inside the perfect machine” (51).

We find here a curious inversion of the de-embodied, de-coupled mind-body relationship of Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, in which hacker-cowboys float through the immaterial “city lights, receding...”, or merge and migrate into cyberspace entirely, their bodies configured simply and uselessly as “data made flesh” (Gibson 1984, 19). Gibson’s novel puts into play Hayles’ contention that “a defining characteristic of the present cultural moment is the belief that information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates” (Hayles 1999, 1). It also suggests that “information as a (disembodied) entity” is presupposed to be able to “flow between carbon-based organic components and silicon-based electronic components to make silicon and protein operate as a single system” (ibid., 2). *Whitechapel Gods*, meanwhile, draws particular attention to the body which is here violently invaded and transformed. By making visible rather than erasing the boundaries between the self, enshrined in organic matter, and the Other, here a cyber-technology incarnated in industrial forms, the novel foregrounds incongruity and pain in its vision of (enforced) hybridity.

We see this represented in Mama Engine, too, who represents the volatile

powers of energy. Her followers “were rarely seen outside the Stack, preferring [...] to be near their goddess, working in her furnace deep inside that mountain of iron. The red glow of their own heart-furnaces leaked through burns and holes in their heavy clothes; some even had mechanical limbs, which held to no human shape” (Peters 2008, 33). We find an example of this here: “A black cloak scuttled by, moving on all fours like a spider, emitting an audible mechanical grinding as she moved” (ibid., 61). Surrendering even their human form, Mama Engine’s disciples transform themselves into something alien and Other, becoming what Hayles identifies as the posthuman subject: “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles 1999, 3). Rather than a “material-informational entity”, however, the subjects are empowered cyborg figures which, in line with Donna Haraway’s theories, may elude and resist the persistent “troubling dualisms” of Western thought, such as ‘self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female’ (Haraway 2000, 313). *Whitechapel Gods*’ subjects are subsumed, their cyborgism denoting not resistance, but loss of self.

In portraying these instances of violent hybridisation with recourse to a Victorian industrial paradigm, *Whitechapel Gods* imaginatively puts into play Karl Marx’s critique of the capitalist factory:

In handicrafts and manufacture, the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory, the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the instrument of labour proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machine that he must follow. In manufacture the workmen are parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes its mere living appendage. (Marx 1867, 261)

In Marx’s vision, a re-organisation of human labour into a mechanised system equals the disenfranchisement of the worker as he is appropriated by the larger mechanism as interchangeable prosthesis, his ability, dignity, and intellect drained away with his agency. This is quite literally the case in *Whitechapel Gods*, where

Marx's metaphorical concept is re-imagined in literal terms, not least through "the clacks", a mysterious cancer which disfigures ordinary East End workers:

The patient writhed and struggled in the bed, fighting a pain that distorted his features into something less than human. He was a comrade named Tor Kyrre, though Bailey could barely recognise him. Spikes of iron had sprouted from his bald pate and his bare chest was riddled with gears and bulbs of all types of metals, the tips of much larger growths festering beneath the skin. As the doctor made his second cut, lateral and shallow, across the base of the rib cage, black oil welled up, slipping down Tor's flanks and staining the sheets and blankets. (Peters 2008, 7-8)

"Clacks" patients are quite literally consumed by the parasitic, semi-organic mechanic growths. As involuntary cyborgs, these hybrid selves enact Haraway's claim that "bodies are maps of power and identity" (Haraway 2000, 315). As she notes, the cyborg figure holds the potential to re-encode "territories of production, reproduction, and imagination" (ibid., 292). Considering that both notions are conceptualised in spatial terms, using "map" and "territory" to visualise power relations, it is no wonder that conditions of capitalist exploitations is linked to space. The "clacks" and its induced cyborgism become symptoms of the disenfranchisement of the East End worker:

Below, dockworkers struggled to unload the goods descending by crane from two zeppelins tethered to the Aldgate spire. No single class seemed as afflicted with the mechanical growths as the dockworkers. They shambled around like parodies of men, covered in gleaming iron pustules, hobbling on malformed brass legs, and picking at ropes and crates with hooked hands and fingerless steel stubs. (Peters 2008, 109)

Here, cyborgism, in its painfully imagined physicality as bodies are invaded, disfigured, dismembered, destroyed and deconstructed, plays out Marx's notion of "*Entfremdung*" or alienation. It becomes a displaced external signifier for the literally de-humanizing conditions of capitalism, enacted through a hyper-Victorian, retro-speculative steampunk mode which, once again, sees cityscape and cyber-tech complicit in their potentially threatening Otherness. The steampunk cyber-city becomes not merely the setting, but the agent of uncanny

transformations.

Recalibrating the Urban Matrix

As steampunk novels, *The Difference Engine* and *Whitechapel Gods* de- and re-construct a Victorian urban imaginary. This choice of setting is more than a purely aesthetic choice. As we have seen, Victorian London holds the potential to re-encode debates about urban life and our dependence on uncanny technologies in new and creative ways. These also differ from traditional neo-Victorian retellings. Neo-Victorian fiction, such as Alan Moore's graphic novel *From Hell* (1989) and its film adaptation (2001), or Peter Ackroyd's novel *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) tends to reposition the Victorian city and its failures as our own historical Other (cf. Ho 2012, Kohlke and Gutleben 2015). As Kohlke and Gutleben have argued, "[N]eo-Victorianism is by nature quintessentially Gothic" (2012, 4) because there exists a "generic and ontological kinship" between both phenomena:

resurrecting the ghost(s) of the past, searching out its dark secrets and shameful mysteries, insisting obsessively on the lurid details of Victorian life, reliving the period's nightmares and traumas. At the same time, neo-Victorianism also tries to understand the nineteenth century as the contemporary self's uncanny *Doppelgänger*, exploring the uncertain limit between what is vanished (dead) and surviving (still living), celebrating the bygone even while lauding the demise of some of the period's most oppressive aspects, like institutionalised slavery and legally sanctioned sexism and racism. (ibid., 4)

Neo-Victorian urban Gothic then often re-iterates Chris Baldick's much-quoted observation that Gothic tales classically evoke "a fear of historical reversion; that is, of the nagging possibility that the despotisms, buried by the modern age, may yet prove to be undead" (Baldick 1992, n.p.). Ackroyd's psychogeographical mode in particular strives to excavate an urban archaeology of hidden routes and haunting spectres, positing the city as sublime and intrinsically uncanny multi-temporal palimpsest shaped by *genius loci*, thereby contributing to a discourse of a modern condition always haunted by the resurfacing past (cf. Vidler 1992,

Wolfreys 1998, Gibson and Wolfreys 2000, Wolfreys 2002, Luckhurst 2002). Through such psychogeographical readings, the Other is no longer that which inhabits specific intra-urban exiles, but is enshrined in and embodied through the historical urban structure itself. However, as Luckhurst notes, “the discourse of spectralized modernity risks investing in the compulsive repetitions of a structure of melancholic entrapment” (Luckhurst 2002, 535).

Steampunk, with its tendency towards historical vandalism, I want to argue, provides an alternative to such an approach. It mobilises a re-imagined hyper-Victorian past as a resonant, retro-speculative shorthand in which to encode, in this case, debates about self-hood, Otherness, agency, and cyborgism. Rather than obsessively re-enact hauntings by a Gothic other in the Victorian as well as neo-Victorian metropolis, both of which imply metanarratives of teleological progress, however thwarted. Steampunk collapses linear temporalities altogether as “the two ends of the Twentieth Century hail each other as long lost twins” (Gunning 2003, 51). With its anachronistic eclecticism, it re-constructs a fantastic Victorian London through which to explore the origins of the present we inhabit, and call into questions paradigmatic ideas about technology, progress, and identity. Steampunk, even in its more escapist incarnations, may do so by challenging the historical evolution of such ideas at a point in time when they are perceived as both formative for our present, yet still “new” and flexible enough to become the subject of speculation and play. Re-imagining now-outdated “crude, limited and clanky” technologies reminds us, in Sterling’s thinking, that “the 20th-century world is calamitously unsustainable” (Sterling 2012, 12). It also alerts us to “the prophetic nature of new technologies, their address to a previously unimagined future”, as Gunning theorises: “Every new technology has a utopian dimension that imagines a future radically transformed by the implications of the device or practice. The sinking of technology into a reified second nature indicates the relative failure of this transformation, its’ fitting back

into the established grooves of power and exploitation” (Gunning 2003, 56).

Steampunk, then, with its retrofuturistic projection, its destabilisation of familiar metanarratives about progress, technology, or self, addresses such relative failures by consciously provoking tensions between the legacies of the past and the struggles of the present through an imaginative double exposure. If, as neo-Victorian scholarship suggests, the Victorian past acts as our *doppelgänger*, our uncanny Other, then steampunk creates a hybrid of the two. Through its juxtaposition and remix of temporalities and possibilities, steampunk constantly re-negotiates boundaries. The steampunk aesthetic itself becomes, in a sense, Haraway’s cyborg, containing “contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes” and holding ‘incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true’ (Haraway 2000, 291).

In Gibson and Sterling’s, as well as Peters’ novel, a fantastic hyper-Victorian London is re-imagined in order to make visible and tangible our own cyborgism through the metaphor of city. Both novels creatively put into play Henri Levebvre’s notion of the Right to the City as interpreted by David Harvey: “To claim the right to the city in the sense I mean it here is to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade, and to do so in a fundamental and radical way” (Harvey 2012, 5). Both novels radically re-shape the city, albeit with dystopian impulses rather than as progressive alternative visions, and remain alert to the fundamental Otherness of both city and cyber-tech. The novels discuss and actualise the urban environment and technology as human-made structures, potentially knowable, yet also retaining elements of autonomy and illegibility. Both, however, remain integral and necessary Others through which we navigate our own identities. As Harvey posits: “[W]hat kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be” (Harvey 2012, 4).

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The Fire Ants of Hurricane Harvey **Displacement and Belonging in Houston**

Nathaniel Otjen

Just hours after making landfall on the Texas coast, Hurricane Harvey became associated with historic and unprecedented flooding. Indeed, images of the storm circulated through news outlets depict flooded streets, immersed homes, and swirling water. The disaster narratives about the hurricane support this view, emphasizing the ceaseless rain, record amounts of precipitation, and historic flood levels. While referred to as a hurricane, Harvey lodged itself in the national imaginary as a flooding event. The storm made landfall on August 25, 2017, and remained in southeastern Texas for five days. During this time, Harvey dumped a record 48.2 inches of rain near Houston (Di Liberto 2017). This sprawling metropolis of six million inhabitants quickly became the epicenter for storm reporting and national concern. Stories and photographs from Houston feature dirty sediments, prismatic petroleum slicks, industrial wreckage, and household debris either floating or immersed in the floodwaters. However, one floodwater spectacle, in particular, caught local and national attention: floating rafts or spheres of red fire ants.¹

¹ Evolving in a flood-prone region of South America, the red fire ant has acquired the ability to float on water. Entire colonies will self-assemble into “rafts” and can float for months. The ants

On August 27 videos, images, and stories featuring colonies of fire ants suspended in murky floodwater began emerging on social media platforms, including *Twitter* and *Facebook*. A day later, news websites such as *The Verge* and *Wired* began circulating these images and stories, which subsequently inspired larger news stations to feature narratives about the spectacle of these flood survivors. From August 28-31 nearly all the major American media outlets covered the phenomenon, including *NBC*, *The Washington Post*, *Forbes*, *Business Insider*, *FOX News*, *USA Today*, *HuffPost*, *NPR*, and *The Atlantic*. Individuals posting on social media and journalists reporting on behalf of news networks described the masses of insects using the language of awe and disbelief. These flood survivors became a spectacle of public intrigue. The ants were most often portrayed as yet another nuisance that Texans had to deal with after the flooding subsided. Most journalists and social media users reported on the fire ants as a safety concern for the flood-ravaged residents of Houston, discussing the potential hurt a fire ant could inflict if the creature stung. The ants were associated with the unusual, strange, and alien. Terms such as “creepy,” “nightmarish,” “aggressive,” “sneaky,” “unsettling,” “disturbing,” and “horrifying” were used to describe the fire ants. In the midst of record flooding and displacement, the red fire ants came to signify the unsettling and unknown world of climate change catastrophe. Harvey released rain on a magnitude previously unknown, setting a record for the most rainfall ever deposited from a single storm in the continental United States (Brodwin and Gould 2017). Cognizant of the historic order of the storm, reporters

lock mandibles and legs, joining together as a single interconnected fabric. Their waxy bodies repel water and trap air bubbles, which enables them to float. The raft itself “simultaneously provides cohesion, buoyancy, and water repellency” (Mlot et al. 2011, 7669). Once assembled, the ants circulate within the raft, exchanging positions as it floats. Worker ants coalesce around the queen who remains protected in the center of the floating mass of ant bodies (Mann 2012). Therefore, “[a] floating ball has two obvious adaptations—the trapped air provides buoyancy and the rotation of the ball prevents any individual from spending too much time underwater” (Taber 2000, 24). As we will see, floating in large rafts is a primary way red fire ants colonize new regions.

and local Houstonians imparted their feelings of uncertainty and despair onto the floating fire ant colonies.

Inundated by record levels of rainfall, Houston became an apocalyptic landscape of disaster and risk. Homes, interstates, and livelihoods were submerged. The swirling floodwaters carried dangerous debris and toxins.² And, to make matters worse, clusters of fire ants lurked amid the destruction. Houston, in short, reflected the worst effects of a contemporary risk society. As Ulrich Beck explains: “In advanced modernity the social production of *wealth* is systematically accompanied by the social production of *risks*” (1992, 19). Policymakers, business capitalists, and political structures attempt to manage the risks, consequences, and hazards produced by industrial modernity. A risk society, therefore, marks a shift from the logic of wealth production to the logic of risk management.

As home to the American petrochemical industry, Houston has long managed industrial hazards and participated in risk society. Moreover, with the intensification of climate change, global risks have become amplified. This magnification of global hazards represents a defining feature of contemporary risk society, according to Beck (1992, 21). Strengthened by the moisture-heavy atmosphere characteristic of global warming, Hurricane Harvey produced a multitude of hazards.³ Houston, in short, has become a place characterized by risk, a landscape of catastrophe. Perhaps most terrifying, however, the feeling of uncertainty defines the contemporary risk society of Houston. According to Beck, “in the risk society the unknown and unintended consequences come to be a dominant force in history and society” (1992, 22). Amid the polluted floodwaters and visible devastation caused by Harvey, reporters and social media users reflected on the unknown risks of industrial capitalism. The floating rafts of fire

² See Kaplan and Healy 2017; Griggs et al. 2017; Hersher 2017 for a list of specific dangers.

³ For research on climate change that predicts an increased future frequency and intensity of tropical storms and hurricanes, see Meehl et al. 2007; Knutson et al. 2010.

ants exposed human vulnerability and pointed toward a difficult, and unknown, future of multispecies togetherness. Yet, like capitalist agents that seek to control hazards, the individuals reporting on the ants and destruction sought to manage the perceived risk of dangerous fire ant colonies. They informed fellow Houstonians to avoid the ants at all costs, used language of isolation to distance themselves from these alien outsiders, and repositioned the human as the dominant species in this battered landscape of hazards and uncertainty.

Influenced by recent critical animal studies and urban studies scholarship that examines how cities stage encounters between humans and more-than-human others (Holmberg 2015; Owens and Wolch 2017), this article studies news and social media representations of the red fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta*, that were published during the historic flooding of Houston in late August 2017. I argue that the narratives produced about the fire ants in popular media perpetuate damaging and inadequate explanations of the species' role in Houston's imagined and material cityscape. In order to understand the various media responses to the ants, I provide a naturalcultural history of the fire ant in the southern United States and offer a literary analysis of these media representations. Arguing that the historical and contemporary discourses about *S. invicta* fail to theorize this creature's role in cultural and material landscapes, I propose two generative models for interpreting and understanding the fire ants in Houston that, when read together, offer a necessary framework for future cohabitation. Revisiting Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the assemblage, I argue that the fire ants caught up in the floodwaters typify a contemporary assemblage associated with risk. I also use Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt's twin framework of "Ghosts" and "Monsters" to examine the imagined erasure of fire ants from the Houston landscape and the subsequent horror their physical presence evoked. Like a ghost, *S. invicta* points to our forgetting, and, like a monster, this species forces humans to consider the realities and possibilities of multispecies

togetherness. Read alongside one another, the assemblage and *Ghosts and Monsters* chart a collaborative future of multispecies collectivity that offers ways of thinking and being in the difficult urbanscapes created by contemporary risk society.

A Naturalcultural History of *S. invicta*

Red fire ants, like other “invasive” species, are “creatures of empire” (Haraway 2016, 15), participating in human imperial expansion while simultaneously creating their own insect “empires.” The first red fire ants arrived in the United States via an Argentinian trade ship. Concealed either in agricultural products or ballast soil removed from a riverbank, five to thirteen queen ants along with several members of their colonies from the rainforests of northeastern Argentina arrived in the port city of Mobile, Alabama, at some point between 1933 and 1945 (Tracy 1995; Taber 2000; Buhs 2004; Ascunce 2011; Mann 2012). Brought to the United States via global trade and transportation systems, these “creatures of empire” encountered a welcoming new landscape. Early myrmecologists, including E.O. Wilson, were quick to study the newcomers. These ant specialists, however, conflated the red fire ant with the black fire ant (another “invasive” species that arrived in the U.S. several years before our protagonist), mistakenly believing that the two ants belonged to the same species. Recognizing this error, biologists soon distinguished between the two, naming the black fire ant *Solenopsis richteri* and the red fire ant *Solenopsis invicta* (Tracy 1995; Taber 2000).⁴ “Invicta” means “the unconquered” and “solenopsis” means “pipe face” or “pipelike” because the ant has an elongated head (Taber 2000, 12). The new scientific moniker for the red fire ant, therefore, literally translates to “the unconquered pipe face.” *S. invicta* powerfully evokes the language of imperial

⁴ *S. richteri*, or the black fire ant, never had the opportunity to spread across the U.S. South and today remains only in Alabama and Mississippi. *S. invicta* dominated this less “aggressive” species, suppressing its populations and restricting its geographic territory (Tracy 1995, 824).

domination. This scientific name secured the red fire ant's status as a creature of empire.

Following its initial introduction in coastal Alabama, *S. invicta* began moving north and westward. As Charles Mann (2012) puts it: "From the ant's point of view, it had been dumped into an empty, recently flooded expanse. *S. invicta* took off, never looking back." Extending an average of six miles per year, the red fire ant moved across the South in two primary ways: either by flying in the air or by floating on floodwater (Taber 2000, 23).⁵ The rate of spreading soon quickened, however, with the post-World War II housing, transportation, and industrial boom. The Southern landscape was transformed into a patchwork of sprawling urban developments, a knotted system of interstate highways, and a vast expanse of industrial farmland.⁶ *S. invicta* capitalized on these human modifications to the landscape, flourishing in the disturbed spaces. Indeed, human disturbances such as road building, clear-cutting, urbanization, and flooding all helped the red fire ant extend its range (Taber 2000; Buhs 2004; LeBrun et al. 2012). According to Joshua Buhs, the ant "succeeds best . . . in open or disturbed habitats" (2004, 12). Within a decade of its introduction, *S. invicta* had spread across twenty million acres in the South (Buhs 2004, 1). By 1950, the ant had arrived in Mississippi, and by 1957 it had spread throughout Louisiana and into southeastern Texas at a rate of thirty miles per year (Taber 2000, 220; Buhs 2004, 33). By the mid-1990s, the red fire ant inhabited 250 million acres in thirteen southern states (Tracy 1995, 824). Within the next decade, *S. invicta* is expected to occupy the West Coast and much of Mexico in addition to the entire southern United States (Taber 2000, 216-17).

⁵ Flooding is perhaps the most efficient way for fire ants to colonize new territories. Floods significantly increase fire ant population densities which enables colonies to establish themselves in new regions (LeBrun et al. 2012, 892).

⁶ This period of industrial expansion marked the birth of contemporary risk society in the South. Human modifications to the landscape altered drainage patterns; newly constructed factories produced and discharged significant quantities of waste; and petrochemical and petroleum refining industries began emitting carcinogenic toxins.

This rapid colonization of the southern landscape brought the red fire ant into contact with millions of people. The ants built mounds in yards, along roads, and in agricultural fields. These mounds were as large as three feet high and three feet wide, and housed colonies of 220,000 workers (Taber 2000). Yards, roads, and fields across the South became interspecies contact zones where humans and fire ants fought for belonging. With their ability to inflict a painful sting upon the human body, to consume crops, to kill and eat livestock and wildlife, to build earthen domes in agricultural fields, and to cause property damage, the red fire ant was publicly labeled a “noxious pest” (Taber 2000, 11). Ants, as Charlotte Sleight notes, “have held a peculiar terror for humankind. Besides their devastating economic impact, there is something uniquely nasty about their inhuman form of attack, their countless number, and their irreducibly mass-nature with no individualization whatsoever. . . . For the squeamish, their alien body form perturbs” (2003, 87). Within just a few years of *S. invicta*’s arrival in the South, humans began strategizing and organizing against these “invaders.” The “fire ant wars,” as Buhs calls the actions taken to eliminate fire ants from the 1940s to the present, were waged in agricultural fields, in state and federal legislature, in scientific journals, and in corporate boardrooms. Mississippi was the first state to enact eradication plans, dumping toxic pesticides such as dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT), chlordane, toxaphene, and gamma benzene hexachloride on the successful newcomers (Taber 2000, 18). In 1958 Congress became involved, approving the Federal Imported Fire Ant Quarantine program which granted funding to fire ant eradication projects in the South (Taber 2000, 217). And most recently, Texas has pledged significant amounts of money and time in an attempt to limit the fire ant’s success (Taber 2000, 217). Yet, despite the militarization against *S. invicta*, the ant is “here to stay” (Taber 2000, 16). Indeed, as Taber notes: “[T]he prospect for eradicating the red imported fire ant seems bleak” (2000, 225). The fire ant will continue to spread, moving into new

territories as climate change increases the size and frequency of flooding events and warms northern latitudes.⁷

While the red fire ant has largely been deemed a “noxious pest” in the southern United States, myrmecologists and fire ant experts have recently begun to elucidate this species’ many virtues. Taber, for example, admits that “alterations of native ecosystems by new arrivals are not intrinsically bad” (2000, 17) and offers several examples of the benefits that *S. invicta* provides humans. The red fire ant kills boll weevils in cotton fields, replenishes local soils with valuable nutrients, aerates soils, prevents erosion, and provides necessary biocontrol for crops (Taber 2000). “All in all,” Taber remarks with reluctance, “the services provided by the red imported fire ant go a long way toward justifying its overall assessment as a nuisance instead of a genuine pest” (2000, 205). Rachel Carson, in *Silent Spring*, also discusses these benefits, refusing to further vilify the red fire ant in the South (2002, 163-64). Notwithstanding that the “benefits” provided by *S. invicta* are problematically framed in relation to human gains and fail to highlight the unique ways of being and doing practiced by this species, the positive attributes of the red fire ant help deconstruct this creature’s image as a harmful invader and complicate the easy narrative of the ant as pest.

This brief naturalcultural history of the red fire ant in the American South reveals the prominent position this more-than-human being occupies in a collective regional and national imaginary. As Buhs explains, the fire ant has become “an entrenched and ubiquitous denizen of the Sun Belt” (2004, 9). Indeed, the red fire ant has written itself into Southern folklore and culture. The human history of the post-WWII South is permanently entangled in the history of *S. invicta*, and vice versa. The fire ant followed humans across the South, altering

⁷ *S. invicta* will also continue to spread around the world. In fact, the red fire ant can now be found on every continent in the Global South except Antarctica. Due to international shipping from ports in the southern United States, *S. invicta* has been introduced at least nine separate times to foreign countries (Ascunce 2011, 1066).

the landscape and the lives of southerners. People, in return, altered the landscape and the lives of fire ants, helping them flourish while dampening their success. Red fire ants, as Donna Haraway puts it, “both do great harm and sustain whole worlds” (2016, 125). Today, *S. invicta* “has a fascination and importance—medical, agricultural, and ecological—unrivalled by any other” (Taber 2000, xv). Thanks to federal, regional, and state eradication programs that required significant scientific inquiry and public advertising, *S. invicta* is now the most-studied ant species in the world and the “most famous” ant in the United States (Taber 2000, 12). The red fire ant has captured attention unlike any other ant species.

Fire Ant Discourse: media representations during Hurricane Harvey

Social media users and journalists portrayed the red fire ants floating in the Houston floodwaters as a dangerous threat to public health and safety. While there were no reported attacks on humans, every media narrative depicted the insect flood survivors as a menace that caused additional grief, suffering, and worries for the flood victims of Hurricane Harvey. The individuals reporting on the fire ants drew from a rich southern cultural imaginary that has long considered *S. invicta* a damaging pest. In fact, the image of floating fire ants has fascinated Americans since the species’ initial introduction in the South. The earliest recorded incident occurred in 1957 when an entomologist spotted colonies of red fire ants floating on the Alabama River (Taber 2000, 23). As the 2017 profusion of news articles indicates, Americans still find the image striking. In today’s cultural landscape, however, technologies of communication and contemporary cultural attitudes influence the representations of *S. invicta*.

The most common narrative practice employed by those reporting on the fire ant spectacle was to ideologically and geographically distance *S. invicta* from the human, which, in turn, erased the red fire ants’ claim to and history in the

Houston landscape. News stories used the terms “invasive” (Loria 2017; Montanari 2017; Zhang 2017) and “imported” (Brulliard 2017) to describe the ants. An immigrant status permanently defines this creature. Unlike the “native” human residents who belong in Houston, the ants represent a foreign troublemaker who can never truly belong. And, as Sleight points out, both terms — “invasive” and “imported” — link the southern red fire ant to the violent language of “illegal” human immigration. The fire ant’s “rise to prominence . . . coincided with that of unwanted human immigrants, and similar language was used to describe both sets of problems” (Sleight 2003, 132-33). If this language of separation is not enough, one news article reminds us that the red fire ants are “thoroughly-detested creatures” (Rainey 2017). Describing *S. invicta* as a permanent outsider, a thoroughly un-American insect, privileges human inhabitants, justifies the continued violence against this species, and fails to acknowledge the red fire ant’s contributions to the Texas landscape. Perhaps most problematic, however, this language erases the fire ant’s history in the South. As one article concludes: “Floating fire ants aren’t a particularly new phenomenon, but that doesn’t make it any less horrifying. Have a little mercy, won’t you, Mother Nature?” (Madani 2017). While the story references the historical presence of *S. invicta*, it quickly erases this presence by bundling both the fire ant and the record flooding under the naturalizing category of “Mother Nature.” This categorical conflation ignores the historical processes that led to the fire ant’s presence in the Houston region, and it disregards the role of climate change and the development of risk society in creating this disaster. One article actually normalizes *S. invicta*’s presence, but immediately distances this species from the human and rejects their companionship: “Yes, flotillas of fire ants are a real thing that happens in Houston—and elsewhere—when it floods. This is how the clever little insects stay afloat and stay alive during their own life-threatening emergency situations. Bless them. They’re just trying to make it, like the rest of us. Even if

they're horrible little ankle-biters" (Shilcutt 2017). The phrase "horrible little ankle-biters" demeans the ants, casting them as childish nuisances lost in the established, adult world of humans. The fire ant is othered and their history in this urbanscape becomes erased.

To describe the floating spheres of red fire ants, the news stories and social media reports made use of two popular genres: horror literature and the newspaper advice column. Like all horror narratives, the reports cultivate fear and hyperbolize threats. The floating ants are called "terrifying" (Brulliard 2017) "scary" (Farokhmanesh 2017), "creepy" (Hauser 2017), "nightmarish" (Kennedy 2017; Madani 2017; Hauser 2017; Alfonso III 2017), "sneaky" (Hauser 2017), "aggressive" (Ingraham 2017, Hauser 2017), "an unusual risk" (Loria 2017), "disturbing" (Madani 2017), "venomous" (Loria 2017; Rainey 2017; Ingraham 2017), "unsettling" (Madani 2017), "dangerous" (Molina 2017; Shilcutt 2017), "horrible" (Madani 2017), "a menace" (Rainey 2017), "a common scourge" (Montanari 2017), a "safety concern" (Rainey 2017), and "one of Harvey's creepiest storylines" (Alfonso III 2017). In short, *S. invicta* is a menace out to attack the human.⁸ The ants are the villains of this risk society horror story. Nearly all the reporters writing about the buoyant spheres of ants imagine entire colonies climbing onto the vulnerable human body and mercilessly attacking. One reporter, in particular, dramatizes this imagined scenario: "They [the red fire ants] sting. They're venomous. And they're looking for any dry place — from rescue boat, to backpack, to pant leg — to set up new housekeeping" (Rainey 2017). Another strikes fear into the reader, explaining that "a whole colony can deliver real damage" (Loria 2017). And yet another explains that it can be "particularly scary" if rafts of fire ants "choose to board a temporary sanctuary someone has taken

⁸ Reviewing 137 articles about insects published in forty magazines from 1970 to 1980, Wayne S. Moore et al. found that only 20% of the articles discussed these creatures using positive language. 80% of the magazine articles "stressed the negative impacts of insects" (1982, 465). Insects in general, it appears, are figured in negative ways within popular media.

refuge on” (Farokhmanesh 2017). In these examples, the ants intentionally seek out the human body to inflict pain and suffering. The favored imagined contact zones include boats, debris piles, and roofs; *S. invicta* will attack when the human is the most vulnerable.

As “the latest menace confronting survivors of Hurricane Harvey” (Rainey 2017), the red fire ants must be stopped, according to these journalists. Like any good advice columnist, they offer suggestions and tips for destroying the insect “menace” and resolving the relationship woes of humans and ants. The two most common pieces of advice are to avoid the rafts of suspended ants and to drown them with a solution of dish soap and water. Readers are told to “spray the ants with dish soap to break down their waxy rafts” (Farokhmanesh 2017). They are also advised to give the ants “a wide berth” (Kennedy 2017), to “steer clear” from their colonies (Loria 2017), and to “stay far, far from the burning insect boats” (Brulliard 2017). The proposed advice aims to bring about a denouement for this horror story and resolve the unsettling human-fire ant relationship (in favor of the human, of course).

Taken together, these media representations of the fire ants reveal several pressing worries about contemporary American life. The fears expressed through popular media render visible the horrors of the contemporary environmental moment. This subgenre of “ecohorror,” Christy Tidwell argues, “reflect[s] real anxieties about the natural world and its existence outside of human control” (2018, 115). Ecohorror, according to Stephen Rust and Carter Soles, “assumes that environmental disruption is haunting humanity’s relationship to the non-human world” (2014, 510). Ecohorror narratives about the fire ants engage and expose larger societal fears about environmental collapse and the eventual demise of humanity. More specifically, the fire ant narratives reveal a fear of invasion, a fear of vulnerability, a fear of the human inability to adapt to changing climate conditions, and a fear of risk society itself. *S. invicta* is well adapted to this

landscape of catastrophe and even flourishes in these conditions while the human is vulnerable and weak. The human, to borrow Stacy Alaimo's material feminist framework, becomes *exposed* to the vulnerabilities of contemporary risk society.⁹

Journalists, as gatekeepers of a national imagined community, are not usually fond of promoting the vulnerabilities of the human. Indeed, under the auspices of nationalism, they work hard to suppress the exposedness of individuals. It should be no surprise, therefore, that the media representations of fire ants in the wake of Hurricane Harvey aim to stifle human exposure and vulnerability. In particular, reporters on social media and national news deny the fire ants agency in order to reaffirm human autonomy, subjectivity, and domination. Record-breaking precipitation amounts, historic flooding, and the success of *S. invicta* — a species long despised in Texas — stripped away all illusions of human control. Yet, by denying the ant agency, humans could restore some of theirs. The first step in restoring lost agency involves *decentering* the fire ant. The second step involves *recentering* the human.

The initial step is accomplished by denying the fire ants agency and questioning their success. One journalist deftly practices this move while describing the construction of fire ant rafts: "The floodwaters lift the ants from their anthills on the ground, and clinging together, they are capable of drifting for miles until they find dry land to re-establish a colony on" (Kennedy 2017). While the image of ants "clinging together" may appear to cultivate a sense of shared empathy for these creatures, the author emphasizes how the ants' rafts are capable of aimlessly "drifting for miles." *S. invicta* lacks all agential capacity; instead, the floodwaters are responsible for the process of raft construction. The waters "lift" the ants from their lowly anthills and, in shock, the ants happen to cling together. The floodwaters then carry the ants to dry land where they will blindly reestablish a colony. Another journalist confirms *S. invicta*'s reactionary status, quoting an

⁹ For more on the concept of exposure, see Alaimo 2016.

entomologist who claims the ants are “just passively floating along” (Farokhmanesh 2017). However, as Deborah M. Gordon has shown, fire ants react to changing conditions such as flooding with spontaneous collective behavior and robust forms of collaboration (2017, M126).¹⁰ The red fire ants possess their own forms of agency, but are denied this ability to act independently.

Once the ants have been stripped of their agential attributes, the human can then reassert themselves. One way the human becomes recentered (which we have already seen) is by killing the floating ants. Another technique, this one rhetorical and discursive, depicts the red fire ant as a peripheral nuisance. The ants are “one more thing to worry about” for the residents of Houston (Farokhmanesh 2017); they are “yet another hazard in Houston’s flooded streets” (Hauser 2017). By recasting *S. invicta* as just another burden that must be overcome, these narratives recenter the human as the dominant creature inhabiting this damaged landscape. One reporter writes: “As if the catastrophic floods in Houston haven’t done enough damage, people are now reporting large colonies of fire ants floating on the rising water” (Madani 2017). Another declares: “To add more drama on top of an already difficult problem, Texas residents dealing with flooding now need to worry about running into piles of stinging insects” (Montanari 2017). And yet another writes: “In addition to widespread suffering and devastation, Hurricane Harvey has brought a plague of floating fire ants to the Houston region” (Ingraham 2017). This special brand of American individualism, postmodern skepticism, and Internet hyperbolization render the red fire ant an obnoxious, tangential concern. The fire ant is denied agency in order to reaffirm the fantasy of human subjectivity and control.

It should now be clear that the media representations of these fire ants perpetuate damaging and inadequate explanations of this creature’s place in

¹⁰ See also Mlot et al. 2011.

Houston's ideological and material landscape. More generative models must be proposed in order to adequately interpret and understand the role of *S. invicta* in Houston. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the assemblage provides an *entrepôt* into a generative realm of thinking with, not against, the fire ant.

Assemblage

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari provide a rhizomatic, lateral, and tentacular way of thinking about social and material being. The world theorized by Deleuze and Guattari is composed of positivities and assemblages. This final concept — the assemblage — is both a physical collection of bodies (i.e. the “machinic assemblage”) and a collection of ideas about these bodies (i.e. the “collective assemblage of enunciation”). An assemblage, therefore, is at once a collection of “content” and “expression” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 89). Content and expression exist on a horizontal axis that flattens hierarchical difference. Existing on a vertical axis are both territorialized (or reterritorialized) boundaries that give the assemblage stability and also the “cutting edges of deterritorialization” that simultaneously hold the assemblage together and disperse the collection outward and away (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 89). The assemblage, in summation, is tetravalent; it is characterized by *content* and *expression* on a horizontal axis, and *(re)territorialities* and *deterritorialization* on a vertical axis. For Deleuze and Guattari, the assemblage is an intermingling of social, material, and semiotic flows: “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality [e.g. the world] . . . and a field of representation [e.g. media coverage] . . . and a field of subjectivity [e.g. the author]. . . . Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders” (1987, 23). The floating fire ants of Houston can be read as an assemblage — a collection of

bodies and representations stabilized by material and discursive boundaries and crosscut by deterritorializing processes.

The fire ants suspended in the wreckage of Hurricane Harvey are defined by a set of territorialities and boundaries.¹¹ In this case, the ants inhabit the Houston landscape because systems of global capitalism brought them to the American South, human development moved them westward into Texas, the region's warm climate provides favorable living conditions, state and national extermination regimes failed, larger flooding events driven by risk society carried them west, and the ants' own success at colonizing new landscapes enabled them to flourish. This collection of territorialities created the geographic configuration of fire ants witnessed during Hurricane Harvey. The bodily, floating presence of ants in Harvey's floodwaters is determined by the increasing strength of severe weather events caused by intensifying climate change, the ability of *S. invicta* to self-organize, the development and construction of the contemporary blacktopped urban landscape, and the worsening Houstonian, and global, risk society. Finally, the media representations of these insect companions are determined by contemporary technologies and information-sharing platforms, national intrigue and concern, human fantasies of control, and the capitalist urge to increase profits. This constellation of (re)territorialities defined the floating *S. invicta* assemblage.

A series of "cutting edges of deterritorialization" stabilized the assemblage of fire ants and dispersed it outward and away. Perhaps most obvious, the floodwaters deterritorialized the local populations of Houston fire ants, dispersing them to new regions. Additional deterritorializations can also be observed. For example, journalists and social media users manufactured fear and disseminated

¹¹ In the subsequent analysis, I follow Deleuze and Guattari's recommended procedure for identifying and studying an assemblage. First, I examine the (re)territorialities of the assemblage and then I turn my attention to the lines of deterritorialization. "On the one hand," Deleuze and Guattari write, "what is the territoriality of the assemblage, what is the regime of signs and the pragmatic system? On the other hand, what are the cutting edges of deterritorialization, and what abstract machines do they effectuate?" (1987, 505).

this message across the United States. The cultivated horror of fire ants, as we have seen, revealed a deep-seated fear of invasion, vulnerability, and risk. In addition, terms such as “invasive” and “imported” distanced the red fire ant from their human companions, generating hatred and animosity toward this species. In this sense, these statements and acts dispersed certain narratives, emotions, rhetorics, and epistemologies outward to the rest of the nation. These edges of deterritorialization also stabilized the assemblage, creating the conditions necessary for such an ideological and material collectivity to exist.

Thinking the floating spheres of *S. invicta* as an interconnected assemblage of bodies and discourses that impacts social and material conditions offers a generative way to read the flooded Houston landscape. The red fire ants, like their human counterparts, are caught up in a posthuman landscape swirling with muddied water, toxins, industrial and household materials, and other beings. Difference becomes erased within the horizontal, bodily content of the assemblage, and the human becomes exposed to the vulnerabilities of contemporary risk society. This difference, however, is rearticulated in the vertical collection of expressions and ideologies that depict the fire ant as a spectacle, an invasive menace. The assemblage, as a theoretical framework, traces bodily and discursive articulations while identifying the various territorialities that shape, build, and constantly reassemble this dynamic constellation. As we will see, reading fire ants as Ghosts and Monsters can do similar work. This second framework builds upon Deleuze and Guattari’s examination of bodies and discourses by paying closer attention to processes of more-than-human worlding.

Ghosts and Monsters

The edited collection *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* proposes two frameworks for exploring and surviving the wasted world of modernity. As Tsing and her colleagues argue, studying the ghosts and monsters of the damaged planet

offers two potent ways to understand the Anthropocene. They contend that if “[s]uffering from the ills of another species” is “the condition of the Anthropocene for humans and nonhumans alike” (2017, M4), then “[f]ollowing ghosts and following monsters are different ways to know the terrors of the Anthropocene” (2017, M176). The critical venture advanced by Tsing *et al* aims to cultivate an “arts of living,” or to make multispecies flourishing possible during this period of extreme loss. Further elaborating on and developing this twin framework for understanding landscapes of catastrophe we can expand upon the previous reading of media narratives as horror genre by developing the more-than-human thinking propounded by the assemblage, and by postulating a future of multispecies collaboration. Reading the fire ants as both Ghosts and Monsters offers a productive way to understand Houston’s landscape of risk and loss.

Ghosts are the past or forgotten ways of life that haunt contemporary landscapes. As Tsing and her collaborators make clear: “Admiring one landscape and its biological entanglements often entails forgetting many others. Forgetting, in itself, remakes landscapes, as we privilege some assemblages over others. Yet ghosts reminds us. Ghosts point to our forgetting, showing us how living landscapes are imbued with earlier tracks and traces” (2017, G6). While focusing on the red fire ants of Houston certainly privileges their presence and “entails forgetting,” it also resurrects *S. invicta* and makes possible a reading of “living landscapes.” Indeed, the floating rafts of fire ants can be read as “ghosts.” They are agents that “point to our forgetting” and show us how the Houston cityscape is “imbued with earlier tracks and traces.” Arising from their hidden, subterranean anthills, entire colonies of red fire ants suspended themselves on the floodwaters. In this moment, the ants became startlingly visible and haunted the public imaginary. Individuals who reported on the flooding called the ants “terrifying,” “creepy,” “scary,” and “nightmarish.” The visibility of the ghost-ants dramatically recalled their presence in both the material landscape and ideological fabric of

Houston. Previously avoided and ignored, the ants suddenly commanded regional and national attention. People began to recall *S. invicta*'s recent history in the United States and this species' lasting impact in the American South. Perhaps most profound, however, individuals were forced to acknowledge the ants' presence and consider a difficult future of togetherness with this species in a landscape of risk. The sudden realization that humans shared the destroyed landscape of Houston with colonies of adept red fire ants briefly brought into being a more-than-human world. These potentialities, however, were quickly stymied as journalists and social media users dismissed the ants and rearticulated an anthropocentric fantasy of human control and domination.

Monsters are the unruly beings that terrify the human, and, like ghosts, render visible multispecies connections in damaged places. According to Tsing and her collaborators, "Monsters are the wonders of symbiosis *and* the threats of ecological disruption" (2017, M2). In the first sense, monsters reveal "symbiotic entanglement" and "ask us to consider the wonders and terrors of [this] . . . entanglement in the Anthropocene" (Tsing et al. 2017, M2). In the second sense, monsters are the hazards and threats of contemporary risk society: "Modern human activities have unleashed new and terrifying threats. . . . Modern human activities have also exposed the crucial and ancient forms of monstrosity that modernity tried to extinguish" (Tsing et al. 2017, M2). Monsters, then, "help us pay attention to ancient chimeric entanglements . . . [*and*] they point us toward the monstrosities of modern Man" (Tsing et al. 2017, M2). The media coverage of the floating fire ants coded these flood survivors as "monsters." *S. invicta* was called "aggressive," "sneaky," "unsettling," "disturbing," "dangerous," and "horrible." The monster-ants revealed the existence of a robust "symbiotic entanglement," calling attention to their presence in a space otherwise coded human. In addition, the monster-ants revealed "threats of ecological disruption." Brought to the United States via risky international trade systems and technologies, made visible

because of climate change, and inhabiting the highly developed metropolis of Houston, *S. invicta* is a monster of risk society. Viewed as an out-of-control monster of modernity, the red fire ant was systematically poisoned. Yet this species' presence in the Houston cityscape defies the long history of fire ant extermination projects. *S. invicta* is both a monstrous threat and a wonder of multispecies symbiosis.

The red fire ant is, at once, a ghost and a monster of the city of Houston. This species recalls forgotten histories, multispecies connections, and contemporary threats. Furthermore, like ghosts and monsters, *S. invicta* complicates the separation between humans and others. The red fire ant occupies a central position in southern identity and cannot be removed from the human. Both human and ant share the Houston landscape. The world of risk will strengthen one species while leading to the demise of the other. Taken together, these two theoretical frameworks — assemblage and Ghosts and Monsters — suggest that it is time to finally imagine a post-risk landscape where both the human and the more-than-human fire ant can practice their own unique ways of doing and being, together.

Conclusion

The floating colonies of fire ants bound in the catastrophic urban landscapes of Houston forced local human inhabitants to recognize a difficult world of multispecies togetherness. However, rather than inhabit the space of exposure and vulnerability created by the record flooding and the presence of fire ants, social media users and journalists rejected this potential moment of reimagination, discursively and rhetorically distanced *S. invicta* from the human, and reinstated *Homo sapiens* as the dominant species within this landscape. Conceptualizing the red fire ants as an assemblage and as Ghosts and Monsters forces us to rethink the multispecies entanglements that exist in the present and to imagine a future of

urban cohabitation. While both models disrupt separatist thought and promote multispecies togetherness, each makes a distinct contribution to imagining alternate modes of existence. Reading the fire ants as an assemblage promotes multimodal thinking by demonstrating that socio-material and discursive formations constitute this floating collectivity. Viewing *S. invicta* as Ghosts and Monsters exposes both longstanding and future symbiotic relationships. These theoretical frameworks that point toward and postulate more-than-human becoming(s) encourage the human, in the words of Haraway, to “stay with the trouble.” Within the damaged landscape of Houston, humans must *stay with the trouble* and learn to coexist with the unloved fire ants. During this era of profound and unrelenting risk, we must make “oddkin” and participate in “unexpected collaborations and combinations” (Haraway 2016, 4) with creatures that make togetherness difficult. The fire ants swept up in Hurricane Harvey’s floodwaters are oddkin. Now we must practice novel acts of becoming with these fellow flood survivors.

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ABSTRACTS

“Some people have a ghost town, we have a ghost city”: Gothic, the Other, and the American Nightmare in Lauren Beukes’s *Broken Monsters*

Carys Crossen

Abstract

Lauren Beukes’s novel *Broken Monsters* is set in contemporary Detroit, and depicts a sequence of gruesome murders against the backdrop of the city’s economic decline. In a more conventional novel the abandoned warehouses, rundown inner-city neighbourhoods and mean streets would be the ‘othered’ setting for the drama, serving as a contrast to the American Dream of prosperity and social advancement. But Detroit has earned a reputation as a place of crime, social unrest and economic malaise, to the extent that this has become the norm rather than the other. Nonetheless, Beukes still manages to other the city setting through various means, including adding a supernatural element and viewing the action through the prism of social media. This article explores how Beukes’s novel others the rundown city setting through Gothic and supernatural elements, and how new developments in the Gothic genre are depicted throughout the text.

Keywords

Beukes, Detroit, Gothic, trauma, internet, nightmare, dream, urban decay

Sanctuary City: Pynchon’s Subjunctive New York in *Bleeding Edge*

Inger H. Dalsgaard

Abstract

This paper considers the subjunctive implications of three relations in Thomas Pynchon’s *Bleeding Edge* (2013) structured along the lines of inside/outside, real/virtual and now/then. Critics have applied the idea of the subjunctive and questions of Pynchon’s experiments with time and space relations in earlier works to investigate ambiguity or multiple realities in his fiction. This analysis of his latest novel focuses on how Other figurations of New York commute between hopeful, subjunctive and pessimistic, indicative readings. The first of three relations identifies the way in which urban planning has been a locus for

discussions of dispossession and colonization in Pynchon's work. In this text exemplified by the loss of diversity effected by Rudy Giuliani's sanitizing of Time's Square in the 1980s and the different outcomes projected for the bird sanctuary, Isle of Meadows, and for the landfill site containing it, Fresh Kills, before and after 9/11 in 2001. The second relation focuses on how different character remember the architectural past of New York city or rebuild it in a virtual and virtuous alternative form, though the Internet is a highly contested space in *Bleeding Edge*. The final relation overlays the two first spatial and virtual relations with the complicated temporal and modal relationship between the 2001 setting of the 2013 text and the present-day reader. Pynchon has often worked with the historically inevitable, deterministic closing down of subjunctive possibilities by the forward march of indicative, possessive, indexed world. Some elements of this text, and not least the position of the reader in the flow of time between the historical facts presented in the text and the as-of-yet unknown outcomes of these in present-day real life, keeps some ambiguity about projected (negative) outcomes alive.

Keywords

Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, subjunctive, New York, urban planning

Anthony Bourdain's Cosmopolitan Table:

Mapping the ethni(C)ity through street food and television

Shelby E. Ward

Abstract

Examining food-television personality Anthony Bourdain and his CNN show *Parts Unknown*, I look at the intersectional mapping practices of food, television, and the city as they articulate on the screen to provide a map of the ethni(C)ity, as Bourdain performs the role of cosmopolitan moving within and consuming cities of the imagined Other. This on-screen performance highlights the complicated positions of the cosmopolitan, who can oscillate between hospitality and hostility, as framed by Jacques Derrida (2001, Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000). This paper follows three cities that question the cosmopolitan's ability to subvert narratives and visual practices that essentialize and reify the city of the Other. In Singapore, the screen as map considers the pleasure of viewing the city from above, as Michel de Certeau critiques. In Bogotá, Colombia, the city as map questions the proposed split between signifiers as "traditional" and "modern;" urban and rural, that is made strange by the tracing food between, in and out of the city. In Hue, Vietnam, Bourdain as map, looks at the body of the cosmopolitan as a translation machine in the assumed and produced hospitality of the outsider or guest-as-host. Each different map and city indicate different ways in which the city of the

Otherved is re-presented through Bourdain's show. Ultimately, I argue that exactly because the city, the screen, and the cosmopolitan work through mediations (Lefebvre 1996) that at times they offer a critique to question relations with each Other, and then at times they only reconfirm essentialized desires to consume spaces of the Other. Both self-reflexivity and reification are possible simultaneously through Bourdain's narrative.

Keywords

Bourdain, ethni(C)ity, food studies, de Certeau, the cosmopolitan

Eyeing Fear and Anxiety:

Postcolonial Modernity and Cultural Identity in the Urban Space of *The Eye*
Shana Sanusi

Abstract

This article explores the cultural representations of Hong Kong seen in the film *The Eye* (2002) by paying close attention to how the urban space produces anxieties and is specifically implicated in haunting. The reality of Hong Kong is seen through its postcolonial modernity where the unsettling sense of isolation and alienation become apparent. This feeling is further enhanced by the city's tenuous balance between the Western and traditional Chinese influences which imposes liminality on the bodies who dwell here. The LeFebvrian notion of the production of space frames the analysis to articulate Hong Kong's predicament. Thailand is therefore imagined in the film as an alternative space that allows a nostalgic, albeit romanticized, existence that Hong Kong cannot afford.

Keywords

Asian horror film; urban space; spatial politics; LeFebvre; postcolonial modernity.

Miraculous Migrations throughout a Chicanx Los Angeles:

Negotiating Otherved Spaces in John Rechy's *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*

Michael Moreno

Abstract

The search for a miraculous and more inclusive Aztlán within the ideological rubble of intracultural discrimination and violence is at the center of John Rechy's *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* (1991). The recovery of one's place/position in Los Angeles as a material site, a psychological location, and cultural sanctuary is an integral aspect in generating individual and collective narratives within Chicanx identity construction. Rechy challenges Los Angeles'

cultural cartography and the tensions it creates with identities. As a queer Chicano, he has focused on how gender and sexuality are represented and othered throughout the Latinx community. As such, *Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* reveals the spiritualized spaces of the “suburban barrios” hidden beneath the shadow of freeways, painted along neighborhood streets and walls, and sequestered behind domestic havens of those discredited and devalued within the Chicana community. We discover, in fact, that challenging hegemonic powers of domination can reverse the erasure and silencing despite the normalizing endeavors of the Chicano patriarchy, the Roman Catholic Church, or the dominant white culture.

Keywords

Chicana Culture and Literature, Urbanism, Spatial Theory

**Interrogating Identity in the City of Chicago:
Geography as Culture in Susan Power’s *Roofwalker***

Courtney Lynn Whited

Abstract:

Susan Power, in her work “*Roofwalker*”, includes narratives of both fiction and non-fiction, and these narratives primarily occur within the urban environment of Chicago. “*Roofwalker*” combines two genres of writing to develop and continue serious conversations about identity and past traumas within the United States and to create complicated depictions of living and existing as an Indigenous person and as a woman. This paper examines two stories in particular – the fictional “*Roofwalker*” and the non-fictional “*Museum Indians*” – both of which incorporate the city of Chicago as the homeplace of the respective main characters. In this paper, I will explore these two stories in order to demonstrate the complicated importance of geography in relation to culture, particularly regarding histories of forced relocation and imaginary boundaries. By focusing on the creation of home in Power’s work, I show how the urban Chicago setting of these two stories significantly impacts the characterization of the main characters and how they relate to their family and cultural history. In “*Roofwalker*” and “*Museum Indians*,” this conversation is told by looking at ways that geography and family coincide and conflict with one another. As the stories and histories are told there are no clear answers and there are no obvious solutions; however, this does not mean that the pieces are failed experiments. This paper shows how Power’s family histories are mimicked in her fiction, and this allows for a deeper look at how urban geography influences the way that Indigenous people write,

speak, and think about their place in the United States, in their tribes, and in their communities.

Keywords

Indigenous, Native, Chicago, Susan Power, Homeplaces

**Uncanny Retrofuturism and Urban Otherness:
Victorian London as Steampunk Cyber-City**

Helena Esser

Abstract

Steampunk, a retro-speculative aesthetic which re-imagines a hyper-Victorian never-was infused with technofantasy, often realises Victorian London as its creative epicentre: the city provides a nexus of accumulated urban imaginaries in which social, political, and technological paradigms converge or originate. In this article, I examine how steampunk may creatively re-route strategies of re-assessing human-machine relationships, inherited from its sister-genre cyberpunk, through a retrofitted industrial paradigm in order to examine selfhood and Otherness, alienation and hybridisation, through the metaphor of city. Through recourse to an outmoded and defamiliarizing Victorian aesthetic, steampunk translates concerns about cyber-technology back into a physical, tangible sphere, where they are productively encoded through and within urban space. My reading focuses on William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's seminal novel, *The Difference Engine* (1990) and S.M. Peters' post-millennial novel *Whitechapel Gods* (2008) and considers them in the context of urban Gothic and steampunk's maker culture.

Keywords

Steampunk, urban imaginary, Victorian London, cyberpunk, *The Difference Engine*, posthumanism, urban Gothic, neo-Victorian

**The Fire Ants of Hurricane Harvey:
Displacement and Belonging in Houston**

Nathaniel Otjen

Abstract:

This article examines news and social media representations of the red fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta*, that were published during the historic flooding of Houston by Hurricane Harvey in late August 2017. I argue that the narratives produced about

the fire ants in popular media perpetuate damaging and inadequate explanations of the species' role in Houston's imagined and material cityscape. In order to understand the various media responses to the ants, I provide a naturalcultural history of the fire ant in the southern United States and offer a literary analysis of these media representations. Arguing that the historical and contemporary discourses about *S. invicta* fail to theorize this creature's role in socio-material landscapes, I propose two generative models for interpreting and understanding the fire ants in Houston that, when read together, offer a necessary framework for future cohabitation. Revisiting Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the assemblage, I argue that the fire ants caught up in the floodwaters typify a contemporary assemblage associated with risk. I then use Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt's twin framework of "Ghosts" and "Monsters" to examine the imagined erasure of fire ants from the Houston landscape and the subsequent horror their physical presence evoked. Like a ghost, *S. invicta* points to our forgetting, and, like a monster, this species forces humans to consider the realities and possibilities of multispecies togetherness. Read alongside one another, the assemblage and Ghosts and Monsters chart a collaborative future of multispecies collectivity that offers ways of thinking and being in the difficult spaces created by contemporary risk society.

Keywords

Hurricane Harvey, assemblage, ghosts and monsters, fire ants, Houston