UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

POS-GRADUACAO EM LETRAS - INGLES

PERCEPTIONS OF POWER IN THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NOVEL

por

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Tese submetida a Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para obtencao do DOUTOR EM LETRAS

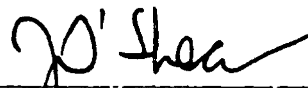
FLORIANOPOLIS

June, 1996

Esta tese foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pos-Graduacao em Ingles para obtencao do grau de

DOUTOR EM LETRAS

Opcao Literatura



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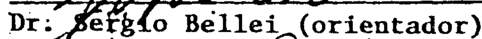

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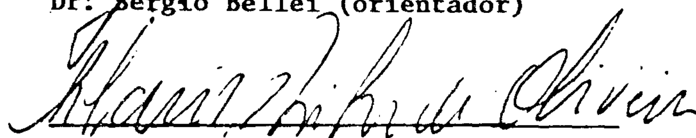

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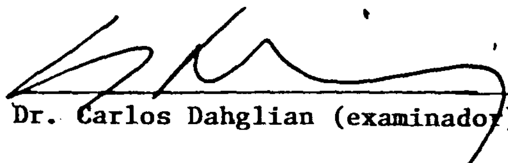

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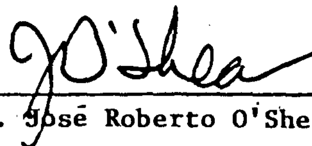

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Dedicated to the Burns clan:

Robert & Ethel
Michael & Julie
Sheila & David
Ian & Sonia
and Tom, Carmen, Priscila

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the following institutions:

CAPES, for granting me the scholarship that allowed me to pursue my doctoral studies in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, during the years 1992-1995; my department, Departmento de Letras Anglo-Germanicas, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, for granting me the leave of absence for same; and the Pos-Graduacao em Letras, Ingles e Literatura Correspondente, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, its teaching and administrative staff, for all assistance rendered during my stay at that university.

I am also indebted to the following individuals:

Professor Sam Coale, of Providence, Rhode Island, and Ms. Michele Ferrier, of San Francisco, California, for their time and generosity in sending me books and articles from the US; Professors Maria Lucia Vasconcelos and Miguel Nineve, for their friendship and support in Florianopolis; Professor Ana Lucia Gazolla, for her help and encouragement in launching me on a belated academic career; and, principally, my advisor Professor Sergio Bellei, some of whose suggestions have been mentioned in footnotes but whose theoretical sophistication and critical acumen have proved generally invaluable.

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to delineate how power--both institutional and representational--has been perceived in American fiction from the post-war period to the present. Representative novelists are examined and a number of individual works analyzed in their historical context. In the first part, socio-political theories of power form the theoretical background for how it is perceived in the novels. The second part discusses the post-war political novel, and the fictions of Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer. The third part examines postmodernist authors including, among others, William S. Burroughs, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo. It is seen that a Weberian (adversarial) model of the novelists of the second part gives way to a Foucaultian (insidiously pervasive) one of the novelists of the third part, which corresponds to the transformation of contemporary society, its politics and culture, under multinational capitalism during and after the 1960s.

RESUMO:

Este estudo tenta delinear como o poder - tanto institutional quanto representacional - e percebido na ficcao norte-americana do periodo pos-guerra ate o presente. O trabalho examina romancistas representativos e analisa uma serie de trabalhos individuais dentro de seu conteudo historico. Na primeira parte, teorias socio-politicos sobre o poder fornecem o suporte teorico para detectar como o poder e visto nos romances. A segunda parte discute o romance politico pos-guerra, Gore Vidal e Norman Mailer, entre outros. Contata-se que uma percepcao de poder Weberiana (adversarial) de poder por parte dos romancistas da segunda parte e substuida por uma visao Foucaultiana (poder insidiosamente filtrado) por parte dos romancistas da terceira parte, o que corresponde a transformacao da sociedade contemporanea, sua politica e cultura no capitalismo multinacional, durante e depois dos anos 60.

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INTRODUCTION

Section I: Literature and Power

a.

The United States since the Second World War has been marked by two interrelated developments important not only for that country but for the world as a whole: the rise to international military, political, and economic power, and the rise of an affluent, post-industrial society. These two broad developments have determined not only the social structure of the United States but also its relations with the rest of the world, relations that owing to its vast power and influence have often been problematic. Within American society these developments have been accompanied by a tendency to separate public and private life that has had consequences for all levels of culture. For example, the post-war novel, along with other expressions of social and cultural life, has been marked by "a retreat from the political" (Molesworth, "Culture" 1023), the eschewing of an engagement with public issues for a nearly exclusive concentration on the private problems and fantasies of individuals, as if the two realms were completely divorced.

Prose fiction has had difficulty in adjusting to the new realities. The writing of the older modern masters Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, even the more politicized John Dos Passos and John Steinbeck have seemed, as one literary historian put it, to some extent "detached" from the post-war world "with its sense of historical disaster, of changed destiny, of nuclear threat, accumulating mass society, growing materialism, and technological transformation" (Bradbury, "Neorealist Fiction" 1131). Yet, the realist writers who emerged after the war continued to be fascinated by an isolated self, an alienated and somewhat comically absurd individual dealing with what was perceived as an increasingly distant and indifferent system

(1134). "The recurring stance of the modern fictional hero," another critic noted in 1967, reflected "alienation": "The common pattern of action which recurred was the pattern of the quest...The nightmare world, alienation and nausea, the quest for identity, and the comic doomsday vision--these are the elements that characterize recent American fiction" (James E. Miller 30). The Sartrean terminology aside, it is worthy of note that these are the characteristics that modern criticism has discovered as most typical of *Huckleberry Finn*, a text that does not shrink, as the ones the critic was discussing, from trenchant social analysis (Hill 231-44). The 19th century American society depicted in Twain's novel, to take one example, is shown to take "a tissue of bookish assumptions and artificial forms" for reality itself (Poirier, *World Elsewhere* 145).

Twain, it is worthy of note, who has been called and indeed called himself the most American of writers, wrote a series of excoriating letters, later collected into a book, against the American military adventurism and imperialism of the end of the 19th century. Frank Lentricchia thinks that the "main line" of American literature has always in fact been political and "stands in harsh judgment against...that soft humanist underbelly of American literature" of recent decades: "a realism of domestic setting whose characters play out their little dramas of ordinary event and feeling in an America miraculously free from the environment and disasters of contemporary technology, untouched by racial and gender tensions, and blissfully unaware of political power" (6). The tendency itself suggests an interrelation between historical reality and fictional creation. It is as if the immense changes brought about by the war and the newly emergent institutions and technologies were too great to be grasped by American writers except indirectly. For example, social class conflicts, when they were admitted at all, tended after the war to be transformed in

fiction into psychological dramas and existential *angst.* Many poets and novelists tended to "project back" from their personal or artistic experience to society and politics, abandoning other representations of power found in history and philosophy (Molesworth 1037). This, Thomas Schaub has cogently argued, was a part of the "new liberalism" among critics and writers in search of a politics that had long become disillusioned with socialism and yet was determined to remain aloof from the reactionary forces emerging with the onset of the Cold War. In the process, "liberalism itself became conservative," as it served to help form what Geoffrey Hodgson calls "the false consensus" of the Fifties (Schaub 9,15; Hodgson 17). With the erosion of old sources of moral authority, the retreat into the self could take hold in both fiction and criticism.

This argument, which will be expanded in later chapters, implies that there is a correlation between the thought and events of a period and its literary production that cannot, I think, be seriously doubted, although the precise connection is complex and problematic and shall be provisionally addressed in the second section of this Introduction. For a very recent example, it has been observed that there has been in contemporary fiction a return to realist modes (sometimes referred to as "neo-realism") after the linguistic preoccupations of postmodernist fiction in the 1970s and 1980s. Some critics have hailed this as a return to "real life" after what is sometimes referred to contemptuously as mere "word games," as if even more traditional realist fictions are somehow not, after all, linguistic constructions. One such critic assured me a few years ago that the American novel is now back where it has always belonged, to the traditional realism of our fiction (Melville? Hawthorne?). Others more skeptically perceive this return, if that is what it is, as an acquiescence in the "conservative" turn of American society with the advent of Presidents Reagan and Bush and their reactionary

social project (McCaffery, "Fictions of Present" 1162), a perception that assumes that fiction mirrors official ideologies in an unproblematic way. It can be shown, I think, that this does not necessarily happen, except perhaps in the kind of novel that frequently appears on best-seller lists. For example, there are the 1960s, a turbulent and questioning decade from which emerged a postmodernist fiction that overthrew traditional methods, techniques, and modes of thought. At the same time, serious works of so-called psychological realism continued to be produced in abundance. On the other hand, the 1950s, a politically conservative even reactionary decade, also managed to produce stylistically and thematically innovative works (William Gaddis, William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac) that radically questioned the socio-political context of that time.

Serious fiction of the present, by which I mean novels not written primarily for the mass market, cannot now return to an unquestioning representation of an assumed stable world; the radical departures of the writers mentioned above and those of the newer postmodernist novelists and critics, whatever their more gimmicky excesses, have made that impossible. The return to realism, to be sure, includes novels of the so-called new regionalism (irreverently, "hick chic") or numerous analyses of domestic life, what Don DeLillo has called the "around-the-house-and-in-the-yard" type of novel (R. Harris 26), from writers like Reynolds Price, Anne Tyler, Bobbie Ann Mason, even the darker Raymond Carver (Lentricchia's examples). But this return may be nothing more than a retreat from a certain kind of overly self-reflexive postmodernism (Ronald Sukenik, Steve Katz). Serious novelists working today as diverse as Toni Morrison, Don DeLillo, Joyce Carol Oates, Tim O'Brien, William Kennedy, Ted Mooney, and T. Coraghessan Boyle, for example, may be said to work in a recognizably realist mode (their novels have narrative plot, characters of a sort, etc. and

they tend to eschew the kind of authorial intervention and metafictional game-playing that is associated with John Barth), but none of these writers have entirely abandoned the fable-making tendencies of postmodernism or returned to an outmoded attempt to create a falsely transparent language that might serve as a vehicle for some unexamined objective reality. There even seems to be the blend, which Alan Wilde calls "midfiction," of realism and experimentalism, exemplified by writers like Stanley Elkin, Max Apple, and Donald Barthelme. The novel is evidently still very much alive (reports of its demise, to paraphrase Mark Twain, have been exaggerated) and still remains a flexible genre, adapting and changing, questioning itself as well as the world.

Within this large, varied, ever-changing body of fiction are a few writers who, in contrast to the old-guard novelists and their contemporary epigones who continue to probe the middle-class psyche in contemporary America, have been writing novels that attempt to see American society in a larger, more public context (or the public-within-the-private, of which more below), who are, to simplify things a little, more politically oriented insofar as they perceive the multiple problems of American society as centered around the notion of public power. The central but difficult concept of power has, unsurprisingly, been much discussed in political and social theory. Once perceived as always involving some form of domination or control by one specific group over others, since the work of Michel Foucault and others, new ways of looking at power have evolved that complicate this general notion. Foucault, for example, does not see knowledge and power as separate.

In an 1848 essay on Pope, the English writer Thomas DeQuincey once made a distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power: "The finction of the first is--to teach; the finction of the second is--to move: the first is a rudder, the second an oar or a

sail" (qtd. by Cuddon, 526). While DeQuincey's binary distinction doubtless alludes to the classical duality of *dulce et utile*, his nautical metaphor makes it unintentionally clear that knowledge and power are both on the same boat.

To anticipate the theoretical discussion somewhat, traditional political theory has viewed power as something possessed by someone, whether an individual (Machiavelli, Hobbes) or a class (Marx). For Foucault, power is not possessed as such but functions in and through discursive strategies, "through the identities produced in the forms of knowledge and interpretation that normalize human subjectivity in various historical periods" (Shapiro 3-4). The linking of knowledge and interpretation in this formulation points up the importance of literature and criticism in the formation of human identity in our era, along with science and repositories of knowledge such as universities, political institutions, the mass media, the law, and other familiar forms of power. None of these, not even language itself, have been seen as innocent, neutral or disinterested--perhaps since Marxism. Foucault's question, "What historical knowledge is possible of a history that itself produces the true-false distinction on which such knowledge depends?" (Baynes et al. 111), suggests that even the "truth," that transcendental notion of disinterested humanism, is arrived at through the discursive practices, institutions and instruments of power and, of course, employed for ends by no means covered by the traditional and comfortable notions of the "love of wisdom" or "disinterested truth."

Given these new perceptions, questions of power have become central in contemporary literary and cultural studies, most recently in the fields of ethnic, feminist, and gay literatures, and in the thriving field of postcolonial literature and theory, but radical new readings of even established canonical authors and the most unlikely works have proliferated to such an extent that it seems that any or all works can be read from this perspective (Riebling 177). It is

somewhat surprising, therefore, that less attention has been given to the nature and exercise of power in American society by contemporary writers who have been most concerned with it. This study is an attempt to address the relationship between this concern and these writers.

b.

The novel has since its beginnings been a social genre and continues to fınction as an important source of information, as Lionel Trilling once remarked (*Liberal* 63), on power, money, and class in modern society, but, of course, a student of literature is not only concerned with the novel as a source but as an object of study in its own right. Novels illuminate reality (how they do so or even if they do is a topic of theoretical discussion, but here I shall just assume that they do). My contention is that our contemporary novelists have contributed to our understanding of power--or in some cases actually obscured that understanding--through the creation of literary representations that offer insights distinct from more abstract and conceptual social theories. In the novel, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, social and political events acquire meaning in connection with private life. The "essence" of events as purely social and political may remain outside the novel, as it were, but they are "illuminated" in their relation to private fates (Bakhtin, "Forms" 109). And from a politicized perspective, we servants must be clear, Richard Sennet has said, about how the power of the masters is limited. At the risk of invoking a now fashionable paranoia, only our knowledge of its complexity can avoid or prevent unshakable images of power that can only ultimately increase the masters' control. My concern in this study, accordingly, is to suggest the ways that power is perceived in contemporary fiction in the United States, or, to put it another way, delineate the different ways in which the literary artists of the world's most powerful nation discern how power has been exercised since the Second World War.

It can be assumed that relations of power are important in any system broadly defined as political. Raymond Aron says, for example, that "[a]s a political concept, power...designates a relationship between men" (257), so that a society without power would be a contradiction in terms, i.e. a mere aggregate of individuals, as Thomas Hobbes long ago recognized. Analysts have differed, however, in assigning power its relative importance. A minimalist view, surely inadequate, is that power is simply one among other features in a political system. Another view, defended by Harold Laswell and Abraham Kaplan, who were concerned with defining a central concept in their field of study, is that the study of power is what properly constitutes a political science (II: 14). A more radical position, widely held today, is that power underlies all human relationships at every level, but if this wording suggests that power is something distinct from the people involved, Foucault reminds us that "power is co-extensive with the social body" (qtd. in Gordon 142).

Political theory has devoted itself for centuries to two main aspects of power: the notion of authority and the use of "allocative" or economic resources. Up to about the 19th century, theory was generally concerned with the power of the state and its legitimacy, i.e. authority. The importance of economic resources was at least implicitly recognized in early theories but the great power of market forces only began to be seriously examined in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. In our own century, the theory of power has continued to investigate these two major areas but has inquired more deeply into the nature of power in both general and specific contexts. For example, it is studied in analyses of organizations, bureaucracies, political elites, and government at national, regional and local levels, and of international relations, the proper subject of political science as Laswell and Kaplan conceive it. There have been many recent attempts of philosophers and social scientists to understand power both at a

more abstract, conceptual level, and by way of empirical studies (e.g. Dahl, *Who Governs?*). Major conceptual theories will be examined in Chapter 1.

On reflection, it is perhaps not too difficult to accept the idea that some kind of power comprehends or is co-extensive with all social relationships: from that even between individuals, like love or family attachments, to institutions connected with the family but extending beyond it, such as clubs, churches, and other social or recreational groups, as well as working and professional associations of every kind, all the way up to the more consciously acknowledged areas of power in military, corporate, and labor organizations, and at all levels of government--municipal, state, national, and international. Power has therefore been of interest to thinkers and scholars in a number of disciplines, such as history, political theory, moral philosophy, sociology, psychology, and economics, and, more recently, literary theory and criticism.. Writing is an act of power, "an act by which reality is seized and dominated" (Poirier, *World* 82), and that at least as far back as William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), it was perceived that the dominant discourses of contemporary society must be exposed and resisted by oppositional ones. Minority and post-colonial literatures, for example, offer to do this in their contention that the (social and politically) powerless have a story to tell but not the opportunity to tell it, since they are not recognized as having a story to tell.

Barbara Packer says that American authors have always been fascinated by power: Emerson, for example, uses the language of power, military and corporate, when he discusses in "The American Scholar" a tradition which "tyrannizes" and an inspiration which "monopolizes" (Elliott, *Lit. Hist. of US* 3876). Power relations have often been central in American fictional representations. To cite only canonical novelists, Hawthorne, Melville, Howells, Twain, Crane, Wharton, and Dreiser have all written fictional works in which the

characters find themselves diminished by powerful environments. Even Henry James, the master of psychological realism, published (in 1886) two novels about revolutionaries, *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*. And, recently contesting the liberal critic John Bayley's reading of James's last novel, *The Golden Bowl* (1904), as a work essentially about "love," Gore Vidal pointed out that it is rather about "force" (i.e. power), exerted by Adam and Maggie in the form of, first, money, then knowledge. Vidal added that Henry's brother William, the philosopher, once mused that the basis of civil society is force, a Hobbesian notion widely accepted by political theorists ("Letter" 49).

c.

This study is made up of three main parts. The literary analyses are to be found in Parts Two and Three (of which more below). The first part, Power and Society, consists of a single chapter which analyzes power in the light of contemporary social and political theory. The first section of this chapter discusses meanings, definitions, and related concepts and their attendant difficulties. The purpose is to suggest something of the sheer complexity of the concepts and to offer a general discussion to serve as a basis for what follows. The second section examines major modern theories of power, namely, those of Weber and Foucault, with some reference to related thinkers.

Max Weber is the first important attempt to go beyond the classical theories of the state toward more abstract and broadly applicable conceptions of power and domination. He defines power basically as one party being in a position to exercise its will on another despite resistance, which implies an assymetrical, with superordinate and subordinate parties, and an essentially conflictual relation, with power as something to be possessed and exercised as a matter of will. This view is shared by most modern thinkers before Foucault and, as I hope to

show in my chapters on the novels, unconsciously at least by those novelists I discuss in Part I. Like classical theorists, Weber also sought to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of power; he recognized traditional, charismatic, and rational/legal types of authority. Like earlier theorists Weber recognized the ultimate resort to force, but he also called attention to the importance of discipline and obedience. In this respect, he has also had great influence on later theory in his discussion of the rationalized but often, paradoxically, irrational power of bureaucracy, which has been the subject of recent fiction like that of Heller, Mailer, and especially Pynchon.

Michel Foucault's work has been important for poststructuralist thought and finds a certain resonance in postmodernist fiction, which tends to confirm Foucault's view of power as something increasingly difficult to identify. Power in this view is not unitary, something outside us but constitutive of the individual to begin with. He breaks with the classical notion that power consists in some substantive instance or agency of sovereignty; it is not a fixed quantity but a flux flowing through individuals and societies, bound up with systems and organizations, whose mechanisms are distributed along different points and not unified at a single one like the state. He therefore does not seek to define its essence, what it is, but rather how it exercised.

Foucault also wants to understand power as positive and enabling, occurring whenever one wishes to direct another's behavior, and as implying freedom (and in these points resembling other theories), as something other than domination of the master-slave type, since if it were only that people would not obey it so willingly. When there is domination it tends not to be top-down but within "lateral" relations, multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and fimction within a social organism. To identify these relations, he has analyzed the insidi-

ous "capillary" network of power relations, the social, political, and technical conditions of possibility, in order to reconstruct in his historical "genealogies" the interlocking but contingently connected relations and their effects.

Foucault said that he wished to create a history of the different ways human beings are made subjects. The recognition that one's personal identity cannot be separated from the fate of humanity, both of which are historically constructed, would argue against the tendency I have pointed out of so many postwar novelists to "psychologize" individual identity and evade some of the more subtle and invisible aspects of power in contemporary life. The abstract conception of who we are, determined ideologically and economically by the state, corporations, and the media, must be resisted by new forms of subjectivity, to which literature undoubtedly makes a unique contribution. One of the methods Foucault identifies that modern civilization has found to mold individuals is a system of disciplinary power, to punish deviation more efficiently and thoroughly, since disciplinary systems, with the cooperation of education and the human sciences, have been inserted more deeply into the social fabric. The technology of normalization became inseparable from knowledge of man and this power was and is exercised through invisibility: as opposed to older forms of power, the subjects and not the leaders are observed, a situation that in a technologically advanced society like the United States perhaps goes some way toward explaining the ubiquity of paranoia in contemporary American fiction.

Political and social theories of power are as numerous as their object is important, but there need not be any necessary link between such theories and any supposed "applications" in literary works. Literature, for a number of reasons, resists being transformed into philosophical or sociological texts, even when there is enough philosophy or sociology in them.

When they have been (forcibly) transformed in this way, they often spring back into a life not foreseen by the theories meant to contain them--this much the deconstructionists have labored to explain. On the other hand, literary works are not independent of the material world and the climate of ideas from which they spring and it might be expected that theories of society might have something to say about texts that also, though in different ways, comment on society. Socio-political critics have in fact obtained considerable mileage from political readings of literary texts. Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, and Frederic Jameson, to mention three exemplary Marxist literary critics, have forcefully argued in a number of books that the social and political aspects of fiction are not peripheral but essential, without a slighting of formal or what used to be thought of as purely "literary" aspects of a given text, since even aesthetic considerations have a social component. Nor is my own interest and emphasis in this study at all divorced from the social and political, as the centrality of the concept of power would indicate. I hope that the second main section of this Introduction, which examines the relation between fictional and historical reality, and my readings in subsequent chapters of selected novels, will demonstrate this concern with text and context, the literary work as a social production.

What does need saying, however, is that there is no automatic correspondence between formal theories of power and its thematic treatment in works of fiction, although I have outlined above possible parallel lines between major theories and novelist practice. There is a need, I think, to take a look at perceptions of power over several decades of American fiction. If this study occasionally reads like a brief post-war history of the novel, it is because the connections between writers and the reality they experience and between the reality of different texts reacting among one another must be constantly made. The difficulty, at least for me,

of making direct correspondences between political and social theory and fictional texts, however, is why this study has not been organized differently, say, into chapters in which a certain theory is first proposed and discussed and then "illustrated" with fictional examples selected specifically for that purpose. I have rather chosen to examine what I have found to be the main theoretical statements and then analyzed a number of novels chosen to see how *they* perceive power, an analysis which includes whether or not they show any correspondence with the theoretical statements and how far such statements may go to explain what is happening in the texts. My concern, therefore, is primarily with the literary works. Despite the necessity of a rather extensive preliminary theoretical exposition, the movement is from the novels back to it, whenever relevant, and not deductively, or reductively, from it to them.

Another reason why social theory is difficult to connect with specific literary works, as perhaps opposed to connecting it with "literature" in general (where there must be some correspondence between two modes of cultural production in a given epoch), is the familiar one that theory is generalizing and abstract, while a literary work like a novel is particularizing and concrete, as in Bakhtin's notion of society-in-the-individual. One may object that, if that is so, then even literary theory would seem to have little to do with specific works. In fact, this seems to be more and more the case, as English Studies and even more so, Critical Theory, take over what used to be English or American etc. literature and criticism, and as novels, plays, poems, and essays recede almost unheeded into the background. Literary theory itself seems to have receded into a sub-category of social theory, or is it the other way round?

Another problem less often remarked is that while the concreteness of fiction makes it readily accessible to contextualization, the specific social and political contexts of philosophical and critical theories are often forgotten, so that theoretical models sometimes tend to

be universalized. As John Carlos Rowe, writing on postmodernist studies, puts it: "One negative consequence of the reading lists in critical theory was the often mechanical application of these theoretical texts to specific literary works without much consideration for the historical differences between theory and literary practice" (195).

Yet another reason is related to the first and can be stated in the form "Literature does not articulate theories but disarticulates them" (Menand, "Eliot" 7), which seems to mean that literature itself may exert a deconstructive function on how social phenomena are perceived. I believe that this in fact is one of its important roles. To the possible charge of a radical postmodernist or new historicist critic that in privileging novels, I am upholding "a discredited myth of literary value" that is no more than just another "discourse" (Kermode 41), at the expense of other cultural productions, one might appeal to this notion of literature's critical potential historically, since the way it problematizes culture is familiar from a long tradition. Even the canonical American writers, Frank Lentricchia says, "those who conservatives say best embody American values" (and have perhaps therefore recently been under fire from feminist, ethnic, and other critics), "are adversary critics of our culture" (5). What it may come down to, however, is that novels happen to be the cultural form that interest me most; others may prefer, or at least choose for analysis, television, pop music, fashion, ads (or, to cite Don DeLillo's comically suggestive examples in *White Noise*, cereal boxes or car crash movies). Television, at least, is probably more influential in shaping mass opinion than any other cultural production and there are recent signs that it is taking over the critical concerns of people who used to be interested primarily in literature.

An argument in favor of the choice of literary texts for cultural work has been proposed by Brook Thomas in his study of the New Historicists, for whom, according to its leading

proponent Stephen Greenblatt, the relation between past and present is one of "negotiation" and "exchange" and for whom ahistorical appeals to the transcendent authority of literature, as espoused by the (old) New Critics, are irrelevant (Kermode 41). Thomas thinks that literature has in fact lost much of its critical potential, that it is either complicit with an extending power or marginalized to a form of "recreation" (Thomas 199-200). For him, however, this does not necessarily trivialize literary texts since they have "transformative potential" (167) as forms of play, or as possible resistances to particular ideologies. Since literature occupies a freer space than, for example, the law, to play with alternatives, including alternative ways of reading (like political readings), literature is a form of discourse that "can provoke us to re-flect on our historical situation" (172). As Salman Rushdie succinctly put it, "the novel is a privileged arena" (103). Following Wolfgang Iser's theory of reading, Thomas argues that the text makes the reader a necessary component in the construction of the text's world, a "construction" of a world that has no prior existence and not a re-construction of an absent original presence (209). Therefore, as readers "we can negotiate an exchange with texts from the past that can give us a sense of the otherness of our own point of view, thus provoking us to grope for alternative ways of world-making" (211). Specifically, owing to literature's status as play, reconstructions of institutional structures can be imagined without the costs of their historical realization, "since the literary provides a space in which possible costs can be played out" (216). The value of this theory, I think, is that it provides for a political criticism that need not neglect literature's imaginative power or concern with aesthetic structure.

d.

It might be proposed that not theoretical disquisitions but empirical studies of how power works in specific social locales would be the appropriate parallel for fictional perceptions of

the same. There does appear to be a rough correspondence between such empirical studies, which have appeared in the political science literature in the United States, and, say, novels of the first half of the century (e.g. "muckrakers" like Upton Sinclair, as well as the "naturalist" fiction of Sherwood Anderson, Richard Wright, John Steinbeck, James T. Farrell), or even earlier (Theodore Dreiser, William D. Howells, Edith Wharton), works which carefully delineate the social and political structures of power in city, region, or segment of society, and which firmly expose the characters who pull the strings of domination. Such a sociological-literary comparative study might well prove of interest, but making such parallels would be of much more limited value in contemporary fiction, for power in contemporary society tends to be more insidious, both more pervasive and more difficult to identify. Contemporary fiction has, I think, evolved to respond more effectively to the social and political changes that have brought this situation about. I have found it necessary therefore to examine varied perceptions of power over several decades.

Parts Two and Three of this study, accordingly, examine a fair number of novels. Each part contains an introductory section which serves as historical and critical background for the individual novelists and the critical readings of works in the chapters that follow. There might be a temptation, in glancing at the table of contents, to progressively classify the novels discussed as realist, modernist, and postmodernist. While such a classification is indeed suggested by my division--it will be observed that there is a break between the more traditional type of text examined in Part Two and the postmodernist texts in Part Three--it would not be entirely accurate. For one thing, while some critics (Rowe, Jameson, Hassan) find postmodernism to be a "period concept" referring to a number of works of art that emerged in the 1960s, others (Chabot) think it is not an all-encompassing term in the way modernism is. Still

others point out that the different kinds of works co-exist (Hassan, *Paracriticisms* 47; Chabot 30): thus, realists (Gore Vidal, John Updike, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, J.F. Powers, etc.) and neo-realists (Russell Banks, Joyce Carol Oates, T. Choraghessan Boyle, Raymond Carver, Ann Tyler, Larry McMurtry) are contemporary with those novelists (Walker Percy, Thomas McGuane, Toni Morrison, Stephen Millhauser, William Gass) mainly inspired by the pre-war modernist masters, as well as those invariably identified as postmodernists (Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Ishmael Reed, Samuel Delany, William Gibson). The terminology is further complicated by the fact that some of the writers I have listed as belonging to one category may be placed without undo violence in another (Morrison? Oates?), and that still other writers (Barth, Delany) have over their extended careers seem to have changed or merged categories.

Norman Mailer is an exemplary case. His long and prolific career spans the limits of my inquiry--the fifty years since the end of the war till the present--and his work shares features defined as belonging to all three terms. For example, his first novel, *The Naked and the Dead* (1947) depicts the gritty life of infantry grunts (realism), insists on the determinism of chance and natural forces (naturalism), and employs the modernist device, borrowed from John Dos Passos, of biographical flash-backs ("The Time-Machine"). The novels of both the Fifties and Sixties feature the quintessentially modernist themes of self-discovery and identity and the tension between knowledge and experience, while stylistically eschewing the modernist obsession with formal unity and aesthetic wholes in favor of a realist concern with linking text and historical experience--even an old-fashioned realist preoccupation with the seamier side of life. His novels of the Sixties introduce elements of fantasy and mix history and fiction within the text, regarded as post-modernist features. A quite recent novel, *Harlot's Ghost*

(1991), in its use of mixed genres, embedded manuscripts, historical and fictional characters, and refusal of closure, can be and has been called a postmodernist novel. Nevertheless, I have included Mailer in the second part, as I think he shows more affinities with respect to his perceptions of power with the novelists discussed there than with the postmodernists of the third.

Despite the problems with historical and even descriptive features of these terms, and the insistence of some critics to employ them only as a convenient shorthand, they often tend to solidify into quasi-metaphysical categories and their taxonomic convenience fades into the drawing of conclusions about a work on the basis of its being so classified. Since what constitutes postmodernism is an on-going debate and since the novelists discussed in my last three chapters, and, somewhat more problematically, in Chapter 5, are said to be bona-fide postmodernists, I have discussed this problem and its relation to my topic in the introduction to Part Three. There is no attempt to establish definitive categories (if indeed that can be done) but to discuss relevant concerns, since it is increasingly likely that we cannot do without such terms and still avoid awkwardness, and--this is the reason for the division--there do seem to be essential differences in perceptions of power in the novelists of chapters 5 to 8 and those discussed in chapters 2 to 4.

Another objection may be that I do not discuss, or even mention, a good many novelists that are also concerned with power and that, in any case, I am begging the question, since the kinds of power that novelists deal with have not been determined. Granted these objections, I may advance the information at this point that I am mainly concerned with political and institutional power in American society and government in a more general (though not universal) sense rather than, say, the institutional and social pressures specifically implicated in racism

or sexism or other kinds of discriminatory social phenomena, although these social phenomena are doubtless negative consequences of the kinds of power this study is concerned with. In the more recent works discussed, also, perceptions of more insidious kinds of power such as the media need to be addressed, although doubtless these kinds, too, are implicated in both blatant and subtle forms of discrimination and domination.

I am well aware that multiple aspects of power and domination have effectively been treated in books and articles written by and about people of ethnic or sexual minorities and women, people who have a lot to say about the politics and institutions of the white, heterosexual, patriarchal United States and have been saying so, in some cases since the 19th century, in both literary and critical works. Nor would I presume to say any such things for them. Their exclusion in these pages, which is doubtless glaring to some readers, is to a certain extent a practical matter. Each of these literary and critical tendencies has developed, especially in recent years, into a whole field of its own, requiring a special expertise that I do not possess and a particular emphasis that I do not wish to give. This is in the way of explanation of my discussing only works by white male (but in nearly all cases, still living) authors in Parts Two and Three. My ignoring black, ethnic, or female authors should not be interpreted as ignoring the importance of their contribution to any discussion of power in American society. Mary McCarthy, Joan Didion, Toni Morrison, Ishmael Reed, Samuel Delany, to mention some authors I would consider relevant (there are others, as well as white males like Robert Coover and Walter Abish), would doubtless enrich the topic but would also considerably enlarge a study in which a large number of novels are already examined. Furthermore, and this is the main point, the authors and works I do discuss have been chosen for their special focus, which is not on the effects on particular groups excluded by the power structure but on that

very structure itself, both in its more evident and more recondite modes of subjugation, a focus that comprehends and concerns all Americans (even white males of the humbler sort) and, by extension, given the expansive realities of American power, the rest of the world. The focus is, therefore, both grander and narrower.

e.

As a final note to this first section, let me offer a brief gloss on the terms of the title. By "contemporary," I mean not necessarily that the authors of the texts discussed herein are living and writing today, although nearly all of them are, but in the accepted sense, at least in American literary studies, of works published since the Second World War, an historical context that is, as shall be seen, all-important. By "American," I mean novels written in English (although American fiction has works written in other languages) by writers from the United States (although some American writers were born abroad), wherever they were actually written (some American writers live more or less permanently abroad) or published (some notable novels were, for reasons of alleged obscenity, originally published in less puritanical places like Paris). This national qualification might seem unnecessary, but this study is being written in Brazil, for a Brazilian university, where people are aware that "America" has an even wider reference than that spacious and populous country situated between Canada and Mexico--which country is, accordingly, referred to herein as the United States, or simply the US. The adjective "American" has been retained to avoid clumsy locutions, but it should be added that the notion of "American Literature" has currently expanded to include literatures of other parts of the Americas. In the admirable *Columbia History of the American Novel* (1991), for example, there are chapters on Canadian, Caribbean, and Latin American fiction

and it is a healthy sign of the times that these literatures have received considerable critical attention in the last few years.

By "novel," I mean more or less lengthy texts of fiction (i.e. roughly, over a hundred pages to over a thousand); I shall generally ignore short stories, essays, and other productions by the authors chosen for the simple reason that the subject is already large enough. I am aware that the traditional term "novel" is often repudiated in contemporary critical discourse in favor of the terms "fiction" and "text," which seems to be a repudiation of replication models of fiction and a corresponding emphasis on the literary work as a construct, something made (fiction), a verbal fabric (text), rather than something whose primary feature is novelty. Yet, as someone pointed out, if one takes "novel" simply to mean a new making or new construct rather than novel content (which may not be so novel after all), the traditional term may be retained, along with the newer ones. As to what constitutes fiction, as opposed to non-fiction, that is a more complicated question that I am unable to pronounce on but one which the novel itself is developing and continually questioning in new and interesting kinds of texts.

Section II: Fiction and History

As the shifting perceptions of power in the contemporary American novel are, or at least I take them to be, directly related to the historical changes that have taken place since the Second World War, it behooves me in the second section of this Introduction to examine briefly some of the ways in which a novel is taken to be related to the historical period in which it is produced. I use the word "produced" to a purpose. Although novels are of course written by individual men and women, they, like other works of art--and being preeminently socially, even topically, oriented, perhaps even more so--are not often thought any more to be creations *ex nihilo* of transcendent individual genius ("...the long-since counterfeit wealth of

creative personality," as Walter Benjamin puts it, 232) but conceived of to a great extent as social productions.[1] Canonical literary texts, for example, are in circulation through the power of certain institutions, like education, law, and the publishing and advertising businesses. The literary artist does not work in isolation from society or outside of history, even though, like Thomas Pynchon, he may be a total recluse, nor can literary works be easily isolated from other kinds of texts. It follows that hard and clear distinctions between text and context cannot always be maintained (Greenblatt and Gunn 3-4).

The problem, then, to put it initially in the most general terms, is how fiction relates to "real life" (and putting tentative quotation marks round that phrase illustrates the questioning of the traditional distinction between reality and representation). Does art, as they used to say, imitate life, or, as Oscar Wilde proposed and the Elizabethans seem to have recognized, does life imitate art? Or, as a postmodernist tendency would have it, is the distinction irrelevant in a world now dominated by representations? Philip Roth lamented in the name of those novelists working in realist modes how contemporary reality constantly outstrips fiction in the invention of the outrageous. American reality, he said, is "a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination." For example, if Richard Nixon had not happened, he asked, could anyone have imagined him? (Roth 34). Roth cannot mean reality in the sense of unstructured events, or even data occurring in time, but the narratively structured and spatially organized "reality" presented in the media, a reality that is (in more than one sense) "mediated." What Roth seems to be lamenting, therefore, is how difficult it is to produce imaginative texts that can credibly compete with factual ones. In such circumstances, it is justifiable to suppose that despite the continuing vitality of realist modes in fiction, many novelists have simply stopped trying to compete, have given up any pretense at replicating contemporary experience and re-

sorted to the fictional "strategies" usually known as postmodernist: intricate language games, metafiction, rewritten classics, weird points-of-view, mixed genres, a penchant for fantasy, science fiction, and so forth (cf. Patricia Waugh).

The problem of what novelists (theoretically) do still remains, however: What is the relation between life and art, or, as it is posed in the contemporary jargon, between world and text? From its beginnings, the novel has been both worldly and fictional, ambivalent about its (meta)fictional status (Davis 225). *Don Quixote*, to cite a familiar, even hackneyed example, is a parody of even older fictions of knight-errantry. Parodies and stylizations of established genres occur throughout the history of the novel, even when that history is stretched, as it is by Mikhail Bakhtin, all the way back to antiquity ("Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"). On its side, Bakhtin says, the novel has even "novelized" other genres, giving them an indeterminacy, a contact with "unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the open-ended present)" ("Epic and Novel" 6-7). Conversely, early novels often used documentary materials to give the fiction authenticity; *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, is said to be based on the real-life experience of a marooned Scottish sailor. As Bakhtin explains, since the novel is "constructed in a zone of contact with the incomplete events of a particular present," it often crosses the boundaries of strictly fictional literature, employing, for example, letters, diaries, moral confessions, philosophical tracts, political manifestoes-- in other words, non-literary literature (33).

The precise nature of the contact of the novel with an "incomplete present," however, remains somewhat vague. The connection used to be thought of as specular, as older theories about Realism sought to explain the emergence of that kind of fiction. Whatever the merits of classical Realism in practice, and they are undoubtedly great, a theory of fiction that perceives

the novel as representing life "as it is" now hardly seems possible, if it has seemed possible for some time. The desire of modernist aesthetics, for example, to go beyond the surface data of classical Realism, to express an interior experience closer to what was felt as a "truer" reality, the lived subjective experience of the self, meant the rejection of a naive realist metaphysic. In a recent version of the anti-realist argument, Robert Scholes explains that it is because life can no longer be recorded that realism, presumably even the newer "psychological realism" of the modernist aesthetic, is dead. One cannot imitate the world (how, indeed, would that be ontologically possible?), only construct versions of it: "There is no mimesis, only poesis," Scholes says ("Fictional Criticism" 8), the theory that is now identifiable as "postmodernist," of which more in a later chapter. Yet, this does not dispose of the problem, for what after all would constitute a "version"? Even Scholes's formula seems to imply some metaphysically distinct world that fictional versions would somehow relate to.

It may well be that, in relating metaphysically distinct entities, one cannot but select the most aesthetically pleasing metaphor (not, that is, the "most precise" one, since that would again imply a knowledge of the *essence* of the two entities for which the metaphor is supposed to be the link). How can reality be understood except by comparing one thing to another? (Hayles 99). As Richard Rorty puts it, "...the world does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors...we only compare languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called 'fact'" (20). For its part, what the novel often does, according to Bakhtin, is offer a variety of languages that either compete or enter into something like a conversation with each other.

In theoretical discussions of the world-text relation, it is seen that a number of metaphors are commonly employed that suggest a wide range of experience: "portray" (painting,

photography), "imitate" (acting, mimicry), "reflect" (optics), "interact with" (psychology). Even the terms I have been using, "relate to," or most problematic, "represent," may be other occluded metaphors. Indeed, the metaphorical relation itself suggests the world-text relation. There is in both a relation of identification, with formal and semantic components. The metaphorical relation, however, is between distinct categories within language, while the world-text relation is between wholly different ontological levels of experience.

It might be useful to look for a moment at the notion of representation. As one might expect in a period which rejected the older Realism, the representation of events (Scholes's mimesis) has not been aesthetically obligatory since the advent of modernism. This has been known, according to Hans Robert Jauss, since the Russian Formalists, and he cites especially Victor Shklovsky's theory of "deautomization," in which the chain of habitual associations is broken by the form, freeing art from the classical function of mere recognition of things (173, n. 49). Jauss adds that the substantialist metaphysics, or knowledge of essences, underlying the representational theory has also become obsolete. Shklovsky's narrative poetics, for that matter, posits a sequence of narrative events (fabula) "behind" the discursive text, which does not imply any metaphysical relation between the sequence of events and real events but does suggest that the first term is merely hypothetical, in that one always has a presentation (i.e. a re-presentation of the fabula, in Shklovsky's theory) rather than a representation (mimesis). That is to say, one always has a "version" which is, in literature, the text. The problem is again that using a term like "version" suggests something that is a variation or illustration of something else beyond itself.

Contemporary theories, as Scholes affirms, will have no truck with mimesis. Linda Hutcheon even defines postmodernism as a critique of representation as reflective of reality

rather than as constitutive of it (18). Roland Barthes says that to depict is not to copy from nature but from one code to another. Realism is therefore a "secondary mimesis," since it "consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy" (*S/Z* 55). Lennard Davis maintains that novels "depict" life as it is represented by ideology, where ideology is taken in the contemporary sense of how culture represents itself to itself, making what is cultural (i.e. historically constituted) "natural" (Davis 24; Hutcheon 49). Representation reappears in these formulations, but with a difference: it does not reflect some distinct reality in a neutral way but is the very stuff of reality and is far from being innocently neutral. A number of theorists have insisted that realism functions ideologically, offering itself as a neutral reflection of the world (Saldivar 521). To adapt a phrase from Roland Barthes, "where politics begins is where imitation ceases" (*Barthes* 154).

Postmodernist theories of representation are often derived from or owe something to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, which concerns itself with "demystifying" or exposing ideologically naturalized, or unconscious, dichotomies in Western thought, a vice he says goes back to Plato but is even less subtle and critical in Saussure. For Derrida, metaphysics is binary thinking and he wants to challenge such naturalized oppositions as external/internal, image/reality, and representation/presence, by showing how the axes function to ratify the centrality of a dominant term by marginalizing an inessential one (Derrida 33; Jameson, *Pol. Uncons.* 114). Thus, in Saussure, the image is excluded without damage from reality, and speech is valued over the representation of writing as embodying an overvalued metaphysical notion of presence. For Derrida, language is "differential," registering both difference and deferral, without simple presence or absolute reference.

Further repudiation of replication models in fiction can be seen in the preference in critical discourse for the terms "fiction" and "text" over "work" and "novel" that I have noted above (sec.Ie), which indicates a critical change of focus from the signified to the process of signification (Greenblatt & Gunn 3). One is reminded of John Barth's contention in "the Literature of Exhaustion" that contemporary fiction has been "exhausted," its content in fact emptied of novelty, so that literary texts are no longer created but are rather reworked. In this case, this new work is not a transcription of something outside itself but a production and, as such, tending to negate a static or passive theory of simple reflection, since representations, like meanings, are not fixed but somewhat fluid in the interactive dynamics of social use through time. Finally, the reflective theory has been further undermined, as suggested above, by deconstructive theories that have cast doubt on the ontological categories on which mimetic theories ultimately depend. Fictional narratives in this view do not mirror what happens or merely recount changes of state; they explore what can happen, and they constitute and interpret these changes (Prince 60).

To write, Raymond Federman says, is to produce meaning, not to reproduce an already existing meaning, a statement that recalls rather closely Richard Rorty's two kinds of philosophy: that which attempts to represent or express what is already there, some posited world, and that which attempts to make something new, undreamed of before (13). Rorty says he prefers the second: we don't need any more theories to explain the world, as we have enough of those already and all are somehow inadequate, but we do need "narratives which connect the present with the past" and with utopian futures (xvi)-- in short, histories and novels. Federman goes beyond Barth in insisting that novels, the verbal tissues of a newly created reality, are not even the re-creation of older texts, as Barth would have it, but "an autonomous reality

whose only relationship with the real world is to improve that world" (8). Although Federman seems to be talking about a certain kind of postmodern novel ("surfiction"), his basic notion that the novel invents its own reality becomes, paradoxically, a return to the modernist aesthetic of the artist as supreme creator and art as an autonomous, unconditioned sphere (Connor 116).

If Federman's statement were true of any novel, fiction would be cut loose from a ground in any other reality but its own language. This dilemma is rather like "coherence" theories of truth in analytic philosophy, which, rejecting the "correspondence" of propositions with facts (mimetic realism, in our terms), claim that what constitutes truth is merely the coherence of propositions with one another. Yet, there may be a number of systems, of, say, geometry, each of which may consist of coherent propositions but all of which cannot be true of the world. At some point, the cohering propositions must have a relation to something outside themselves (Hospers 116-17). Language is not mathematics, in any case. It does not spring whole, like Athena, from the writer's brain but is learned and employed in highly specific social contexts. Whatever claims of autonomy it has within a consciously structured text, it cannot wholly escape "correspondences" with the world, even if the notion of correspondence is yet one more metaphor.

Federman's statement also recalls the older notion of moral criticism: of literature as an "improvement" on life. Yet, one might take a clue from E.D. Hirsch Jr., who thinks that although life's mysteries remain mysterious, fictions which we know to be artificial and arbitrary offer a respite from uncertainty and incoherence. One can think of a number of contemporary *fictions* that give no respite whatever from uncertainty and incoherence, but Hirsch's suggestion makes it possible to take Federman's meaning not as the moral improvement of

Leavisite criticism, but improvement as a kind of tidying up of the anarchy of experience, a necessary restructuring of the world so that it can be understood, or even a making of connections of past, present, and future, in Rorty's sense.

Marxist critics understandably reject any "free-floating" interpretation of the text, such as Federman's statement suggests, in favor of the text's relationship with some context or ground in the material world, which in the more sophisticated versions means the socially negotiated world (cf. note 1). For Frederic Jameson, the problem is whether texts replicate the ground ideologically in a "political unconscious" or have some autonomous force in which they can be seen as negating the context (*Pol. Uncons.* 38). The terms of argument have been shifted here by moving the autonomous force of the text toward either a reinforcement of the *status quo* or a genuinely subversive potential. I have already discussed in Section I Brook Thomas's idea of fiction as a construction of possible worlds, which would make it potentially critical of real ones. Herbert Marcuse (48), similarly, has said that the norms of the order of art are not those of reality but of its negation, not an idealist negation, but the power of the imagination to question the *status quo* in its proposal of alternative worlds (48). But Jameson's question raises the alternative possibilities of a textual "replication" or negation of the ideological subtext. This seems to agree with Lennard Davis's view of fiction (cited above) as life depicted as it is represented by ideology, and would leave open possibilities for either the de-mystification or an even more subtle and insidious mystification of reality. Literature appears in what Raymond Williams calls "the emergent sector of culture," that is, that which embodies new meanings and values, but it can also be a "residual" product whose values belong to and (sometimes unconsciously) seek to preserve values whose time has passed ("Problems" 44-45). It cannot in any case be seen as neutral. It may feign neutrality

but it is "the lack of neutrality that inheres in every human decision, even the decision to remain neutral" (Budick 6-7). That there are these alternative possibilities becomes clear enough when one turns to specific novels, but there is a third possibility as well, that a given text may, unconsciously, both affirm and negate the ground, which Jameson himself explores with considerable critical sophistication in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), a work that places the ideology of modernism in history (Donongho 179). For Jameson, even form and style are encodings of a materialist history, the economic mode of production and its social relations (Donongho 179)

Referring to Richard Goddens' *Fictions of Capital* (1990), John Whalen-Bridge, in another variation of this argument, says that writers may create both "symptoms" and "doctors." A novel may exemplify symptoms (i.e. of social ills) when it promotes "reification," while a diagnostic novel demystifies capitalist ideology (195). In certain cases, Jameson (and Marcuse) would not seem to be in disagreement with Federman after all. Fictional texts may in some cases, and may not in others, "improve" the world (in this radical perspective) in their potential to expose ("unmask" seems to be the favorite critical term) "the rhetorical and political nature of all writing about human experience, 'fictional' or 'historical'" (Elliott, Gen.Introd., *Col.Lit. Hist. of US*, xviii). As Foucault says, discourse can be both an instrument and effect of power but also a hindrance and point of resistance to it: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (*Hist. of Sexuality* I, 100-101). In any case, literary like other kinds of texts "constitute a society's ideological practice" (Kavanaugh 319).

Fictional differ from non-fictional texts that are explicitly critical perhaps in their effort at both a wider and deeper level of understanding, a level which engages emotional and imaginative responses as well as rational ones. In trying to explain, for example, why novelists are often reluctant to discuss their work critically, Don DeLillo said: "If you're able to be straightforward and penetrating about this invention of yours, it's almost as though you're saying it wasn't altogether necessary. The sources weren't deep enough" ("Interview," LeClair 20). This greater effort at a more complete meaning, responses to more than a rational argument, is also, of course, what both makes fictional texts difficult to interpret and brings on all the arguments about whether such-and-such a work is reactionary or subversive. It may well be both.

The complex and politically ambivalent way that such a critique can function may be briefly illustrated with respect to one of my favorite fictions, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a book that librarians find hard to classify (political novel, fantastic fiction, children's fable, non-fictional satire, all of the above?). To take only Book I (the Voyage to Lilliput), one can see Swift attempting to reproduce a fantastic though recognizably contemporary (i.e. 18th century English) society by means of a political allegory: Whigs and Tories, French and English, Catholics and Protestants, etc. In his historico-fictional construction, he also attempts to expose the social falsity, bad faith, and political short-sightedness of a society through exaggeration, parody, caricature, telling juxtapositions, and other satirical devices, as well as the gross reduction of scale in which "little people" show how small their vision really is. The text, that is, attempts to "negate" the posited historical world in the process of making it ridiculous. At the same time, the text ironically entertains (and inconspicuously inserts) some alternative possibilities that Swift evidently wishes to suggest in all seriousness, a method he

also employs to great effect in his pseudo-reformist essay, "A Modest Proposal." A fictional world that is parallel to the historical world is therefore constructed, negated, and reconstructed: a "production" in literal and figurative senses, which simultaneously negates and affirms its context, although with an affirmation/negation that is not to be directly identified with Swift's Tory political sympathies and the ineptitude of the Whig government he is satirizing. The work is a prime example of Brook Thomas's proposal of how fiction can provide a space in which social transformation can be played out.

Returning to the question of fictional-historical correspondence in realist texts, one might mention Terry Eagleton's updated theory of literary realism, in which realism does not create texts that refer to real objects but rather "displays particular modes of signification which entail a greater foregrounding of the 'pseudo-real'," or the signifiers within the text. The imaginary object in the text is not comparable to a real object, for it exists as a representational process that signifies not the object but ways in which a particular period signifies the object (*Criticism and Ideology* 64-99). Other, non-Marxist, radical theories would seem to sever the text from any real ground. In Jean Beaudrillard's theory of simulacra, the sign as representation goes through four stages, from reflecting reality, to masking reality, to masking the absence of reality, to becoming, finally, a simulacrum with no connection to reality at all--a perfect copy of something that does not exist ("Simulacra" 170-71). Such theories leave, with the disappearance of the referent, free-floating signifiers and the resulting gap between work and world that make it difficult to see how the two realms of being can ever be bridged. At this point, one might offer another metaphor for the world-text relation: an ontology of lines running parallel to each other, distinct but inseparable, or better, since parallel lines never meet, waves that intersect at certain points, affecting each other in a constant interaction.

Historical reality breaks into fiction, helping to bring it into being through content and context, while fiction is often a model text for historical experience.

Williams says that Marx himself noted that materialism had failed to see that reality was not to be understood merely as an object of thought but as "sensuous human activity or practice" (qtd. in *Marx. and Lit.* 30). Language, Williams argues, should have been associated with this emphasis on practice, what I have called above the interaction of social use through time, but instead the idea of activity was projected by thinkers on to either the idea of language as self-creative but separate from a (subsequent) social practice (i.e. Hegelian idealism), or to an abstracted "creative individual" (i.e. Romanticism) (Williams, *Marx. and Lit.* 30-2). Williams says that Bakhtin took the strong points of these two tendencies, incomplete in themselves: language as activity, from idealism, and language as system, from the objectivist linguistics developed in response to the idea of a purely individual creation of meaning. Signs are the products of the activity of speech between real individuals, but, crucially, not just past or fixed products, as in language system accounts, but part of a process of individuals in ongoing social relationships. Language is therefore not a reflection of material reality but (in Williams' formulation) "a dynamic and articulated social *presence* in the world," or "a constitutive element of material social practice" (37-8, his italics; 165).

Bakhtin introduces the concept of "chronotope" (lit. time-space, in which neither is privileged) as "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Holquist 425): "Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)" (Bakhtin, "Forms" 253, his emphasis). Emphasizing the creative aspect of fictional worlds, Bakhtin steers a middle course. The represented

world must not be confused with the world outside the text, as in the false correspondence of naive realism, and yet the two worlds are not so radically separate either, since they "find themselves in continual mutual interaction." Their points of intersection are perhaps less like the lifeless schema of intersecting waves I have proposed above than (in Bakhtin's suggestive metaphor) like a living organism that neither fuses with its environment nor can live outside it. The work enters and enriches the world as a text commenting on the world, and the world enters and enriches the work as part both of its process of creation and its subsequent life "in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of its listeners and readers" (254). The novel is the only genre that is still developing--the others being more or less fixed in the tradition of their histories--and only that which is developing can comprehend development as a process. From the point of view of reception, Jauss also argues that literature is not a static object but interpreted anew by readers at different times. It has therefore a dialogic character with the reader seeking to complete his knowledge of the object "as a moment of new understanding" (Jauss 165-66). The experience of reading, he says, can liberate one from the "prejudices and predicaments of a lived praxis in that it compels one to a new perception of things" (180).

"Texts are worldly," Edward Said says, since "to some degree they are events and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and, of course, the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Adam and Searle 607). Said goes on to point to another direction where text and world intersect, literature as commodity production: "The realities of power and authority--as well as the resistances--are the realities that make texts possible" (Ibid.). Literary texts as both events and products are produced by their historical moment but also add something to that moment that

was not there before. [2] As social productions, products plus events, they are not complete in themselves, as Jauss suggests, but come to a fullness of meaning, which may never be total, in the course of their readings. History can be said to exercise its influence even on what may be considered the personal element of style.

This theory of language in and of the world is not identical with but ties in with theories of literature that see not a world to be reflected but mediated through language, with mediation in Jameson's sense of "transcoding," the process of articulating two different structural levels of reality (*Pol. Uncon.* 40). Text and material reality for Bakhtin and Jameson don't have a direct connection but are mediated by an already existing ideological world of discourse. The text does not refer but is a mediated version of a world that has already been textualized ideologically. As Jameson puts it, we do not confront a text as a "thing-in-itself" but as "the always-already-read," even when it is new, for then we read it through "sedimented" habits and categories developed by inherited traditions of interpretation (9). This implies both that texts are not totally new creations and that we have no direct access to reality (a notion familiar in philosophy since Kant). The text is, as it were, twice removed, since it is a text that comments on another text, although the text it comments on is of a different semiotic order. And yet this "new" text is not severed either from the "old" text, or context, since the discourses that the literary text is related to are socially and historically grounded (Stam-Burgoyne 217).

Bakhtin also theorizes the novel as both critical and self-critical discourse. Like Wittgenstein, he denies the abstract essentiality of language. Power attempts to centralize language in dominant and exclusive forms. In literature, by contrast, this tendency is subverted by the now famous concept of the "dialogic" of multiple voices (Bakhtin, *Problems* 87-113;

Connor 203). The dominant discourse of a given culture is "reflected as more or less bounded, typical and characteristic of a particular era, aging, dying, ripe for change and re-newal" (Bakhtin, "Prehistory" 60), while the "evolving heteroglossia" of the novel represents the culture in all its fullness, in which language is transformed from an "impermeable mono-glossia" into "a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality" (61). Novel-istic discourse, furthermore, both represents and is represented; it always criticizes itself in a system of languages that "mutually and ideologically interanimate each other" (47).

Through some such contextual approach, it becomes possible to re-write the life-world (which seems to be the new word for reality), unknowable in its unstructured state, as history, thus reducing the original problem, though not its difficulty, to entities on a similar ontological plane, writing as representation in history and fiction. Williams's, Bakhtin's, and Jameson's theories may be called "historicizing," but the tendency at least is not absent in either neo-realist or radical separatist theories. Eagleton, for example, argues that objects are histori-cally signified through the *period*, and Beaudrillard's four stages must be not an ontological but an historical process, in which he is talking about a progression in representation from realism to postmodernism.

There seems to be an emphasis in both current fiction and theory on the similarities of fact and fiction via the common vehicle of narrative in preference to the common-sense notion of a radical difference between what is somehow given as true and what is merely invented. (It is worth remembering that the root word for both "fact" and "fiction is the Latin verb *faceo*, *-ere*, which means most generally "make" or "do," neatly summarizing the two notions of construct and performance discussed above). The return to historical narrative, the so-called New Journalism, the common mix of historical and fictional characters, and the ambi-

guities of real and invented historical documents in contemporary novels are some of the literary practices that illustrate this emphasis. Facts, as Williams usefully points out, are not the static, passive, disinterested and empirically available totality they are often taken to be (*Problems* 16), which, again, becomes clear as soon as one reflects on how facts become accessible, i.e. via some spoken, written, filmed or, more increasingly, electronically transmitted text. The whole question of the status of fact has been radically problematized: "A fact is a theoretically constituted proposition, supported by theoretically mediated evidence and put forward as part of a theoretical formulation of reality" (Mary Hawkesworth, qtd. in Easterlin & Riebling 64). And words, in this formulation, cannot be taken to be rooted in intention, experience [i.e. empiricism], or mind or, as Catherine Belsey says, "guaranteed by reason, science or law," but are "the material of ideology, produced in the interests of power, and open to contest in the interests of politics" (27).

The historiographer R.G. Collingwood, commenting on Hegel, noted that process in nature is different from process in history because in the latter the historian re-enacts in his mind the motives of the agents whose actions he narrates. A succession of events is historical only when it constitutes actions whose motives can at least in principle be re-enacted (115). The historian, creator of a workable narrative, therefore transforms events into acts, giving "what happens" sequential structure and intelligible meaning. The authority of this historical account, therefore, depends on the persuasive power of the narrative to convince the reader of its truth; hence, it is, like fiction, "a rhetorical performance." Jameson, who insists that history has a referent that is real and not merely imagined, admits, however, that it is only available in textual form. In his formulation, it can be approached by "passing through its prior textualizations" to its function as the "absent cause" of social effects in the present, experienced as

"Necessity"(35). His theory of the political unconscious in literature has its function in detecting and restoring the repressed reality of the master-narrative (i.e. for him as Marxist, the history of the class-struggle).

Hayden White is the critic who has most insistently put forward the view that historians and novelists, the latter of whose productions are *a fortiori* rhetorical performances, have narrative in common though their referent is of a different order, since in fiction events are selected both from real life and from the imagination of the novelist, or some combination and/or transformation of both. [3] The historian transforms, or better, translates events into facts; the context is, so to speak, in the text itself, the historian's own historical experience inscribed within it, which is why there are competing versions of the past. There may be common agreement on facts, but that some historical representations are more acceptable or somehow preferable to others has to do with the relationship between text and its producer and consumer, historian and readers. Beyond the narrative content, what is said to have happened and when, is the form, which can also be said to have a content, since form (like objective-type realist narrative) can give an appearance of reality. Why does the story seem real?, White asks. The answer is to be found in the formal functions of the text, not the historian's stated intentions: "It seems possible that the conviction of the historian that he has 'found' the form of his narrative in the events themselves rather than imposed it upon them, in the way the poet does, is a result of a certain lack of linguistic self-consciousness which obscures the extent to which description of events *already* constitute interpretations of their nature" (Adams & Searle 404, his emphasis). A perception is "clarified by being cast in a figurative mode different from that in which it has come encoded by convention, authority, or custom" (405). The Aristotelian distinction between art and history, in which the former is the representation

of the imaginable and the latter the representation of the actual gives way in this view to a recognition of their common constructed narrative ground.

In fiction as well, the context is inscribed in the text, beyond the markers of time and place (whether "chronotopes" or "setting" in the older vocabulary), since communicative codes are shared by writer and reader. The difference between historical and fictional narratives in White's theory, is therefore not between real and imaginary, since reality is always interpreted, but in the codes used, the level of presentation, and the degree of self-consciousness. As Foucault says, the possibility exists "for fiction to work within truth, for a fictive discourse to induce effects of truth, and...that a true discourse engenders or 'fabricates' something that does not yet exist, that is, 'fictions' it" (qtd. by Miller 211). History is, of course, not totally subjective since it deals with measurable, quantifiable events, but since it is made by a particular person at a particular time and place, it cannot be objective or "scientific," although it may use scientific techniques. Historians that construct models and reject narratives do not avoid an ideological component; at some time the model must be applied and the historian will find in his model what he has put into it. What is more to the point for the present purpose is that fiction is not totally subjective either, since it deals with aspects of reality (ideas and emotions, as well as events), but ones that are not susceptible to measurement, thus filling a gap that history leaves open. This is an especially important role for a country that has often believed that the separation from history was its true beginning (Lewis 5). To which one might add a remark attributed to Carlos Fuentes: "Literature is what history conceals, forgets, or mutilates."

NOTES

[1] That is social, not *material* productions, since artistic or intellectual production is not the same thing as factory work or manual labor, a false homology developed by some Marxist theories (Jameson, *Pol. Uncons.* 45-46).

[2] Stephen Connor, "Writing in History," lecture given at Universidade de Sao Paulo, S. Jose do Rio Preto, January, 1993.

[3] Much of the following account is based on a lecture given by Professor White at the Facul-dade de Ciencias Humanas, UFMG, in 1995, and my conversation with him at its end.

PART ONE - POWER AND SOCIETY

CHAPTER 1

THEORY OF POWER

Section I. Definitions and Concepts

a.

If the word "power" has a great number of meanings, for the present purpose many of the technical definitions may be disregarded at the outset, although it is noteworthy, with respect to contemporary American literature, that the fantasy digression of "Byron the Bulb," in Thomas Pynchon's important novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), actually manages to conflate electrical and political meanings of power (647-55). I shall generally ignore aspects of power that do not concern human beings as, for example, transcendental power in religion, referring to alleged capacities of the Deity or other spiritual beings to influence or affect man and nature.

A useful beginning might be made by looking at the five main clusters of meanings for "power" given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The first is "The ability to do or effect something or anything, or to act upon a person or thing"; the second offers as synonyms "strength, force, might," which political theory carefully distinguishes from power, properly speaking; the third is the active property of inanimate things (like an herb or a ray); the fourth is control or command over others, with the synonyms "dominion, rule, domination, sway, government, influence, authority"; the fifth is legal ability, capacity, or authority to act. These definitions might all be summed up in the usual meaning of the Greek word for power, *dynamis*, the capability in one thing to produce change of some sort in another, which is broad enough to

include both human and non-human agencies. Except for the third, all the OED definitions imply human agency, so I shall concentrate on those.

The first OED definition correlates fairly closely to those given by some contemporary theorists, such as Mario Stoppano, who says power is "the capability or possibility of acting, of producing effects" (973). Anthony Giddens says power is "the transformational capacity possessed by human beings, that is, the capacity to intervene in a given set of events so as in some way to alter them" (*Nation-State*, qtd. by Erlicle 378), which makes more explicit the bringing about of some *alteration*, only implied in the production of effects in the first definition. Raymond Aron says power is "the potential possessed by man or a group for establishing relationships with other men or other groups that accord with his own desires" (Aron 257), in which the alteration or effects to be brought about as a result of the desires of the newly forged relationship is left implicit, but in which it is added that the desired changes are in the interest of one party to the possible detriment of another, the "zero-sum" problem.

What these various definitions have in common is, on the one hand, a *causal* relation, and, on the other, a *capability,* the capacity to act, something which can be applied or exercised if desired or thought necessary. The notion of capability can be seen in the noun for "power" in some languages, e.g. *pouvoir* in French, *poder* in Spanish and Portuguese, which as verbs mean "to be able." A second meaning of the Greek word *dynamis* is the one Aristotle follows in the concept of that name which he develops in his *Metaphysics:* the potentiality in a thing to pass from one state to another (Ross 173). *Dynamis* is thus potential that can be actualized, and it will be related to discussions of the difference between the possession and actual exercise of power. Both causality and potentiality are points I shall take up below.

If one understands power specifically in social terms, that is, with respect to human beings and their diverse social interactions, which can be called "politics" in the broadest sense, power is further reduced to a set of meanings ranging from a general capability of acting, contained in the first OED definition, to such a capability coupled with the determination of some people to control or otherwise determine the behavior of others, implied in the first definition and made explicit in the fourth, that is, the power some human beings have or wield *over* others, with people as both subject and object. This notion would normally exclude the power of man over inanimate things or over nature, since this kind of power is physical and technical in itself. It is not difficult to see, however, that it could involve socio-political questions as well, for example, in the exploitation of natural resources, since the relevant technologies belong to the world of science, business, and government, which constitute the public, political sphere (Stoppano 934).

With this stipulated emphasis on the socio-political, a number of theorists have pointed out that the essential character of power is *relational.* One party (whether individual, group, institution, nation, etc.) exercises power over another. This may include even the kind of power one may say a person has over him- or herself, for example, the determined ability to improve his or her mind or character, or some other (more trivial) pursuit, an aspect of power in terms of an ethics of self that has in fact been discussed at length by the contemporary theorist of power, Michel Foucault, in his later work.[1] Foucault, however, emphasizes in his work on the "care of self" (though not, as we shall see, elsewhere) the independent character of power over self, of an ethics that is a structure of existence "without any relation to the juridical *per se*, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure" ("Genealogy of Ethics" 348). He points out that this is properly a Roman idea (i.e. Stoic, and, one might add, a modern one), for the Greeks felt that power over self was a necessary preliminary for the care of their companions and their

city. Indeed, the "preparation" of the self for, ultimately, socially beneficial purposes is, I think, the main thrust of Plato's and Aristotle's ethico-political theory.[2]

As for the last two definitions, the difference between them are both historically and theoretically important. For the moment, I shall explore further the concept of power and some related terms, mainly as developed in the work of Robert Dahl, Mario Stoppano, and John Kenneth Galbraith.

b.

In his essay on power, Dahl refers what he calls "power terms" (power, authority, coercion, persuasion, force, etc.) to "subsets of relations among social units such that the behavior of one or more units (the responsive units, R) depend in some circumstances on the behavior of other units (the controlling units, C). Dahl is therefore concerned with behavioral control at all social levels. His essay has the merit of delineating some common elements in a number of modern analyses. He distinguishes, on one hand, the description of power features in a political system (dependent variables), and, on the other, the explanation for these features (independent variables). The descriptive features are: the *magnitude*, or amounts of power, of the C's with respect to the R's; the *distribution* of power among numbers, regions, social classes, and so forth; the *scope* or range of power, in that C's may be powerful in one activity but relatively weak in another--a result of the tendency of power to specialization; and the *domain* or extension of power, the R's over whom the C's have control ("Power," Lukes 37-58).

In his essay, Stoppano elaborates a scheme that he calls the "measurement" of power, since his emphasis is on quantity rather than descriptive features. Power may be measured (to continue with Dahl's useful Controlling and Responsive units) by the probability that C will be obeyed, by the number of R's subjected to C, by the sphere in which power is applicable, by the degree of

modification R's behavior undergoes, by the degree of restriction by C of R's alternatives, and by costs for both C and R (Stoppano 939-40).[3] It can be seen that there is some correlation between the two schemes; e.g.. the number and sphere correspond somewhat to Dahl's distribution and domain, and the cost to one of Dahl's explanatory features (seen below). What is readily apparent from either of these schemes is that detailed analyses of power in real social situations would be extraordinarily complex.

As for explanatory features of power, differences in *resources*, and how they are distributed, have been the most important for theories as historically and theoretically varied as those of Aristotle, the US Founding Fathers, and Marx and Engels. The most obvious resource is wealth and property, but resources may be of the most varied kinds, such as power (used to get more power), respect, moral standing, affection, well-being, skill, spiritual enlightenment, and different kinds of access and control, such as access to legality, control over employment, and both access to, and control over, sources of information and technology (Laswell and Kaplan 87). [4] This last resource is especially important in the contemporary world with the growing monopolization of information by multinational enterprises in "late capitalism" (Jameson, *Foreward* xiii).

Anthony Giddens has proposed two main categories of power resources, *authoritative* and *allocative* (qtd. in Erlicle 378-79). Allocative resources are economic, broadly speaking, and authoritative include many of the resources listed above. The major concentrations of power in modern societies may be said to be found in national states and in capitalism, which in turn can be seen as dependent on Giddens' two kinds of resources: thus, the state depends on authority, since it must present itself and be accepted as legitimate, although as can be seen often in the historical survey, even legitimate authority seems to depend in the last instance on force.

Furthermore, this authority is recognized only within the borders of the state. Relations between states, owing to the lack of both an international court of appeal and enforcing police power, are quite a different matter (Aron 271), as the war in former Yugoslavia has tragically shown. Capitalism depends on allocative or economic resources; it is in fact a theory and practice of making use of them, but in modern societies it also has an important role in maintaining political legitimacy as well, insofar as it is effective, or widely regarded as being so. Here again, on the international level the situation is rather different, as capitalism tends to subvert national boundaries through the dynamics of capital "flow" and the ever-increasing power of multinational corporations. Another, sociological meaning of power is therefore related to capitalist market forces, which are an example--perhaps the best example--of the "transformational capacity possessed by social structures" that may be independent of the will of individuals (Giddens, qtd. in Erlicle 378-79).

Other explanatory features that Dahl cites are: political or bureaucratic *skill*, emphasized by Machiavelli, which may explain why two C's with the same resources exercise different degrees of power; *motivation*, in that one C may, for a determinate reason, use his resources and another choose not to (conversely, one R may respect C's authority, while another challenges it); and *costs*, which is how much of Cs disposable resources he is willing to risk. Costs will therefore include C's motivation, while R's interpretation of cost may motivate his resistance--which could in turn make C interpret his own costs as too high.

The causal nature of power relations has already been noted. Dahl argues that power is analogous to cause, even that power relations are a subset of causal relations (i.e. C has power over R = C's behavior causes R's behavior), which introduces related philosophical problems, such as necessary and sufficient conditions in causal and, by analogy, power relations. The

problem of distinguishing cause from correlation carries over to the problem of distinguishing true from spurious power relations. Attempts to develop empirical theories of power therefore confront the problem of a causal chain, since additional variables can usually be inserted between supposedly directly related factors. [5] Stoppano also argues for cause as an intermediate factor between C and R, but he thinks that since one is dealing with a *social* situation the relation between C's and R's behavior is not necessary but only probable. Therefore, C is not a necessary but a *sufficient* cause; that is to say, C's action is sufficient to cause R's behavior but not necessary to cause it, since R might behave that way for some other reason.. For similar reasons, Stoppano calls attention to the *particularity* of this type of causal relation. C may cause R to behave in a certain way at a certain time but not necessarily in the same way at another time (Stoppano 935-36).

As for potential and actual aspects of power, Laswell and Kaplan make the important distinction between *having* power and *exercising* it, which the OED definitions imply but do not make specific, and Aron also distinguishes between having the power (*puissance*) to do something and exercising the power (*pouvoir*) to do so. Thus, a man with a gun has the power to kill another without necessarily doing it (Aron 257). Whether or not he does so will depend on considerations of motivation and cost, but motivation (or the lack of it, as in this example) may not always be evident. Dahl posits the presence of a "manifest intention," and Stoppano, similarly, an "intentionality," to differentiate the actual exercise of power from its mere possession. Stoppano says, however, that in the absence of manifest intention there may be "interest" on the part of C; that is, the consequent behavior of R may be of interest to C even when C does not always make his wishes explicit in an order or command. Dahl gives the example of a ruler whose possession of power induces his subordinates to react in a certain way

without the ruler's having actually ordered them to perform a specific action. By anticipating the ruler's wishes, the subordinates seem paradoxically to have controlled him, if by their actions they have, say, elicited his favor. And yet it is clear that the ruler, merely by having the power, really controls the behavior of his subordinates, since in their attempt, successful or not, to anticipate his decisions in their own favor, they have, in a sense, obeyed him. (Dahl, in Lukes 51-2). To give another example, a social environment may be so constituted that the repressed elements may continue to behave in ways the dominant group intends even when the latter is not directly commanding them on a day to day basis. Such continued behavior may indeed be the measure of their repression. The accurate prediction of another's intentions is obviously crucial to many kinds of power relations, such as diplomacy and war, hence the importance of bluff. Being thought to have power that one *de facto* does not have may be as good as actually having it, since the other party will react *as if* one had it.

If it is true enough that R's behavior can be modified without C's wishes being made explicit, as in Dahl's example,[6] it does not follow that R's behavior cannot be modified without R himself being aware of it. *Manipulation*, as in certain kinds of propaganda, is clearly part of the concept of power. Another distinction related to the actual exercise of power made by Stephen Lukes is that between active exercise in political decisions and the "passive acceptance of established institutional power" or the "mobilization of bias," in which important issues may never reach the public realm, that is, the power of both overt decisions and of non-decisions (*A Radical View*, qtd. in Erlicle 378-79).

Much thought has also been given to the *means* by which power is exercised. Broadly speaking, these can be reduced to *coercion* and *persuasion* (Stoppano 938). On the international level, diplomacy as an alternative to war as a means of solving problems between nation-states

is a recognition that persuasion is often preferable to coercion (e.g. fewer costs), though powerful nations evidently use some combination of both. Many theorists, who have a predominately negative perception of power, prefer to speak of power only when coercion is employed, but (at least by the definitions examined) the will of C can be fulfilled, and the behavior of R can be altered, as much by persuasion and often to better effect, since persuasion normally implies consent. Coercion implies the disposition to use brute force, at least as a last recourse since the mere threat of force may be sufficient to achieve the desired effect. Coercive measures may also include those which can be summarized as "applied pressure." For example, C may exert pressure on R by threatening to deprive him of needed or desired resources, or to withdraw needed support (economic, political, military, etc.). Such a negative threat is certainly coercive and may be more effective than the threat of brute force. As Gerhard Lenski observed, force is the most effective means to seize power in a society but not very effective for retaining and exploiting it, as revolutionists soon discover. The reason is that it is both inefficient and costly (i.e. economically, as well as in Dahl's sense of cost), so that large amounts of time, energy, and wealth are consumed in maintaining social control by force, and important values like loyalty and honor are lost to the rulers who employ it. Thus, it is in the interest of the rulers or ruling elite, Lenski says, to legitimize their power once all organized opposition to it has been neutralized. Force, that is, must be transformed so that might becomes right (244-47). The usual means for this transformation is ideological control, a form of persuasion that can be interpreted as coercive. In the most general terms, ideology simply means sets of ideas and the ways they are expressed and transmitted. An (early) Marxist definition suggesting the coercive nature of ideology is "the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or social group" (Althusser 239).

As is evident from this discussion, a major difficulty is that the line between persuasion and coercion is not always distinct. Persuasion merely means that C changes R's mind in order to alter his behavior, such as using a rational argument to convince him that taking the suggested step would actually be in his best interest. R, if he takes the step, comes to the conclusion that it is actually better to have obeyed C than not. Clearly, power has been exercised, since R's behavior has been modified by C, but can one say therefore that power is not, as Max Weber thought it was, always a question of *conflict*? Stoppano suggests a solution by differentiating the *will* of C and R at the beginning of the exercise of the power and at its end: at the beginning, there is a conflict, since R would act otherwise without C's intervention, but not necessarily at the end, if R agrees with the outcome to the extent that he gives it greater value than if he had acted otherwise. On the other hand, R might remain dissatisfied or even humiliated by C's imposition, so that a conflict of will remains even at the end. In this case, it is likely that coercion of some sort has been used. Whether conflict exists or not, therefore, is often a question of which means are employed in the exercise of power (Stoppano 939), and, since the parties are usually unequal, what resources are available to each.

R's mind can also be changed by a positive inducement, such as the promise of some reward. Again, is this persuasive or coercive? R's acceptance of the reward may depend on his freely given consent, for example, in accepting payment for services rendered that C has solicited and R has agreed to perform despite initial unwillingness. In this case one can say that C has exercised power on R, since his will has been changed, but R has not been coerced, since he could in principle refuse. It is often the case, however, that R badly needs what is offered and, there existing such a great difference of resources at R's disposal in comparison with C's, that R feels forced to accept C's offer when he might not have done so if he had been in a better bargaining

position. This kind of positive pressure, of "offering" something that is not likely to be refused, is clearly coercive, analogous to the negative pressure of the threat of withholding something. The line between coercion and persuasion is even less well-defined in situations where persuasion is not open but insidious, as in certain kinds of propaganda, the manipulation of consensus. Propaganda is often resorted to because of the higher costs of more open kinds of coercion, or as a complement to them. As Lenski observes, coercion is typically followed by attempts at persuasion, for "coercive power can often be used to create a new consensus." Again, as in the example of revolutions, force gives way to propaganda and the systematic instilling of a new ideology (Lenski 248). The various means, subtle and not so subtle, by which power is employed are taken up by 20th century theorists, such as John Kenneth Galbraith.

Galbraith declares, in *The Anatomy of Power* (1984), that he is concerned with what is often kept hidden in the exercise of corporate power. Galbraith's emphasis is on what he calls "organizational power" in the contemporary world, following Weber's perception of bureaucratic organization as both the means and the epitome of modern power. He says that while Weber's general perception of power as the imposition of one's will on another is generally accepted, very few theorists have discussed *how* that imposition is achieved. This is not strictly accurate, since Machiavelli, for one, wrote a handbook on the subject, and, recently Foucault has labored to delineate what he calls the "how" of power. Galbraith approaches the how-question through an analysis of what makes people submit to power (1-13). He proposes three "instruments"(means) for achieving submission, which he denominates condign, compensatory, and conditioned power. *Condign* power either inflicts or threatens painful or unpleasant consequences. *Compensatory* power, by contrast, induces compliance by promise of reward. These two types would seem to correspond to the negative and positive reinforcements of behav-

ioral psychology, or, to what I have referred to above as negative and positive forms of coercion. Most important for modern societies, Galbraith says, is *conditioned* power, which is exercised by changing belief and induced by persuasion, education, or some other insidious method. Conditioning thus corresponds somewhat to Gramscian ideological control and Foucaultian disciplinary power, since the crucial point about conditioning is that it is not recognized. Education is not an "innocent" form of conditioning in this view.[7]

Roughly corresponding to the three instruments are the three "sources" of power (i.e. Dahl's resources): personality, property or wealth, and, most important, organization. Personality is a quality of leadership that may include any personal quality, even brute strength (which Galbraith says still prevails in some situations, as in certain families) that confers power on an individual. Nowadays, personality is primarily related to conditioned power, as it constitutes a leader's ability to persuade. Property or wealth is obviously connected with compensatory power, since submission may often simply be bought. Organization (which refers to both the Weberian process and its concrete result in *an* organization) employs conditioned power as its primary instrument, although an organization, such as a state, may clearly use condign and compensatory power as well. The three instruments in fact occur in varied combinations, depending on the type of organization. For example, the power of a corporation to set prices, influence politicians, and manipulate consumers depends, Galbraith says, on its immense wealth but also to a great extent on how well these dubious practices are concealed, that is, on the conditioning implied in the capitalist ideology of free enterprise, the sovereignty of the consumer, and the impersonality of the market. The market, which is classically supposed to regulate corporations with its "impersonal" mechanisms, is to some extent an instrument of the corporations for achieving their aims (5-13).

The evil of conditioned power Galbraith explains as follows: "It is accepted as the reality by those who employ it, but then, as underlying circumstances change, the conditioning does not. Since it is considered *the* reality, it conceals the new reality" (131, his emphasis). For example, in the shift from entrepreneur ownership to stockholder, the real state of affairs has been concealed in the myth of the individual as participant in the corporate process. Actually, corporate policies are decided entirely by management; stockholders remain passive recipients of both dividends and decisions. There is thus a real parallel between the (lack of) power of the corporate stockholder and of the citizen-voter in a modern democracy.

One more important difference in power in the US that Galbraith notes between past and present is the relation between corporations and the state. Formerly, these two great organizational powers were allies, which is now perhaps only the case with the military (Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex"). The military is the supreme example of organization, which, as condign instrument of government policy and in compensatory alignment with corporate manufacture and development of technology, is a source of concern with its greatly increased capacity for devastation in war. Nowadays, however, with this important exception, government and corporations in the US are recognized as enemies, since other organizations, often hostile to corporate interests, now have access to government, and corporations perceive government regulation as restraining their profit-making activities (what is really behind Ronald Reagan's pseudo-populist rhetoric of "get the government off the backs of the people"). Finally, the state has become a corporate power in its own right, with a vast increase in bureaucratic organization.

Section II. Two Views of Power

a. Weber

As stated in the Introduction, in the theories of power prior to our own century--and even in many of this century--the primary focus has been on the state. More recent theories, while continuing to address issues related to the state, praxis at its loftiest level, have explored institutional and local levels of power in empirical studies (especially in the US), which seek to identify who actually wields power in a specified institution, locale, or situation. This task, however, is often made difficult in the more complex organizations by the existence of occult powers, i.e. those who really make the decisions, which finction parallel to those who officially hold power or who are thought to hold it. The problem is, as Raymond Aron says, "up to what point the official distribution of authority and the effective division of power coincide or diverge" (263, 272). Other theories, mainly following the work of Max Weber, have attempted to develop more abstract schemes and general conceptions of power and domination that will work at both micro- and macro-levels.

For Weber, a power relation is one kind of "social relationship," or situation where two or more parties (whether individuals or groups) take account of one another's behavior in a meaningful way, but one in which there exists a "struggle," wherein one party is concerned to make its will prevail against the resistance of the other (Weber, *Basic Concepts* 63, 85). In this generalized conflictual relation, at least, the consent of the controlled party is not a consideration. As seen in the discussion in Section Ib, however, persuasion may result in rational agreement and not necessarily be a hidden form of coercion. Stephen Lukes points out that the power relation need not imply conflict or resistance, since, first, power can be employed to avert or pre-empt resistance (though this merely means that an incipient struggle was crushed before it could be

realized in action) and, second, that power can be the result of consensus or be exercised cooperatively (Introduction, *Power* 2). The problem is that a theory such as Weber's is a mere formalization or abstraction; if one attempts to employ a concept applicable to all relationships of command and obedience in collective life, without considering the means of who commands and the feelings of who obeys, Aron says, one ends up merely with an ahistorical "interpersonal and dissymetrical relationship" (254-55). Weber's definition of power, accordingly, a general basis for many that follow (as, for example, those given in Section Ia) is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (*Basic Concepts* 117). The phrase "being in a position to carry out his will" introduces into modern concepts of power what we have seen as capability or potential: A *has* power if it is probable he will be obeyed, as a commander with his troops; the commander *exercises* power when he gives the command and they obey it (Stoppano 936). As is appropriate for a thinker concerned with a social science he believes ought to deal with general notions (as in his theory of "ideal types"), Weber strives for abstract comprehensiveness in a definition whose core is the imposition of will and the overcoming (if necessary) of resistance to that imposition, which implies an ultimate resort to force, the focus of critical reactions to Weber's theory.

Admitting that the notion of power is too "amorphous" to be useful scientifically, Weber rejects it in favor of the somewhat narrower concept of *Herrschaft*, which Aron translated as *domination* (Fr. and Engl.), "the opportunity to have a command of given specified content obeyed by a given group of persons." Here, the possibility of imposing one's will in the notion of power (*Macht*) gives way to the fact of command; there is also a clearer perception of the relation between superior and subordinate (Aron 258). A second feature of domination, according to

Boudon and Bourricaud, is that the overall capacity of C is increased in some way, although they say that Weber does not make it clear whether C's gain is in detriment of R (the so-called "zero sum" theory) or it can be attributed to their interaction (433-34).[8] It is probable that both situations occur, at least in theory, as in the political relation between the citizens of a democratic country and their government. In any case, that the controlled element may sometimes benefit is evidently a feature of Weber's thought.

In opposition to the reductive role of economics in Marxism, Weber seeks to distinguish the irreducibly specific nature of political power. Politics for Weber is a social relationship characterized by the domination (*Herrschaft*) exercised by one or more men over others. He thinks that domination cannot be reduced to economic power, since the resources available do not completely determine the power available. One can, for example, buy the compliance of some people but not of all (Aron 255, 261). For Weber, domination implies obedience, even if voluntarily contracted. Modern democracies, since they are relations of this type, therefore imply obedience and politicians calling themselves "public servants" does not affect the character of their dominant positions, nor does the voluntary character of the social relationship affect dominant-subordinate positions: a worker, like a soldier, is subject to authority even though the worker's subjection is voluntary. As Aron comments, the term *Herrshaft* invokes the relation of master/servant rather than that of governor/governed. How obedience becomes duty, or force becomes law, leads to the question of authority and its legitimacy.

Like earlier political thinkers, Weber seeks an answer to the question of what constitutes legitimacy. He distinguishes domination from force and violence in the insistence that "all domination seeks to maintain a belief in its legitimacy" (qtd. in Boudon and Bourricaud 173). Authority may be roughly defined as the power plus the right to enforce obedience. Weber pro-

poses three basic or "pure" types of legitimate (or, more accurately, legitimated) authority, adding that an actual social situation may reflect some mixture of the three. *Traditional* authority achieves legitimacy through time-honored custom. An example is the family or the church. *Rational/legal* authority is legitimized through its recognized efficiency at achieving goals. The supreme example is the modern bureaucratic state. *Charismatic* authority may be religious or secular; it is self-guaranteeing, resting on the devotion to an exceptional leader. An example is a hero or popular dictator, whose appeal may even override the other two types (*Basic Concepts* 81). It follows that all forms of power do not have legitimate authority; tyranny, for example, depends on an unauthorized use of force. Economic power based on monopolistic position, where one party is in a position to dictate terms, is also a form of coercion. Other kinds of *influence* may be derived from some sort of personal superiority (e.g. "erotic attractiveness" or a gift for conversation are examples Weber gives) but are not thereby legitimate. The distinction between authority and influence seems to be a basic one. With authority, the power of position allows one the right to command; with influence, personal or group resources enable one to exert pressure (Weber, *Selections* 61; Lenski 250).

Still, Weber's typology does not always allow a clear understanding of the relation between force and legitimacy in maintaining systems of power (Boudon and Bourricaud 435). In connection with domination, for example, Weber calls attention to the importance of discipline, the prompt and automatic obedience from people who have a "practiced orientation" towards a command. Discipline, whose major contemporary theorist is Foucault, points to subtler forms of domination that work by the active complicity on the part of the obedient. For Weber, however, the concept of discipline "hinges on the belief by both sides in the legitimacy of the authority that exercises domination" (Secher, Introd. to *Basic Concepts* 20). In another text, Weber makes a

stronger case for the complicity of the subordinated, "a certain minimum of voluntary submission...an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience" (*Selections* 59). Here, he emphasizes the subordinate's advantage in obedience, which brings material or other rewards ("ulterior motives") or which may rest on custom or affection, but, strictly speaking, obedience for Weber implies a formal obligation without regard to the attitude of the obedient. For purposes of classifying types of authority, therefore, Weber thinks that a distinction between "submission" and "sympathetic agreement" is not significant, but whether R obeys C out of resigned acquiescence or enthusiastic support surely always makes a difference to R, and often to C as well.

Power wielded by the state is distinguished by its claim to "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order." Besides authorized force, the state for Weber was constituted by jurisdiction over a territory, authority, and bureaucracy (*Basic Concepts* 122). Weber's analysis of bureaucracy would also become the focus of many modern studies of power. Basically, administration, which is an apparatus of coordination, is required in modern corporate organizations, including the state, where there is domination over a great number of individuals. The more a state becomes a great power, the more bureaucratic it necessarily becomes (Boudon and Bourricaud 173; Weber, *Sel.in Translation* 347). Bureaucracy is the administrative apparatus of any kind of rational/legal domination. It developed historically, Weber says, as the result of a perceived need for a large standing army and its financing, in the interests of national power-politics. In the modern state, the same process has come about economically, through the growing complexity of life and the increase of wealth available for use; an organized public provision arose for needs that were once unknown or provided for by private means. A modern political stimulus to bureaucratic development has been the perceived increasing need

for order and protection. From motives of power politics or ideology, the state usurps or is pressured into taking over "social policies." Finally, bureaucracy has developed for a number of technical reasons, mainly the increasing importance of transportation and communications (348-49).

Traditional power tends to be patriarchal, its administration depending on loyal servants rather than impersonal bureaucrats. Of course, it still exists in certain parts of the world, or even in certain regions of modern societies (like northeastern Brazil) but tends to give way to the legal and bureaucratic type as the society modernizes. Charismatic power is inherently unstable since it depends on the continued belief in the charismatic leader or the continued efficacy of a popular revelation. A good example of these features of charismatic power can be found in contemporary literature; Robert Coover's *The Origin of the Brunists* (1966) is a novel that explores American evangelicalism and apocalyptic religious tendencies, as well as the more generalized mass appeal and precarious hold on power of the charismatic leader.

In contrast to charisma, bureaucracy is extremely stable due to the development of a professional class, a rigid hierarchy of superiors and subordinates whose functions are explicitly specified and who possess special competence for their tasks. The decisive reason for the advance of the bureaucratic organization over other types is because of the resulting technical efficiency, a consequence of calculable rules and the impersonal character of bureaucratic offices (Weber, *Selections in Translation* 348-49). What is often lamented about bureaucracies, their dehumanized character is, Weber says, precisely what makes them so effective. The impersonal character of bureaucracies excludes all that is irrational, all that resists calculation, which makes them ideal for capitalist enterprises, in which profit is the supreme motive (351). Weber emphasizes the machine-like character of bureaucracies, wherein both functionaries of the bu-

reaucracy and those subject to it become like cogs in a machine, as the latter's material fate becomes dependent on its steady functioning and the former becomes disciplined to its habitual and impersonal nature. The impersonal character mechanism means that it can work for anyone who controls it, which makes any revolution, or the creation of new types of authority, increasingly utopian, Weber says, especially because of a bureaucracy's control of communications and its "internal rationalized structure." Once established, therefore, it is one of the most difficult social structures to destroy, an instrument of power of the first order for those who control its orderly and methodical apparatus (*Selections* 68, 73-5).

It has been observed by some theorists that control over subordinates is never total, since some kind of active compliance, a "dialectic of control," is usually necessary if the relationship is not to be overly burdensome to both sides ("Power" 378-79). Weber's contemporary, the neo-Kantian philosopher Georg Simmel, called attention to this character of power relations, which he says are too often thought of in overly "mechanical" terms, i.e. that the superordinate so dominates the subordinate that the latter is deprived of all freedom, becoming a mere object or means to the former (Simmel 203-4). Even in the most oppressive situations of domination, the subordinate maintains a measure of personal freedom--except in the case of physical force, where domination over the subordinate may in fact be total. For Weber and Simmel, there is always "interaction," or action mutually determined, although in situations of domination it is, of course, unequally determined. This interaction results, Simmel says, in a certain "spontaneity" allowed the subjected, even when the room for action has been severely limited. Conversely, the superordinate's freedom is never complete, for "leaders are also led" (207). The subordinate is only an apparently wholly passive element insofar as he/she to some extent controls the dominant party, as can be seen with a teacher or public speaker, who, while nominally in control responds

to the class or audience and is subtly modified by it.[9] Even the law, which implies submission in a single direction, originally meant "contract" (Roman *lex*) and so recognized that those subject to it are "contractors," a recognized party in a binding relationship (209), a perception that would be expanded in Weber's American disciple Talcott Parsons.

This give-and-take perception of the nature of power relations is opposed to the Hobbesian conception of power as having the means to achieve future advantage, i.e. as something one party possesses. The essentially social character of power relations implied in Weber's general definition requires another party that is induced to behave in the way the first or controlling party desires. If force is not the means chosen to induce the desired behavior, other means both coercive and persuasive may be employed, as we have seen, such as the use of a variety of resources, but the various resources (wealth, prestige, etc.) are not all in the possession of the same people. Furthermore, as Aron points out, the "plurality of the domains" where power is exercised allows for reciprocity. Men are not "pure" subjects or objects of power; some may dominate in certain domains and be dominated in others (Aron 262).

If I may return at this point to the last two of the OED definitions of power given in section Ia, the difference between them is noteworthy. The fourth definition emphasizes control, influence, or some kind of domination over others, while the fifth explicitly mentions legal authority. As has been seen, power need not coincide with legally constituted authority (as in the various kinds of "influence"), although theorists like Parsons think that, properly speaking, it should. Parsons defines power positively, as a system resource, "the generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization" where the obligations are legitimized and refer to collective goals (103). Parsons's "consensus" concept of power is partly at odds with the conflictual model of his master. While power and

authority are not quite equivalent in his theory, force is, he thinks, not power at all, and in any case should only be applied as a "negative sanction" in extreme cases, when the object is unduly recalcitrant, as with criminals. He does not accept the notion that force underlies all power relations, which he perceives rather as a system of "binding obligations," a contractual relationship that depends like a currency on collective confidence. Parsons, therefore, rejects the Hobbesian tendency to treat power as the capacity to achieve ends without regard to the means employed or the authority invoked.

Parsons believes he has solved the problem of whether power is essentially coercion or persuasion: "It is both, precisely because it is a phenomenon which integrates a variety of factors and outputs of political effectiveness and is not to be identified with any of them" (139) Power depends on authority, which depends on consensus, and is geared toward the attaining of collective goals. Lukes argues that this exclusive dependence on authority and on a value consensus that can only be assumed creates a situation where only legitimated power is recognized as real and the central problems of coercion and compulsion are thereby excluded (Lukes, *Introd.* 3). Also, Lebrun says, since an infraction will be punished, coercion is always present even for those who have never thought of contesting legitimacy (25-30). It is to the point that Parsons translated Weber's *Herrshaft* as "imperative control" which, as Aron says, obscures the confrontation between who obeys and who commands in a system of imposed order or discipline, but which is more appropriate to Parson's own theory (Aron 259). [10]

Like Parsons, the German-born American philosopher Hannah Arendt sees power in enabling, positive terms, exercised for collective goals. If Hobbes's notion of power made it seem to be something an individual could possess, Arendt argues extensively (e.g. in *The Human Condition*) to the contrary, that power does not belong to an individual--that is the property of

strength--but only to a plurality of men and women engaged in collective action.[11] Power comes into being when men agree to join together for purposes of action and disappears when they disperse. The "binding and promising" necessary for power to continue to exist requires people who through their mutual promises are already in the process of constituting a stable "worldly" structure, which she thinks "may be the highest human faculty" (*On Revolution* 175). Although Arendt rejects Parson's idea of power as a means, she too insists on the need for legitimacy: "far from being the means to an end, [power] is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category...power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy" ("Com. Power" 68).

By definition, therefore, Arendt rejects illegitimate power as power at all; what the tyrant exercises is *violence*, which she says is often confused with power. Hobbes thought that since no man is strong enough to dominate permanently, violence, a war of all against all, is the natural human condition. This is similar to Marx, in that the social order is the arbiter of public peace, but for Marx violence in not a natural state but characteristic of a society perverted by the monopoly of the means of production; its origin is not natural but social, and the struggle is not all against all but between classes. Nor is force necessarily violence, if the Hobbesian sovereign uses force as protection against violence, and if for Lenin the Party uses force, not violence, for the establishment of a legitimate system. Force, as Weber would say, can be the legitimate use of violence. Boudon and Bourricaud (following Machiavelli) think that violence can therefore be a resource of power. Every society is violent to the extent that force is not always regular and legitimate, although a society reduced to violence is a contradiction in terms (610). Its use, however, depends on strategy, since it can be played (as in a bluff) to actually economize force,

although they admit that it may have to be actually used on occasion to maintain credibility (605-7), a principle the American military well understands. For her part, Arendt argues that violence, being speechless, is essentially unpolitical. It depends on "instruments" and is ever likely to be resisted. It is therefore eventually self-defeating, when the resistance that will inevitably be called up causes a breakdown in authority: "Where commands are no longer obeyed, the means of violence are of no use...everything depends on the power behind the violence" ("Com. Power" 66-67). Power can be destroyed by violence, as in tyranny; it can only be checked by power, "Montesquieu's discovery" that "power arrests power" (*On Rev.* 151). This institutional solution therefore explicitly opposes the school of thought of *Realpolitik*, forged in the period following the French Revolution, which holds that the most successful means of political action are intrigues, lies, and violence (105).

Arendt's theory is Weberian insofar as it attempts to establish a distinct political realm. She argues that the social inequality (which, to be sure, is politically generated) that results in poverty and misery binds people to the realm of necessity. Revolutions have attempted to redress the social problem, to bring about a new socio-economic order, rather than change political structures, which she thinks should be revolution's true aim. The Marxian "social question" was based on the ancient exploitation model of slavery, where a ruling class possessed of the means of violence could force a subject class to bear the burden of their labor. Reversing this relationship, Arendt thinks, will not abolish misery, which can only happen with the rise of technology. [12] Hatred of the masters or longing for liberation is ultimately "politically sterile," just as mass violence as a form of rebellion is pre-political, since it is incapable of speech. People bound to the necessity of want are by definition not "free," and free people are the only ones who can act in an actual public realm, which in a republic is constituted by the exchange of ideas and

opinions among equals (cf. Foucault: "Power is exercised only over free subjects and only so far as they are free," qtd. in Dreyfus and Rabinow 201). As Montesquieu maintained, power and freedom belong together, for "conceptually speaking, political freedom did not reside in the I-will but the I-can" (*On Rev.* 150).

Arendt thinks that, of all revolutions, only the American Revolution was ultimately successful since it did not submit to the unleashed force of popular violence and subsequent reign of official terror precisely because the revolutionists understood that the central idea of revolution cannot be the liberation of the oppressed but the foundation of a body politic which can guarantee the "space where freedom can appear." Freedom, or "public happiness" as it was known to the Founding Fathers, consists precisely in the citizens' right of access to public power, a positive idea of freedom in contrast to the negative (classical liberal) notion that freedom is essentially protection by the government for the pursuit of private ends (*On Rev.* 125-7). Arendt's theory of collective public action would seem to be supported by the recent popular revolutions in Eastern Europe, where power was shown to be less a question of arms, i.e. violence, than of people acting collectively.[13]

b. Foucault

"Power is a positive thing...control a negative thing" --Woodrow Wilson

The Marxist concept of hegemony has been undoubtedly useful for analyses of ruling class ideology, which is something so total that it goes beyond philosophy ("the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class," Marx and Engels 428), and becomes equivalent to common sense, corresponding to the reality of social experience. Ideology is a set of ideas and representations that serve to justify and explain the social order, the conditions of people's lives and the relations they have with one another. As it develops out of the phenemonal (apparent or

surface level) forms of reality, which conceals and inverts the essence of social order, it is "false consciousness," which implies that some ideologies are not false insofar as they do not invert essence (Fiorin 28).

Social control in societies that do not resort to force depends on this assimilation of dominant values, an assimilation that does not result from a common moral consensus shared by all classes of people, as some liberals would have us believe; rather, the class values legitimized in society are a function of institutional power, such as education, religion, and the press (Parkin 81). Since the system of values and meanings in any society are not static and abstract, but organized and lived as a social process, one must therefore understand how the system of values is assimilated, as, for example, in school curricula or in the current debates over the literary canon. The totality of the system, as Raymond Williams argues, can be seen in how opposition is incorporated. Whatever the internal variation of modes of opposition, they do not in practice go beyond the limits of the central effective definitions. For example, at the level of university philosophy, history, or literature courses, there is a selective tradition which is passed off as *the* tradition, or the significant past. Some meanings are diluted or reinterpreted so as to support, or at least not contradict, the dominant culture; others are simply not perceived, or are perceived as harmless alternatives (*Problems* 37-44). The hegemony of the ruling class, which it must achieve to survive, therefore depends both on control of the state and, crucially to its continued success, through control of cultural institutions that guarantee an ideological homogeneity, such as the control of communications and information, which creates the possibility of a domination that begins in the inner consciousness. Dominant classes fortify themselves by not being able to be contested or questioned. Their hegemony consists of their power to define a situation or the alternative as the only valid or even possible one (Guareschi 43).

A somewhat different emphasis has been put on social control by Michel Foucault. He has tried to think of power in new ways, for example, that power is not something to be possessed and used by someone and therefore external to the individual, as in so many classical theories, but is constitutive of the individual to begin with: "...the lesson of Foucault," Umberto Eco observed, "is that power is not something unitary that exists outside us" (4). Foucault says that history has studied those individuals and institutions that have held power but has neglected its "mechanisms" and "strategies" (*Power/Knowledge* 51) In his attempts to discover the connections between "mechanisms of coercion and elements of understanding," he wants to erase the perception of powerful practices and institutions as an unquestioned given or historical necessity to show rather their contingency, the arbitrary quality of "games of truth" invented or constructed at given historical periods in specific situations (Miller 303-4).

In his early works (the 1960s), Foucault rejected the essentialist, Platonic search for historical origins, offering instead what he called "archeologies," in which he examines the sets of discourses that condition what counts as knowledge, for example, of madness or clinical medicine, in a given epoch. He thinks that discourses and discursive practices can be articulated as the "unconsciousness of an age" (Cutting, "History of Madness" 63), indications and expressions of how people thought and acted. Such discourses and practices establish norms and rules but also controls and exclusions, determining what counts as true, or scientific, in a given period (Flynn 30). They are therefore social constructions with no privileged access to the truth (Cutting, "Introduction" 10-12).[14] Subsequently, in works called "genealogies" (the 1970s), he shows the discontinuities and importance of randomness in historical events. The dispersed character of events and their multiplicity of explanations, levels of different types of events that differ in their capacity to produce effects, suggest that Foucault does not share the traditional historian's

concern with reconstructing what happened but wants to write, as he claimed, "a history of the present." The particularity of the genealogies tends to subvert, in what is thought of as the post-modernist fashion, Lyotard's "grand narratives" of inevitable progress, to diagnose problems (rather than causally explain), "to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 81; Flynn 44; Cutting, "Introduction" 14).

Foucault's originality as a theorist of power is his break with the notion, which can be seen in all historical theories that power "consists in some substantive instance or agency of sovereignty" (Gordon, "Afterward" 235). To the consternation of some critics, he never defines power, being concerned not so much with *what* it is, its essence, or even the Marxist question of over *whom* it is held, as he is with *how* it is exercised (*P/K* 92). Like Nietzche, he understands power not as a fixed quantity but a flux flowing through individuals and societies, bound up with habits, systems, and organizations (Miller 15). Its mechanisms are distributed along different centers and not unified at a single point, such as the state (Mohanty 33-34; Caputo 246), which is perhaps a reply to critics who have charged that his analysis, as such, does not make a normative distinction between oppressive and non-oppressive forms of power, although (it is conceded) his rhetoric implies one (Lukes, qtd. by Ingram 253, n.16). To be sure, in papers and interviews, Foucault explicitly discusses a kind of local opposition against the "totalizing nature" of power. He says where there is power, it is exercised, although no one is properly speaking its "title-holder"--which is not to say it is not known who exploits, where the profit goes, etc. To force the information network, to designate the target, is a first inversion of power; the local, regional, and discontinuous theories being elaborated are the beginning of discovering how power is ex-ercised. Since power relations are not localized at the level of the state, or between classes, but

penetrate the depths of society, resistance does not consist in destroying the institutions or acquiring control of the state apparatus but is fought out at points of confrontation and instability (*DP* 27).

The role of the intellectual, for example, is in the order of knowledge and "truth," a local practice that struggles to make power "appear" and wound it where it is invisible and insidious (*Microfisica* 71, 75-77), i.e. "not the uniform edifice of sovereignty," but domination within "lateral" relations of power , "the multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism" (Caputo and Yount, "Institutions" 9; Foucault, *P/K* 96). In the "vaguer dominion" that Foucault says he investigates in the genealogies, as well, the point is to assemble and "make visible" in their strategic connections the discourses and discursive practices of institutions, which are not just the sum of discourses formulated about an institution but the workings of the institution itself, including the unformulated practices that ensure its functioning and permanence (*Microfisica* 130; *P/K* 38). One thing that Foucault proposes, therefore, is what he has called "an insurrection of dominated knowledges" or what is below the level required by knowledge or science, the activation of local, non-legitimated knowledges against the unitary theoretical system that orders them hierarchically in the name of a "true" knowledge, the centralizing effects of power connected to institutionalized scientific discourse (*Microfisica* 169-71).

Foucault's nominalism, noted in the particularity of the historical researches, doubtless accounts for his surprising statement that "power does not exist," by which it is presumably meant that there is no essence as such but only particular relations of domination and control in specific social situations and under specific historical conditions (Flynn 34, 39).[15] In fact, Foucault wants to understand relations of power as something other than domination, as occurring in all

relationships where one wishes to direct the behavior of another (cf. section Ia). Since there can be no society without relations of power, Foucault, although his perception of it is far less benign than theirs, sees power, like Parsons, Arendt, and Galbraith, as positive and enabling as well as (potentially) repressive. The exercise of power in fact implies freedom; slavery is not the consequence of power but force, constraint, and violence, since the slave's range of possibilities are severely reduced. As John Caputo says, power and freedom contend, as it were, agonistically, with different strategies "winning" or "losing," with victorious consolidation (one might say "hegemony") on one side, or successful resistance on the other (54-55). Yet, Foucault does not search for causal or determining factors in the Marxist fashion, identifying domination with a certain class or mode of production; instead, he analyzes social, political, technical "conditions of possibility" to reconstruct a system of interlocking relations and effects that are contingently interconnected. Power relations are found at different levels, under different forms, and are not given once for all but are amenable to change, since total control over the other implies the absence of power (Gordon, "Afterward" 243; Bernauer and Rasmussen 12). Domination, by contrast, would occur when an individual or group was able to render relations of power invariable and irreversible by political, military, or economic means (Bernauer and Rasmussen 1-3, 18; *P/K* 119). In this case, liberation from a restricted state of freedom is the historical or political condition for the practice of liberty, a notion similar to Arendt's, although such practices are articulated not at a universal but local level. If power only functioned as a negation, if it were, as thinkers like Marcuse suppose, primarily repressive, people could not be brought to obey it so willingly. What makes it acceptable is that "it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no" (*P/K* 119). As opposed to the congealed situation of domination, therefore, Foucault rather per-

ceives power as a complex "capillary" network of relations that are variable and reversible at different moments by varied strategies of resistance.

Although Foucault later insisted that his works were not, after all, analyses of the phenomena of power but were undertaken "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our own culture, human beings are made subjects" (qtd. in Rabinow, "Modern and Countermodern" 199), the centrality of power, especially in the genealogies of the middle works, is undeniable. In fact, one may take the "different modes" in the preceding statement to mean the means of domination (in the sense discussed in section Ia), and the way that "human beings are made subjects" to mean both how people are subjectified and how they are subjected. These two meanings are perhaps not that far apart in the genealogies and they come together in the notion of "governmentality," which according to Arnold Davidson, has a double objective: first, to criticize current conceptions of power as a unitary system, and, second, to analyze it as "strategic relations between individuals and groups, relations whose strategies were to govern the conduct of those individuals" (118-19). The first objective offers an alternative model to the hierarchical one of a vertical descent from ruler or other higher-order truth (like Rousseau's "will of the people"). It is claimed that unitary power has given way with the development of a more fragmented and differentiated society to another horizontal type of power, "more ubiquitous, diffuse, and corporeal," circulating throughout all areas of social life (Ingram 220). The second objective is both ethical and political (ethics being "that component of morality that concerns the self's relation to self," including the construction of subjectivity) (Davidson 118). The individual recognition that his/her personal identity cannot be separated from the fate of humanity, both of which are historically constructed (Poster 71), would argue against a tendency to "psychologize" individual identity. The abstract conception of who we are, determined ideo-

logically--and economically--by the state, must be resisted, Foucault thinks, in one way by new forms of subjectivity; hence, the ethical becomes political. The power that institutions have over people comes in a large part from their ability to deny them their individuality. This is clearly seen in the practices and procedures of bureaucratic or military organizations, prisons, hospitals, and even schools. Foucault wants to keep the question of identity open and prevent the administrators and managers of various kinds from constituting an identity for individuals that becomes an historically contingent constraint (Dreyfus and Rabinow 212-16; Caputo 250).

As a result of this conception of political struggle as a "politics of ourselves," ethics (as defined above) becomes central in the late works (the 1980s). Disciplinary techniques, which Foucault describes and documents so thoroughly in the genealogies of power, are applied to the self to create a new self, an aesthetization of ethics found, for example, in the ancient Stoics, a process he evidently admires. The crucial difference is that in this sense discipline is *self*-willed, and not imposed from without by authorities for the purpose of subjugation. With self-discipline, the freedom and creativity of the individual are not curtailed and controlled but ensured and enhanced: "...the exercise of self-mastery is closely related to the state of freedom" (Boyne 144). Foucault himself recognized this difference as a continuity in his thought, to be understood under two aspects: the role of coercive practices and institutions in the normalization of individuals, on one hand, and the role of ascetic practices in the constitution of the ethical subject, on the other (Bernauer and Rasmussen 9-19). Some critics, notably Jurgen Habermas, however, find not a continuity but a vacillation between, respectively, objectivist or constructivist and subjectivist or voluntarist conceptions of agency; that is, either the agent is a determined object or a "strategic subject" (Ingram 215-69). Without presuming to decide whether Foucault was consistent or not in this matter, I shall concentrate, in accordance with the theory of power as

it has been discussed up to this point, on the agent as a determined object, Foucault's concern with control, domination, subjugation, subjection.

Foucault sees a certain connection of "economism" between the liberal and Marxist conceptions of power. In liberal theory, power is a right, can be possessed like a commodity, transferred, etc. through a legal act. The basic notion is a contractual type of exchange, as can be seen in the analogies of power and wealth (e.g. Talcott Parsons). In Marxism, power plays a role in maintaining relations of production and the class domination these relations make possible; the historical *raison d'etre* of political power is therefore located in the economy. Social institutions, however, as Weber emphasized, do not precisely coincide with relations of production; one cannot therefore criticize the dominant system only by attacking these relations (Lebrun 63-69). Foucault is concerned with breaking away from this economistic model toward an analysis in which power is not exchanged or possessed but exercised, existing only in action, not the privilege of the dominant class but the "overall effect of its strategic positions" (DP 26; *P/K* 88-89; *Microfisica* 174-75). Once liberated from economism, the two hypotheses that suggest themselves are, first, that power mechanisms work for repression (the "Reichian" hypothesis), and, second, that the basis of the power relationship is a hostile conflict of forces (the "Nietzchean" hypothesis), war prolonged by other means (inverting Von Clausewitz), or the reinscribing of relations of force in institutions, economic inequality, etc. The two are connected in the sense that repression can be considered the political consequence of the conflict of forces, just as oppression was once the consequence of the abuse of sovereignty in judicial models, when power exceeded the contract. There emerge, therefore, two basic schemes: "contract-oppression," the judicial model of the 18th century philosophers, and the "domination-repression" analysis, in which repression is not an abuse of power but, on the contrary, the effect

and continuation of a relation of domination, the practice of a perpetual relation of force. Foucault says he adopted this scheme of power as an occluded war to about the mid-1970's but that it needed to be adapted (*P/K* 91-92; *Microfisica* 175-77).

The response was perhaps his most important work of political theory, *Discipline and Punish* (Fr. ed. 1975, first Engl. trans. 1977), written during Foucault's politically active period with French Maoists (1972-4), a work he describes as "a genealogy of the present scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications, and rules," and, most important, "from which it extends its effects" (DP 135). It was treated as a seminal work of social criticism that avoided both crude Marxism and conservative empiricism (Miller 234). Its historical aim is to describe in detail how methods of punishment changed between the horrible torture of Damiens (1757) and the beginnings of modern prisons (c.1840). Nietzche's notion of "mnemotechnics"[16] Foucault revives and extends to an account of the change from the old practices of torture and violent public executions, which were meant to avenge the criminal's offense against the sovereign by reproducing the crime on the visible body of the prisoner, a display of sovereign power's asymmetrical relation (DP 50, 55), but which exposed the cruelty in justice itself. From exemplary punishment, the means of social control came to be an increased control over desires and actions through discipline, with the modern human sciences taking over Christianity's disciplinary role. The point of application is once again on the body--and on the soul insofar as it is the seat of habits. The aim of imposing new rules was "not to punish less but to punish better..to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body" (84). Penal reform came in at the point it became necessary to define a punishment in which continuity would replace excess and expenditure, since spectacular punishment was haphazard in application. According to the "economy of power," it became

more effective and profitable to guard and discipline rather than physically punish. Foucault admits that every system of power has the problem of "the ordering of human multiplicities" (218) but that disciplines try to do so at the lowest cost (in both the economic and Dahl's sense), at the maximum intensity and reach (i.e. extension of domain), and for maximum output of the organizations (penal, military, etc.) within which it is exercised (218).

The social cost of this transformation was that an army of technicians, including warders, but also doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and educationalists, took over. The technology of power became the liberal principle of humanizing penal institutions but also of the knowledge of man, a diffuse "power/knowledge" (they imply each other) that is multiform in method though coherent in its result (23). Discipline introduced the power of the *norm*, from which power demands the production of truth made possible by its new techniques (6). Normalization, which came into being from contingent circumstances (i.e. other "solutions" might have been adopted) narrows human possibilities by binding people to a normalizing apparatus. It imposes homogeneity but at the same time makes it possible to measure differences as deviations from the norm. It therefore tolerates diversity up to a point but punishes it when it threatens the discipline of the norm (Caputo and Yount, "Institutions" 6; Bernauer and Mahon 143). Those categorized as deviants are excluded. Science thus develops the knowledge it requires to create the desired, well-ordered individual. It is therefore not a neutral and objective search for transcendental truth but implicated in the practices of domination (DP, 7; Poster 64).

The range of the authorities was extended to the general population. There was a general and continuous submission to supervision, milder than that exercised by a sovereign, but more insidious and microscopic, a "capillary" regime that exercised power *in* the social body and not *over* it, which became possible from the moment when the myth of the sovereign was no longer

possible (in England sovereign power was displaced to finctions of representation) (*Microfisica* 130-31). The idea was to create "docile bodies," to "shape an obedient subject" (DP 129), to increase the forces of the body in economic terms but reduce them in political terms, a "mechanics of power" that links an "increased aptitude and an increased domination" (138). Anyone who has been a soldier finds instantly familiar the spatial and temporal techniques of discipline that Foucault elaborates: enclosure, partitioning, finctional sites, ranking, and time-tables, temporal elaboration of the act, body-object articulation, exhaustive use. (Indeed, Foucault refers to a an 18th century "military dream of society" (169) as an alternative to the social contract ideal.)

Disciplinary power is exercised through invisibility. It is the subject not the leader who must be seen. Surveillance (the book's French title is *surveiller et punir*) or observation rather than physical coercion renders the actual daily exercise of power unnecessary. "Panopticism," which Foucault discovered in a description of in the writings of the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, is a "technology of power," an architectural arrangement that makes soldiers, prisoners, patients, students, visible to a central control.. Power is thus continuously exercised through an inspecting gaze that each one will end up internalizing, so that there is not need of weapons or physical violence (*P/K* 155). One who is subjected to such a field of visibility and knows it, Foucault explains, assumes responsibility for power's constraints, "becomes the principle of his own subjection" (DP 203). "Is it surprising," he asks, "that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (228)

In the following work, the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976; Eng. tr. 1978), Foucault seeks to show that repression is not what power is all about. The historical inquiry is directed toward a society that "speaks verbosely of its own silence" and promises to "liberate it-

self from the laws that make it function" (*History* I: 8). The aim is to define the power/knowledge regime that sustains the discourse on sexuality in society. Rather than repression--the "Victorian hypothesis," by which we falsely believe that when we say yes to sex we say no to power (157)--discourses of sexuality were multiplied by an "institutional incitement" (18) to speak and hear about it. It was spoken not to be condemned but (and here one may connect this work with *Discipline and Punish*) to be managed and administered, "inserted into systems of utility" (34). The shift is not from power as constraint to power as productive, but a production that is also a constraint, which works through linking sex with identity, or producing sex as a category of identity so that deviations from the established norm can be regulated, controlled, and punished (Butler 87). In the 19th century, sex was incorporated into orders of knowledge: the biology of reproduction and the medicine of sex, the first giving scientific cover to obstacles and fears aroused by the second (*History* 54-55). In contrast to an oriental art of sex, western civilization produced a science of sex geared to a traditional form of knowledge/power, the confession, that is so deeply ingrained it seems like a liberation rather than a constraining power. A "political history of truth" would show that truth is not free but its production is involved in power relations. A confession, for example, unfolds within such a relation: one confesses to an authority who requires the confession in order to judge, forgive or punish (38-62).

This "analytic of sex" includes general reflections on power that take up some earlier themes. Foucault says that his is an "analysis"(82) rather than a theory of power, but, again, the analysis needs to be freed from the judicial model. In this view, all modes of power are reduced to an effect of obedience, so that the productiveness, resourcefulness, "positivity" of power are neglected (82-86). This negative view of power has been widely accepted since power can only

be tolerated if it conceals part of itself: "its success is directly proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (86). Historically, law was the weapon of the sovereign but also the system's "mode of manifestation and the form of its acceptability" (87). The exercise of power in the west is formulated in terms of law, and facts and procedures are covered up by judicial discourse. This judico-political discourse is not adequate, Foucault thinks, to describe how power was, and is, exercised, but "the code according to which power presents itself" (88) and which prescribes how we conceive it. The forms of sovereignty to some extent still exist but they have been penetrated by new mechanisms, of the type he has described in this and previous works, mechanisms which operate not by right, law, and punishment, but by technique, normalization, and control, and that go beyond the apparatus of the state (89).[17] One must conceive, finally, not the sovereign model, merely temporary forms of power, but the multiplicity of power relations: they are not exterior to other types of relations (economics, knowledge) but immanent in them; they are both intentional and non-subjective, i.e. exercised through aims and objectives but not the result of an individual subject; they always and everywhere imply resistance but a resistance that is not exterior to power itself, which by Foucault's theory would be impossible, but presents "points" distributed irregularly everywhere in the "network" (92-96).

NOTES

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[1] For Foucault's most extensive work devoted to this question, see *The Care of the Self, The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3, trans. Robert Hurley (1984; New York: Vintage, 1988). By 1980, Foucault thought that his earlier work had insisted too much on techniques of domination and saw

as important the techniques that individuals perform on their own bodies and souls to modify their conduct and transform themselves.

Howison Lectures, Berkeley, 1980 (qtd. in Miller 322-3). I shall briefly take up this point again in my discussion of Foucault in Section II, below.

[2] Foucault said in an interview that ethos implies a relation to others to the extent that care for self renders one competent to occupy a place in city, community or intra-individual relationships. It is power over self that regulates power over others. Cf. "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (Bernauer and Rasmussen 7-8).

[3] The descriptive phrases have not in this case been italicized, as they are my own paraphrases of Stoppano's more discursive treatment.

[4] "Increasingly, the central question is becoming who will have access to the information [the] machines

will have in storage to guarantee that the right decisions are made" (Lyotard 14).

[5] The theoretical basis for this aspect of Dahl's argument is Blalock (18).

[6] For manipulative situations, Stoppano makes the same point: "A can bring about a certain behavior in B without making [his intention] manifest" (935, 938).

[7] Galbraith discusses (131f.), for example, how the teaching of economics in universities ignores the real world of great interacting organizations, a reality that is not acceptable to the ideology of universities or one that lends itself to mathematical models compatible with assumed market competition.

[8] As for the "zero-sum" problem Talcott Parsons's thinks that in some cases R in fact loses if C gains power, the case where the quantity of power is fixed, as in a particular hierarchic

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collectivity, but the zero-sum is overcome in the electoral mandate to do what is best for the public interest within legal limits, as a bank may invest deposits as it sees fit given certain restrictions. Boudon and Bourricaud point out (434) that there are situations where zero-sum does not apply, as when a third party is involved, whether mediator or cynical exploiter, who may tip the distribution of power, or the presence of some exceedent factor (like a windfall profit) that owes nothing to either side. Gerard Lebrun (15-20) thinks that the zero sum is not obvious, as is shown by Parsons and Foucault, who rejects it on the grounds that power cannot be reduced to the negative or destructive.

[9] This is Simmel's example, but one also thinks of politicians, who do not (or at least are not authorized to) wield power with complete autonomy and must give some satisfaction to voters. This view can be taken too far (cf Dahl's example of the merely apparent control of the ruler by the ruled, Section Ib, above).

[10] In the text of Weber (*Selections from His Work* 59) taken from *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* and edited by Parsons, the term given is "imperative co-ordination," which not only obscures the confrontation but positively erases it.

[11] By this theory, the phrase "divine power" is an oxymoron; what God allegedly possesses is superhuman strength, "made irresistible by the means of violence" (*On Revolution* 193), as is seen in the Old Testament.

[12] Arendt says (*On Revolution* 217) that the abundance of natural resources in colonial America presupposed that a revolution to abolish want would be unnecessary. She thinks that private enterprise has therefore been an "unmixed blessing only in America" (which is debatable) and in

the absence of natural wealth "has led everywhere to unhappiness and mass poverty," a view that would justify some sort of socialism, if only for the underdeveloped world.

[13] This is also the view of what is considered the best general work on Arendt, Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992).

[14] That ideas are in a sense constructed by history in Foucault's work is put by George Canguilhem as "...events affect concepts and not men" (Canguilhem 79).

[15] Foucault said in an interview that when he used the word "power" it was as a short-cut for "relations of power" (Bernauer and Rasmussen 11). Caputo and Yount explain that sets of power relations pervade life "without power ever amounting to a thing or substance." ("Institutions" 5).

[16] Nietzche elaborates, in the *Genealogy of Morals*, a fable of man as a slave of desires and whims, with the strong inflicting pain on the weak, which brought on fear and the resulting need to control the warlike impulses in this state of nature. Rather than a Hobbesian sovereign, laws and customs arose to suppress arbitrary and violent impulses. The result was a "mnemotechnics," or "memory of the will," since only memory can make people behave in predictable rather than arbitrary ways (*Genealogy* 58-62; Miller 215-18).

[17] Lebrun thinks Foucault's analyses of an invading and insidious power return to the state of things comprehensible to Hobbes and Hegel: "What Foucault describes is the triumph of the leviathan, the perfection of the Hegelian state" (69-73, my translation). If this were true, there would be no more politics. What Foucault is perhaps describing is the tendency rather than the accomplished fact.

PART TWO - POWER AND POLITICS IN POST-WAR FICTION

INTRODUCTION

Politics and social themes went for the most part into abeyance in American fiction after the war, a situation that persisted even into the 1960s. This apparent apathy on the part of American writers is often compared by the Old Left to the politicized Thirties, when a large body of fiction inspired by left-wing ideas was produced. The Great Depression of those years doubtless helped people understand that there was a direct connection between politics and the quality of their lives. It has, however, often been lamented (or in conservative circles celebrated) that the socialism that enjoyed a heady revival in that period never really prospered in the US. There were socialist movements in the 19th century, following European models, but the Socialist Party, which peaked around 1912, died with President Wilson's reforms. The usual explanation for the failure of socialism in the US is the relative affluence of the American worker, but affluence may in fact accompany an upsurge of socialism (e.g. France, 1968). The explanation is historically more complex (Karabel 27). In contrast to Europe, in any case, contemporary socialist theory in the US tends to be divorced for these (and other, more current historical reasons) from politics (Eagleton, *Against the Grain*, 75).

The contemporary rejection of, or apathy to, the public world of politics, especially left-wing politics, may perhaps be better explained by the context of the post-war years, with the emergence of the United States as a super-power. While this century has been called, with the usual hyperbole, "the American century," in 1939, before the war, the US was a great power only in name, with just minor influence abroad. As historian Gordon Craig points out, however, only two years later Franklin D. Roosevelt was already thinking of the US as a "world policeman," and by 1945, both the fact of victory and the development and deployment

of history's most fearsome weapon served to have "a very inflationary effect upon the American self-image (Craig 47). This historical situation, a post-war "pax americana," with the concomitant rise of an affluent domestic economy emerging from war production, may be said to have turned the national psyche to (perceived) new or neglected priorities of private life, on one hand, and to the facile certitudes of an assumed national superiority, on the other. To the consternation of nationalists, however, other parts of the world, as Theodore Draper says, have often, especially more recently, refused to play their roles "in the American scheme of things" (qtd. by Craig 47).

The retreat into the private and particular that characterizes postwar fiction is in this interpretation a result of assumptions arising from American cultural hegemony, which has solidified and expanded since the war and only in recent decades seems to be questioned in literature. From the late Forties through (in most cases) the mid-Sixties, serious American novelists tended to delve into the murky depths of their characters' self-identity, which, indeed, has always been something of a national obsession and may historically be related to a society in which social roles have been more fluid than in Europe. Both the mass and the intellectual public tended to see bad social relations as the result of private illness or alienation rather than public action or political choice. This tendency may in part be owing to intellectual movements imported from abroad that lost some of their original bite in the New World. Psychoanalysis, for example, has reinforced the preoccupation with the interior self and the separation of social from personality problems. Similarly, the existentialism that was popularized in the post-war US encouraged a self-absorption that actually supported the alienation that European existentialism had come into being to combat (Van Leer 478).

Even serious post-war novelists, Richard Ohmann has argued, have shown this "psychologizing tendency" in their work, a tendency which he believes has persisted even into the Sixties, when a more politicized fiction might have been expected in response to new attitudes and practices emerging from the counter-cultural attack on established values. He mentions Saul Bellow's Moses Herzog, John Updike's Harry Angstrom, Philip Roth's Alex Portnoy, or Sylvia Plath's Esther Greenwood as characters interested primarily in personal salvation (Ohmann 80-90), as well as Thomas Pynchon's Oedipa Maas (in *The Crying of Lot 49*, 1966, which I shall discuss at length in Chapt.7), as another example of this tendency. Oedipa's dilemma, however, lies in her inability to decide whether she is (privately) going mad or there is something really out there making her feel as if she were; in her case, an ambiguity is sustained in a paranoid socio-political climate. [1]

One might also mention E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971), in which the narrator, from the standpoint of 1967, looks back at his childhood as a son of radical parents who were executed as spies during the height of the "Red Scare," as an example of Ohmann's case. The novel is an imaginative rendering of the controversial Rosenberg Case, in which the radical couple Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted and executed (1953) for passing atomic secrets to the Soviets. As a political novel, it offers a valuable historical portrait of the post-war world of the Old Left, but it mitigates, even sentimentalizes that tendency's resolute Stalinism and in the manner of earlier political novels concentrates on psychology rather than politics, in this case, the narrator's and his sister's psychological traumas resulting from their parents' awful fate. Susan's radicalism, for example, owes more to the trauma of losing her parents at an early age than political convictions born of events. Finally, it curiously ignores the anti-Semitic issue that was an important historical factor in public outrage against the Ro-

senberg's alleged espionage. While Ohmann is surely right about most mainstream post-war fiction, he has overlooked, among a few lesser figures, Norman Mailer, who published two or three novels in the Sixties dealing with the major political events of the time.

At the same time as the emergence of a large, affluent middle-class, indifferent to social inequalities that seemed to have been resolved or at least not perceived as a major priority, the international situation steadily deteriorated as cooperation between the two ideological poles of the Allied powers began to crumble even before the war was over. The dreams of 1945 had become by the early Fifties a nightmare of fear and paranoia: the USSR's successful test of a nuclear device (Sept. 1949) that ended US atomic monopoly and the US's announcement of the development of a fusion hydrogen bomb (Jan.1950); the formation of the Euro-American defense alliance, NATO (1949), aimed at the Soviets and inspiring their formation of the Warsaw Pact counter-alliance (1955); the fall of nationalist China to Mao Zedong's Communist Revolution (1949). The Truman Doctrine (1947), aimed at protecting Greece and Turkey from Communist domination and ideologically justified as helping "free peoples," was used in fact to support any regime perceived as anti-Soviet: Tito in Yugoslavia, Rhee in the Philippines, Chiang kai-shek in China, Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal. The Truman Doctrine was thus placed in a global setting as a practice of the philosophy of what George Kennan in the same year called the "containment" of Communist aggression, which had its most violent consequence in the stalemated war in Korea (1950-51), a war that the right-wing military commander, General MacArthur, wanted to settle by bombing (Red) China, adding to fears of a massive land war in Asia.[2]

There was considerable national frustration at what was perceived as the world's most powerful country being unable to achieve the kind of decisive victory in Korea obtained in the

Second World War. Conspiracy arose to explain what could not easily be explained. Communists were thought to be infiltrating even high levels of government, a threat from within to match the threat from without (Dubovksy 274-78). Soviet peace feelers were interpreted as disguising increased espionage activities by US officials and, in the search for Communists under every bed the cherished civil rights of American citizens were repeatedly violated in the interests of "national security," which, it was said, "in times of peril must be absolute" (Dubovksy et al. 279). [3] The fears of Europe being overrun by the large Soviet forces, even as the USSR was being encircled by the west, and of the (real) possibility of global annihilation from a nuclear war between the two super-powers, no doubt contributed to a paranoid domestic climate.

The early Fifties' phenomenon of McCarthyism, with its attendant issues of power, loyalty, subversion, and the ideologies of extreme left and right, might also have been expected to call for serious fictional treatment, but perceptions of domestic communism and its implacable enemies was usually left to popular works, such as Herbert Philbrick's personal account of FBI counter-espionage, *I Led Three Lives*, which inspired an early television series. Ruth Prigozy, for example, has considered five political novels of the period dealing with McCarthyism (including two popular works) and found them all wanting. [4] Two of the works she cites by serious writers--Lionel Trilling's *The Middle of the Journey* (1947) and Norman Mailer's *Barbary Shore* (1951)--attempt to engage political ideas, while the third, Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952) is confined to politicking and intrigue in the face of administration pressure at a university campus. The climate of recrimination and betrayal that characterized that inquisitional institution of the period, the (Senator) McCarthy-inspired House Un-American Activities Committee, and legislation in a number of states that

brought on a national academic crisis by requiring teachers and other professionals to sign "loyalty oaths" are replicated in this satire of earnest liberal professors.

Trilling's novel, too, shows the dilemma of a conscientious liberal in an intellectual climate where polemics take the place of rational debate and political positions tend to polarize, with the hapless well-meaning liberal trapped in the middle, a position Trilling himself and his (writer) wife Diana often found themselves in with their principled (but staunchly anti-Communist) stands on political issues of the time. *The Middle of the Journey* is a novel of ideas, as Mailer's *Barbary Shore* tries but fails to become, and yet its characters succumb to the danger of that kind of fiction by becoming too abstract, mere mouthpieces of defined positions (Karl 267). Trilling's protagonist Laskell is just the calm, judicious middle-of-the-roader picking his way between ideological extremes that one would expect to find in an argument of that exemplary liberal, Lionel Trilling. It is to the point that the novel is set in rural New England (i.e. removed from the messy urban environments of national political struggles), that Maxim (based on the historical figure, Whittaker Chambers, of whom more in the following chapter) goes from Marxism to reaction, i.e. the extreme right and left come together, and that Laskell's political development is depicted principally as the spiritual one suggested by the title, a rebirth (from a near-fatal disease) *in mezzo cammin.*

The post-war polarizations of ideologies made concrete in the Cold War seem to have brought on a domestic situation of confrontation and fear in American society that created a cultural paralysis. McCarthy's unsupported accusations of treason in high places, aided by the sensationalist press, provoked a collective hysteria in which intellectuals and artists got caught up. Many of them had in fact been members of the Communist Party or fellow-travelers in the Thirties but ended up renouncing the Party with the general disillusionment of the Left

after the revelations of Stalin's purges and the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact. Many ignominiously indulged in public self-castigation, however, submitting to McCarthyist pressure and informing on their colleagues to avoid prosecution or "blacklisting." Mailer's novel (which I shall discuss in the next chapter) deals with this climate of fear and intimidation, interrogations and wrung confessions, that characterizes the period.

The politics of fear and paranoia continued through the late Fifties and into the Sixties and even Seventies. The US, agonizing over falling behind in the "space-race" when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik (1957), provided federal aid to education to promote technological development in an apparent effort to catch up. The Eisenhower years (1953-60) continued Truman's policy of containment but with an emphasis on military aid and defense alliances. CIA covert operations were executed under Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, the supreme cold warrior, who sought to prevent the rise of left-wing leaders throughout the world by subsidizing right-wing military *coups*. For example, the US backed Diem against the nationalist Ho Chi Minh, a mistake for which it would pay dearly in the next decade. Nor was the administration of the celebrated liberal John Kennedy much improvement, as it increased defense expenditure and military aid to anti-Communist (often repressive) regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In July, 1961, the administration recommended that Americans build bomb shelters as protection against nuclear attack, and in October of that year, Kennedy faced down Kruschev in the Cuban missile crisis, the tensest moment of the postwar years (Kennedy had campaigned on the existence of a "missile gap," which Defense Secretary McNamara finally admitted did not exist. Ball 16-20).

The climate at home often suggested the McCarthy years. Kennedy's successor Johnson claimed that "Russians" supplied anti-Vietnam US Senators with material for their speeches

and directed the FBI to investigate contacts of congressmen with foreign embassies. In 1967, the CIA and NSA began to (illegally) investigate domestic organizations and individuals. Nixon in the early Seventies had the CIA investigate anti-war protest groups and individuals to see if there was finding or influence of foreign powers (none was found). Investigation often proceeded by unconstitutional means. In the early Sixties, the Attorney-General Bobby Kennedy lobbied for wiretapping in national security as well as criminal cases; although it was defeated, he did not restrain the FBI use of wire-taps for all purposes (the FBI even bugged Martin Luther King). By 1972, wiretapping and break-ins were seen as normal means to noble goals. In 1976, the House of Representatives voted not to release the report of a committee investigating the intelligence agencies, even after the Church Report (Senate) had uncovered multiple abuses of the CIA and FBI and ineffective executive oversight. The conclusion is that there was a greater concern for secrecy than exposing abuses of power (Dubovsky et al. 329-437; 502). In the fiction of Norman Mailer, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo, the national obsession for spies and secrecy would eventually find full fictional expression.

NOTES

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[1] David Van Leer (505) has suggested, furthermore, that Plath's story of Esther Greenwood's mental breakdown in *The Bell Jar* (1963) is "the decade's most detailed indictment of the psychological inadequacy of the age's assessment of women," and that Esther's illness was not merely a private problem but brought on by her attempt "to conform to traditional models" of women's magazines, i.e. a social indictment.

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[2] Truman dismissed MacArthur, but the public reaction in the demogoguic General's favor (69%) perhaps showed both his charismatic appeal and the American public's manipulated fear of a renewed "yellow peril" (cf. my discussion of Gore Vidal's *Empire* in Chapter 3b).

[3] Quoted from the AEC board created to review J. Robert Oppenheimer's security clearance-- it was denied (1947), though Oppenheimer, chief scientist of the A-bomb "Manhattan Project," had been trusted with top-secret material since the war. Other abuses would follow. In his State of the Union Address, Pres. Eisenhower claimed that over "two thousand security risks" had been dismissed from the government. In 1954, FBI electronic surveillance ("bugging") was approved by the Attorney General; in 1955, the CIA opened private mail in the interest of alleged national security (Dubovsky 380).

[4] The two popular works she discusses but that I am unfamiliar with are Merle Miller's *The Sure Thing* and Irwin Shaw's *The Troubled Air*, which, Prigozy says, comes to the conclusion that the Communists were to blame for McCarthyism. Her comments on the novels are unfortunately confined to a paragraph or two for each novel. The main objection seems to be that the liberal protagonists at the center are too weak to sustain the novels.

CHAPTER 2

POWER AND THE LIBERAL CONSENSUS IN THE POST-WAR POLITICAL NOVEL

a.

Power is formally exercised and legitimated in the practices and institutions of national and international politics. One would therefore expect to find issues of power featured in the "political novel," if I may confine that fictional category (less easily called a genre) to an extended fiction "in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting" (Howe 17).[1] This definition Irving Howe goes on to amend to: "a novel *in which we take to be dominant*" political ideas or the political milieu (17, italics given), since he has argued that whether a critic calls a novel psychological or political is less important than why he or she proposes to use one or the other categories. He does not comment on the circularity of the definition (in which "political" occurs in both subject and predicate), but perhaps a certain circularity is inevitable given the indispensability of the term "political," which has a wide range of meanings but which context should make clear. This definition is a stipulated one, in that I am restricting the category to Howe's two aspects, and yet these aspects can be said to comprehend broadly what would fulfill the usual expectation of what a "political novel" consists of, or negatively, what it might be expected to omit and thus repel a certain kind of reader. A political novel is either to a great extent thematically concerned with ideas, concepts, or theories related to the state, its institutions, and the powers residing in such, or, (much more common in American fiction) that in which the dominant setting or milieu is institutional, at all levels of government.[2]

Nowadays, one needn't even be a radical critic to be quick to point out that "everything is political," to which I would readily agree, and indeed this has been assumed in my discussion

of power in Chapter 1, but in this case such an objection would ignore the notion of "political novel" that is being given and/or that it could be said to contain when one describes a certain fiction as such. Affirming the essentially political nature of all social experience and all cultural productions is, of course, legitimate and proper in the broadest context, which is that there is no area of human activity or thought independent of social, historical, and economic factors. The cultural sphere is certainly not to be thought of as produced or existent independent of these factors. In this sense, all novels are political, but if one says that every novel is a political novel, the term becomes of little use, and it seems that there is, as outlined above, a recognized use. One might therefore distinguish between the broad and narrow context by saying that every novel is political but not every novel is a political novel. Howe concedes the stipulative and reportive aspects of his definition when he says that a political novel is "any novel I wished to treat as if it were a political novel, though clearly one would not wish to treat most novels in that way" (4). [3]

Frederick R. Karl, in his comprehensive history of the contemporary American novel, says that a large-scale political novel in the 20th century, such as is associated with the great European moderns Mann, Kafka, Malreaux, Koestler, Orwell, has eluded the grasp of the American novelist (254).[4] In Howe's epilogue (written in 1986), for example, in which he briefly discusses important post-war political novelists--Gordimer, Naipaul, Marquez, Kundera, Solzhenitsyn--he significantly mentions no Americans (252-73). More recently, however, Russell Reising has argued that critics have ignored the political aspects of American literature, and Richard Goddens, while not concentrating specifically on the political novel, has sought to restore the socio-economic and political dimensions of American writers as stylistically and thematically diverse as James, Fitzgerald, and Mailer. And novelist E.L. Doctorow has blamed

critics (like Karl) for valuing political fiction from abroad but neglecting the home product: "It's like President Reagan's feeling about trade unions: He likes them as long as they're in Poland" (qtd. by Whalen-Bridge 187).

Can one conclude that post-war American fiction ignores politics? Most of it seems to until fairly recently, when the post-war illusions of affluence indubitably came to an end. In the Introduction to Part Two, I have discussed some of the socio-historical reasons for the tendency to treat private experience independently of the social and political context, where I suggested that the neglect of so many of our novelists to engage political issues is directly related to the collective state of mind, as it were, since the war. Some ahistorical explanations for this neglect have also been proposed, notably Daniel Boorstin's, that the character of the American mind is essentially pragmatic or untheoretical, which at least has the merit of explaining why Americans pay so little attention to their philosophers. In the application of this theory to fiction, American novelists are supposedly wary of using the deadening hand of abstract theories in the drafting of imaginative works, although this would explain only the unwillingness to write novels dealing with political ideas.[5]

As for institutions, one might expect a people so ostensibly proud of their own to have shown more interest in fictional treatments, but it can be argued that more than pride and indifference are relevant to the popular American aversion to politics. For one thing, the US was founded on the principles of classical liberalism, whose very logic implies a separation of public and private spheres. For another, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of popular ideology (e.g. Lincoln's celebrated, but surely false, notion that ours is "a government of the people, by the people, for the people") in maintaining the stability of the American political system (Lenski 247). There is great confidence in the average citizen about the self-reliant

stability of national institutions. This is partly justified, the system having proven resilient in withstanding stresses from above--in occasional scandals among the upper echelons of government, where blatant wrong-doing has tended to be redressed, or at least the overtly corrupt punished--and below, for example, in bona-fide attempts to deal with the urgent and conflicting demands of minorities, although here the system has been less successful, as recurrent race riots make evident. In any case, no one seriously thinks that the US government will fall to either a *coup* or a revolution; such vicissitudes are, for better or worse, the property of other nations.

This self-confidence, however, can degenerate into a generalized complacency, even apathy, with regard to politics, especially when that activity is associated exclusively with inept or dishonest politicians. One of the few places where the average citizen participates in democratic politics, national elections, have resulted in a low turn-out of the electorate, the striking of moralistic poses by the candidates, and media concentration on what is often merely personal trivia. And yet, the low turn-out may simply reflect a comprehension that voting for political representatives is a poor substitute for real participation in political decision-making, which is true enough but not specific to the US, since it is the basic democratic problem of any large modern state.

It can be conceded that to most people in the US, the government seems remote and unresponsive to their needs and desires, interfering in their lives only when it raises taxes. This, to be sure, has been the thrust and appeal of conservative rhetoric in recent decades, but whether it explains the apoliticism of the American novel, as Frederick Karl thinks, is at least debatable. For one thing, the literary canon has hardly neglected politics. Karl is surely right, however, when he argues that questions of space and the pastoral have tended to preempt political solutions to social conflict in literature. Doubtless, many novelists have been inspired by Huckle-

berry Finn's "spatial solution" to the complexities and moral dubiousness of what Huck knew only too well of "sivilization" by having their heroes simply light out for the territory. To be sure, this has often not proven much of a solution. Hawthorne's Dimmesdale rejects it as unrealistic, for example, and Melville's Ishmael comes to realize that one can hardly leave the world of power behind.

With a few notable exceptions, political novels were written by popular writers, that is, those writing mainly for the mass market. These works do not fully engage political theories so much as "deal with ideas already in circulation" (Prigozy 254) and concentrate therefore on the political milieus like Washington or state and local governments. As appropriate to works directed to consumers, they seek to "reassure rather than disturb the reader's belief in the normal Democratic American system" (Nye xiii). It is one of my contentions that perhaps the best known of these works has unintentionally the opposite effect. In the readings of political novels in this chapter, I shall confine myself to the early post-war years (1945-60) and their reactionary political climate, examining four representative political novels--two best-sellers and two works by serious writers--to show how these fictions perceive the workings of power in the American political life of their time. It will be seen that despite the official liberal belief that power in our political system is diffused through the mechanisms of checks and balances--the heritage of the constitutional debates of the Founding Fathers--these fictions consciously or unconsciously deny this belief. They perceive power as concentrated in fewer hands and more deviously exercised than liberal belief would warrant. And yet, the solutions to the dilemmas of power offered in these works shirk the radical conclusions that might be drawn, as each of them succumbs in its own way to the more facile resolutions of what has been called the "liberal consensus."

b.

Norman Mailer's *Barbary Shore* (1951) explores more radical positions than other works of the period (e.g. Trilling) and yet, arising out of the cultural vacuum of McCarthyism, manages to remain a curiously inert novel. The first sentence, "Probably I was in the war," places the narrator Mike Lovett outside history, removed by amnesia from a known past: "The legends from a decade of newsprint were as intimate and distant as the places in which I must have lived. No history belonged to me and so all history was mine (4). As a writer of fiction, which Lovett means to be (without ever writing much), he would seem to be singularly unpromising, but he suspects the opposite is true: "Now, at the time I write, when other men besides myself must contrive a name, a story, and the papers they carry, I wonder if I don't possess an advantage. For I have been doing it longer and have been tantalized less by the memory of better years" (5). He may supply with imagination what other men must be content to sift through in experience. The contriving of a name and a story, especially the reference to carrying "papers," also suggest a society in which it might be dangerous to have too much identity.

In keeping with his shadowy existence, Lovett remains a spectator in the major confrontation taking place in his Brooklyn boarding house between McLeod, an articulate, anguished Marxist theoretician, and Hollingsworth, small-time don juan, bully, and smug blonde representative of middle America. Hollingsworth supposedly has a job on Wall Street, but since he never goes to work, it may be assumed that this is merely to associate him with capitalism, in its ideological conflict with McLeod's communism. The names indicate character traits and, as Frederick Karl says, also suggest allegory: McLeod is nebulous, adrift; Hollingsworth, like Hawthorne's Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance*, is a man whose need for domination he disguises as a service to society; Lovett, although sexually randy, seems incapable of love.

McLeod's wife, Guinivere, whose name suggests Arthurian romance, seems extraneous to such a scheme, although she is at least an adulteress. In the political allegory, McLeod and Hollingsworth are clearly extreme left and right, the mindless vitality of capitalism and the promise and ultimate betrayal of communism, with Lovett in the middle, perhaps the modern artist wooed by both sides but straining for an impossible non-ideological place (as McLeod reminds him, 124) from which to practice his ahistorical art. Lovett can be opposed to the alcoholic schizoid, Lannie, a former Leftist gone over to Hollingsworth, since he moves in the opposite direction--from uncommitted bourgeois intellectual to committed revolutionary (Karl 268-69). One critic has suggested that Lannie and Lovett are Trostkyites to McLeod's Bolshevism, but Lovett is apolitical until he finally joins McLeod. Again, Guinivere is the odd (wo)man out; the suggestion that she is "the masses," pursued by all the men, works within the scheme but on the face of it remains unconvincing; she is not proletarian as she doesn't work and can perhaps be connected with the masses only in her vulgarity. The novel's title alludes to the Barbary Coast, the home base for North African pirates, which does not resonate with a suggested political allegory unless the boarding-house residents are seen as outlaw recluses from official society.

The possibility of allegory would perhaps mitigate the obvious defects of the novel as a realist fiction: the clumsy device of a narrator who must be improbably present at all the important conversations; the implausibility of Hollingsworth's interrogations of McLeod in a boarding house (since the former evidently works for a repressive but unnamed governmental agency resembling the FBI of the McCarthy era); Hollingsworth's cuckolding of McLeod and the latter's unexplained passivity, etc. The unrealistic, even parodic character of the quasi-legal proceedings can be seen in Hollingsworth's notes on McLeod, which recall the wild ravings of

Joe McCarthy: "Admits to being atheist...to blowing up churches...to being against free enterprise...Admits murder of President and Congress, Advocates destruction of the south...rise of the colored people, Admits allegiance to a foreign power, is against Wall Street" (81).

The heart of the conflict (and the novel) is a long interrogation in which Hollingsworth insists on the bureaucratic language that repression favors but, inexperienced in procedural matters, takes no notes. McLeod, accustomed to the plodding and paranoid Party methods (he claims also to have been a government "statistician"), says; "If I were your superior, and knew you had made no record, I'd set a man to watch you, and a man for him as well" (182). The unreality of the arrangement again becomes manifest: why would an agent as inexperienced as Hollingsworth be assigned to an important suspect like McLeod? (and why would this be done at home, unless merely to allow Lovett to witness it all?) Even the spontaneous meeting of Lovett and McLeod on the bridge, where the one tries to win the other over to revolutionary commitment, is hardly less stagey. One can imagine these kinds of scenes being done more effectively twenty years later with devices of post-modernism, such as an unapolegetic schematic and a lack of solemnity, say, by John Barth or Robert Coover, but Mailer remains hampered by his artifice of realism.

McLeod is clearly Hollingsworth's intellectual superior, as right-wing certitudes are no match for Marxist dialectic, but Hollingsworth correctly assesses their positions with respect to the locus of power: "I'm a simple fellow who concerns himself with facts, and that's not so bad in its own way, because I'm sitting where I am and you're sitting where you are" (191). His chief concern is recovering the certain "little object" that disappeared from the government agency where McLeod worked; although never identified, the object signifies, for one thing, that McLeod's renunciation of his mysterious Leftist past is not sincere. McLeod disclaims

responsibility in a complicated story (185-6) of his involvement in the state bureaucracy, an early example in contemporary American fiction of the Kafkan system as an impersonal but living organism that would later be exploited to effect by Burroughs, Barth, and Pynchon. McLeod tries out the argument that he cannot possess the mysterious object if he does not know what it is: "Like everything else, the little object creates about itself a circle of acquaintance and can be understood only collectively, for such is the nature of knowledge today"(193). This line of thought is quite suggestive in explaining future relations of power, but the possibility is not followed up. The identity of the object becomes merely irritating and McLeod turns out to have it after all, willing it to Lovett as his final attempt at honorable resistance.[6]

McLeod was, as it happens, not a government statistician but a paid informer who "cooperated" (as the HUAC used to say) when he was about to be liquidated by the Stalinist party apparatus overseas, but then disappeared with the object in a fit of remorse for his be-trayal, devoting himself to revolutionary theory. Under interrogation, he admits to having been an important member in the Party, with crimes such as the murder of a close associate and par-ticipation in the assassination of Trotsky ("him out of Mexico") on his hands. Self-disgust does not cause him to lose his lucidity; of Hollingsworth, he says: "..he's got a policeman's brain, it's only the murders he understands, but what of the capitulations which he would undoubtedly approve?" What is puzzling is why McLeod is capitulating to Hollingsworth, confessing of his own free will to a man and a cause he despises, since even if he confesses it is understood that he is going to be executed anyway. The only possible answer is that it is necessary for McLeod to be found guilty simply for him to launch his long farewell harangue on the inevitability of war between the two "colossi" (i.e. the super-powers)--a forecast similar to Lenin's --as a consequence of the logic of overproduction, competition for markets, low living-standards, and

arms-stockpiling during the Cold War. This didactic exercise is evidently a summary of Mailer's own views on the world at the time. It is both irrelevant to the immediate situation in the novel (Lovett already understands it and Hollingsworth couldn't care less) and historically inaccurate, since the balance of power brought about by the Soviet A-bomb turned out to be lasting.

Out of this apocalyptic scenario, McLeod improbably believes that there will be a place for revolutionary socialism apart from the Party (given Mailer's independent but left-leaning politics, doubtless his own belief), spontaneously arising like the Phoenix from the ashes of war to usher in a true equality of working-people--if we are fortunate enough, one has to add, for the State to disappear before the people do. Lovett's grandiloquent conclusion bears quoting:

> Meanwhile, vast armies mount themselves, the world revolves, the traveler clutches his breast. From out of the unyielding contradictions of labor stolen from men, the march to the endless war forces its pace. Perhaps, as the millions will be lost, others will be created, and I shall discover brothers where I thought none existed (311-12).

As this piece, with its echoes of Matthew Arnold, is spoken not by the now deranged McLeod but by Lovett, who has remained heretofore passively indifferent to Hollingsworth's destruction of McLeod and does nothing to prevent his murder, it is hard not to conclude that McLeod, Lovett, Mailer himself have become the soft-headed utopians Marx himself is said to have repudiated.

Mailer has evidently attempted in this novel to create the climate of fear and betrayal in the midst of the McCarthy years, and, perhaps beyond that, a dialectic of the Cold War, but even with his oversimplifications the message comes out muddled. The main problem is how are we to read McLeod: as an idealist corrupted by the devious machinations of Stalinism, as a criminal self-destroyed by guilt, as a Graham-Greene-like humanist caught in the dirty game of

politics and unable to deal with a neurotic wife or revolutionary choice, or as an heroic socialist clinging to resistance even as he is being brought low by the forces of reaction?

Karl's quite ingenious suggestion is that McLeod (with his mixed political past and sense of a grand mission) is a "Whittaker Chambers mutant" (268). If "politics begin and end with the self," Chambers is a character right out of a Mailer novel (572). Chambers was an editor who confessed in 1948 that he had been a courier for the Communist Party. In a famous trial of the period, he accused a high-ranking official in the State Department entrusted with foreign affairs planning, Alger Hiss, of turning over secret documents to the Soviets.[7] As Karl observes, Chambers's resemblance to McLeod is most evident in his delirious autobiography, *Witness* (1952), contemporaneous with Mailer's novel. While his political views are quite absurd (he sees, for example, Roosevelt's New Deal as a move in the coming hegemony of international socialism), Chambers portrays himself as an heroic personage in an existential and political drama of the highest import, in which the US-USSR power struggle and the fate of the free world hang on the decisive vigilance of patriots like himself and red-baiting Congressman Richard Nixon. And yet, he also reveals himself in the book as a loser redeemed by his act of betraying a friend, which he prefers to perceive as determined by historical destiny. To Nixon, for example, he says of himself and Hiss: "We are caught in a tragedy of history...I could not do otherwise"(Chambers 572).

If Chambers's fiction becomes more compelling than Mailer's, it is not too difficult to see why. The concrete details, what makes fiction fictional and not a mere rhetorical tract, Mailer has not filled in; what remains is not so much a political novel as a sketch for one. For example, despite its initial promise, Lovett's mysterious past turns out to have no function in the present. Nor does his conversion to McLeod's utopian vision have any motivation in the action;

inaction is indeed his salient feature. As for McLeod, both actions and motives remain undefined, as does his murder by Hollingsworth, who would not be both interrogator and executioner. Nor does McLeod's martyrdom elicit any sympathy. He does nothing to save himself or redeem his past crimes other than withholding the object whose existence never becomes wholly credible. The stated ruthlessness of his past is not a convincing basis for the heart-wrenching of the present, and, as Hollingsworth remarks, no bureaucrat turned to theory later in life. Unlike post-modernist novels where the unexplained or inexplicable will have functional roles in threatening systems, Mailer's novel simply remains an outline. The one-on-one ideological struggle has no immediate context in which power can be measured.

There is, in short, no connection in *Barbary Shore* between past and present credible in terms the novel establishes among the characters, just as the historical thread has been severed from the first by Lovett's amnesia. Nor does the plot, loosely connected discussions, create a substantial context that would support a novel of ideas, even if the discussions did not so often degenerate into unintentional parody. The novel seems amenable only to a reading where the contemporary world would be shown as a place of confused meanings and intentions, failed prospects and disappointed hopes, not the solidly material world of Marxism but one of psychological moods and conflicts, and so not comprehensible in the framework of a linear temporality working itself out by inexorable laws. Yet, such a reading, the psychologizing of the political that we shall see as a common fictional strategy to the mid-Sixties, can hardly be reconciled with McLeod's martyrdom and Lovett's inheriting of his revolutionary mission. Can the confusion be explained by the author's own political confusion, like that of so many artists, writers, and intellectuals of the time, of being unable to uphold American capitalism and yet disillusioned by Soviet Communism? If this is the case, Mailer was not so different from the

period's liberal novelists and their protagonists, such as Trilling's Laskell, he seemed so anxious to distance himself from.

c.

Gordon Milne's historical study, *The American Political Novel* (1966), which discusses novels from the revolutionary period to the present, unfortunately ends right at the point when American novelists began to rediscover politics as a subject of serious fiction. It is symptomatic therefore that his chapter on the post-war political novel discusses only three works, by Robert Penn Warren, Edwin O'Connor, and Allen Drury, that only the first is an important literary work, and that he ignores entirely Mailer's radical effort. His title for this chapter, "The Professionals," is also misleading, since it is aptly applied only to O'Connor and Drury, Penn Warren being known rather for his reputation as distinguished poet, critic and novelist (what used to be called "a man of letters"), author of a novel that has become a canonical work of literary modernism. In this section I shall discuss the two popular works, as they share a milieu of government politics--the mayor's office of a large city and the US Senate--while neither novel can be said, except unconsciously, to deal with political ideas.

O'Connor's *The Last Hurrah* (1956), ignores the national scene for an interesting if romanticized portrait of the old-fashioned paternalistic politics of urban bosses, specifically, the Democratic political machine of Boston in the early Fifties. The story follows the last election campaign for mayor of Frank Skeffington, who has already served as governor of the state. Skeffington, whose career (Milne informs us) is based on that of the historical James M. Curley, is a septuagenarian widower and the father of a frivolous playboy immune to his ironies. He is presented as the best type of old-time politician, frankly paternalistic and famous for his political *bons mots*: "There's a considerable difference between what they say they want and

what they'll settle for. You can promise them the first, but only have to deliver the second" 230). His crackpot political opponent, Charles Hennessey, is, he says both "honest and crazy," a combination that killed him, although the former type can succeed in politics and there is much evidence the second type has succeeded (186).

Skeffington may serve as a fictional example of Robert Dahl's description of the features that explain power (Chapt.1b): as the incumbent mayor, he has the allocative resources at his disposal to both dispense largesse and make deals; as campaigner, he is both highly motivated and supremely skilled, making use of local folk rituals, like the Irish wake, to garner votes. It becomes clear that in office he has been both efficient and corrupt, adept at persuasion (he is a brilliant extempore orator), compromise, and, when deemed necessary, applying pressure. The consummate politician, Skeffington is personally charming, witty, urbane, cynical, and possessing an intimate knowledge of the by-ways of his fiefdom. He tolerates and makes use of a loyal band of retainers but will cashier a subordinate if he becomes a political liability, as in the episode with the skirt-chasing Johnny Byrne whose escapades would scandalize puritanical Irish-American voters. His strength and eventual downfall is precisely in a uniquely personal style of doing politics: he asks after family members by name, lends money, does personal favors, and solves problems, receiving a line of petitioners at home every morning before being driven to the office. In other words, he might make an effective and popular leader for a small, semi-rural community, but as big-city mayor can only become the victim of historical change.

Skeffington is tolerant of hangers-on and ineffectual opponents like Hennessey but ruthless with enemies, like the greedy undertaker or the treacherous union boss. On the campaign trail, he invites his nephew Adam to accompany him as an observer, a device designed to present a more private, sympathetic view of the man to balance the public view of the politician

(Milne 165), but which is rather unconvincing since the old man is characterized as someone who necessarily keeps his own counsel. His only serious opponent in the election race is the mild-mannered non-entity McCluskey, chosen to run for his malleability by the local powers of progressive capital: the slippery banker Cass, self-righteous newspaper editor Force, and others less visible, who have leagued together to finally get Skeffington voted out of office. All are moralistic and rather unsavory characters, except the colorless McCluskey, forming a somewhat simplistic contrast to the flawed but fully humanized mayor. Even the characters who occupy a middle ground between respect and distrust secretly admire him as a lone example of a lost breed. The author's dice are so loaded in Skeffington's favor that it is difficult not to agree. His wit, candor, and refreshing lack of hypocrisy are so unlike the professional politicians one encounters that one is evidently meant to overlook the fact that by any objective criteria he should have been ousted from office long ago. As the title indicates, however, the story is to be one of human pathos. Despite numerous references to dishonesty, fraud, and mismanagement of public funds, these unpleasant things remain firmly in the background. Every time we see Skeffington in action, he is either crushing some fool or ruining some scoundrel.

Why then is it the mayor's "last hurrah"? The answer that the novel gives is what historically took place. The favor-granting bosses became obsolete once the federal government itself became the instrument of political paternalism. They were effectively finished off by Roosevelt's New Deal policies of the late Thirties and early Forties. Roosevelt took "the handouts out of the local hands" (330), in effect depriving them of the power that derives from rewards and inducements. The decade-long delay in Skeffington's fall is explained by his considerable personal resilience, tenacity, and political savvy. The electorate finally opts for change once he is perceived as belonging to the past. The loss of the election is therefore explained in the

novel as not owing to his well-known abuses of power but to external historical forces beyond his control.

At the end of the novel, the politically independent Gardiner is made to enumerate Skeffington's many excesses and crimes, as he watches a horse-drawn hearse (apt symbol of the mayor's old-fashioned elegance) take the old man's body to the cemetery. The list is depressingly familiar: public works that were executed unnecessarily and for three times the cost; contracts diverted to political supporters; tax rebates given to campaign contributors; the redrawing of boundaries for political advantage (gerrymandering); people on the payroll who do no work (featherbedding); and the awarding of public jobs to old friends. In spite of all this, Gardiner reflects, "Skeffington had always amused and attracted him, and in a sense, he felt a great sympathy for him" (360). Such is the dazzle of the mayor's personality that his abuses of public office are erased; nor will they detract from his historically heroic stature, as the final two chapters, devoted to his poignant death and grandiose funeral, emphasize.

In the end, then, Skeffington is sentimentalized, his abuses of power attenuated to the novel's vision of him as a veritable symbol of a by-gone age, a more colorful and even heroic time than the television-dominated present is likely to be (there is a fine Fifties set-piece of McCluskey filming a TV slot at home, with wife, kids, and dog). Skeffington, who always makes personal appearances, is seen as the human alternative to bland modernization. To be sure, O'Connor strikes a chord in the reader here with his portrait of the evils of contemporary capitalism and television politics: something valuable has been lost. The problem is the substitution of myth and selective memory that reduces the past to nostalgia rather than as lesson for the present, a falsifying practice taken up by the current conservative congressional leader Newt Gingrich with his "history" lessons.

For a less accommodating view of the often crooked and brutal paternalism of the Irish-American pols, one must turn to a much later novel, William Kennedy's *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game* (1978), a work that does justice to a political past without either Mailer's speechifying or O'Connor's sentimentality. In the novel, the McCall brothers rule Albany, New York, with an iron hand. They control the legal administration (through rigged elections), including the police, as well as illegal gambling and minor rackets, through methods (bribery, blacklisting, strong-arm coercion) that make Skeffington's abuses look like peccadilloes. The contrast between their kind of politics and legitimate authority that can be recognized even by a gambler can be seen in the following dialogue between the reporter, Daugherty, and Morrie, the (Jewish) gambler:

> [Morrie]"My old man wanted me to study politics, but I always knew politics was for chumps."
> [Daugherty] "The McCalls do all right with it."
> "What they do ain't politics."
> "What would you call it?"
> "They got a goddamn Roman Empire. They own all the people. They own the churches. They even own most of the Jews in town" (267).

And here is Daughtery reflecting with true Irish eloquence on his own inability to influence events in his locked-up town:

> The condition of being a powerless Albany Irishman ate holes in his forbearance. Piss-ant martyr to the rapine culture, to the hypocritical hand-shakers, the priest suckups, the nigger-hating cops, the lace-curtain Grundys, and the cut-glass banker-thieves who marked his city lousy (272-3).

c.

Allen Drury's *Advise and Consent* (1959) deals forthrightly with the McCarthy-era issues of loyalty, subversion, and the abuse of public power, although its rewards on the marketplace (best-seller adapted to Broadway play and Hollywood film) might alert one to the accuracy of its perceptions. Elizabeth Long has argued that popular novels are a mode of access to

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the subjective dimensions of collective life; operating within the conventions of literary realism, popular novels imply a community of shared meaning (3-5). This is almost but not quite to say, as Gramsci and other Marxists have, that most writing in any period contributes to the dominant culture's power to particularize general truths, which is what makes popular works effective in embodying ruling-class meanings and values (Williams, *Problems* 37-45). *Advise and Consent* is a good illustration of this idea. The novel is replete with Cold War clichés about the Soviets' evil intentions ("They don't *want* things to be worked out peacefully," whines a Senator, 134) and the sincere but innocent efforts of Americans ("We've tried," says the same Senator, "In our blundering, well-meaning way, God knows we've tried...somewhere along the way it's seemed to go wrong" (125).

This curious notion of the US as helpless victim of circumstance and an evil adversary finds an echo as recent as Ronald Reagan's pronouncements and is partly grounded in the uncertainty of national purpose arising from the launching of the Soviet satellite Sputnik (two years before Drury's work was published), an event that shocked the public into a realization that US technical superiority could no longer be taken for granted. The novel shows how doubts suddenly arose about the American way of life depicted on television as inherently desirable, doubts about manufactured goods and sloppy services, an indifference to the world at large and fearful loss of national purpose: in the novel's rather clumsy phrases, "The Age of the Shoddy," "The Age of the Shrug," and "dry rot" (592-93). Narrator and characters fret constantly in the familiar conservative conviction that these things could be set right if only right-thinking people would be resolute enough to do so. The underlying meaning of this lack of domestic will ("...we have forgotten how to do anything but question ourselves in one vast pa-

ralysis of self-doubt," 245) is a failure to make a firm stand against Communism. In this way the novel becomes an indirect apology for the Cold War.

Advise and Consent is set in Washington, which is glamorized, in contrast to its provinciality in Gore Vidal's novels. The story is told by way of long, mostly inconclusive dialogues, evidently meant to represent the hearty "old boy" conversations among the powerful that have been done much better by Vidal, or, for that matter, by the Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope in his Palliser novels. Although ostensibly a story of the US Senate, the central feature of American politics, the two party system, is generally ignored: there are no Democrats and Republicans. The bargaining and compromises of partisan politics are scrapped for the more dramatic conflicts of ambitious individuals locked in personal struggle. Despite the realist presentation, with four long sections giving biographical background for the four principal Senators, these gentlemen remain as schematized as Mailer's characters and politically less interesting. Intended to reveal the human character behind the decisions, the biographies turn out to be padding, since the decisions are not made in consequence of established character but of melodramatic plot.

The basic conflict centers on the Senate's confirmation of Robert Leffingwell, a smooth but shady liberal, appointed by the President to be Secretary of State, whose international importance, it is stressed, is even greater in a time of super-power stand-off. A former college professor, Leffingwell has been an able bureaucrat, especially skilled at influencing public opinion. He is therefore doubly suspect. In the Fifties, intellectuals were seen as "egg-heads," bright and eloquent perhaps, but soft on Communism and so not politically reliable for the business of defending the free world. Adlai Stevenson, Eisenhower's urbane and articulate opponent, was the period's quintessential "egg-head," no match for the General, who, while politi-

cally shrewd, had a grandfatherly manner and verbal ineptitude that guaranteed his trustworthy image. It is highly unlikely that such a figure would be, as Leffingwell is, the darling of the press, but Drury's perception of the media also belongs to an ideology that was outdated even at the time. The members of the Washington press corps are depersonalized in the novel, sharing identical opinions and identified only by the papers they represent. In contrast to the ponderous and scrupulous Senators, they play favorites, prejudge issues, and are revealed as dupes of an unidentified liberal establishment.

In a situation recalling McCarthyism, Leffingwell is accused by a disaffected subordinate of having belonged to a Communist cell in his university days. Although he destroys this fellow in skillful cross-examination, lingering doubts remain about his confirmation. Two opponents emerge, Seab Cooley for the wrong reason (revenge), Brig Anderson for the right (patriotic concern). Cooley, a powerful Southern conservative, schemes for the missing witness to make himself known. Anderson, all-American boy from the West, is as Chairman of the confirmation committee anxious to prevent confirming a liar to such an important post. The novel thus follows the general conflictual pattern of Fifties' best-sellers. Long (104-7) identifies the novels in the decade following the end of the war as registering little social conflict, while those of the late Fifties portray heroes trying to avoid being manipulated by complex forces and survive with dignity. Brig Anderson's situation clearly belongs to this category.

Anderson's opposition brings him into conflict with the President, press, and fellow Senators who are mostly in favor of confirmation. His strong will and well-known integrity are no match for these combined forces, which illustrates both Arendt's dictum that strength is never a match for power and the truism that in politics ethical principles are often sacrificed to ambition. The President calls upon all the means of power at his disposal to bring Anderson to

heel: respectively, positive inducement, tactical surprise, exercise of authority, verbal persuasion, and, when all else fails, negative coercion. He offers to buy him off with a promise of federal assistance to his home state; he outflanks the Senator with a public announcement of support for the nominee; he decides simply to ship the inconvenient witness abroad. When Anderson argues that none of these maneuvers will turn the nominee from a proven liar into a man of trust, the President offers the wonderfully sophistic argument that the nominee's very deviousness is precisely what makes him the ideal man to deal with the Soviets. Since the President's re-election prospects evidently depend on the confirmation, he finally resorts to blackmailing Anderson, claiming to subordinates that "there is always something in a man's background" that can eventually be used against him.[8] The novel thus (unwittingly) illustrates Gramsci's idea that parliamentary government is a balance between coercion and consensus.

In a plot turn worthy of a soap-opera, the President's opportunity miraculously turns up in the hands of a Supreme Court Justice, a Leffingwell supporter, who, we are asked to believe, conspires not only with the President and Senate Majority Leader but with an ambitious demagogue (Sen. Van Ackerman) to destroy Senator Anderson's reputation, thus clearing the way for confirmation. Ackerman has been identified as McCarthy, although the two could not be more different ideologically. He is the strongest supporter of Leffingwell, whom one could easily imagine McCarthy fulminating against as a Red menace to national security, and it is inconceivable to imagine McCarthy making speeches, as Ackerman does, appeasing the Soviets (Kristol 38).[9]

The novel exemplifies the unequal distribution of Dahl's explanatory features (cf Chapt.1, sec.Ib). Thus, in the President vs. Anderson conflict, the former has many more resources at his disposal, although he is weak in diplomatic skill. Cooley and Leffingwell have

greater motivation than the others but are defeated for lack of resources, notably credibility. With respect to costs, Anderson pays a heavy price for his political victory. As an example of how power works in a constitutional system, as Drury evidently intended, however, the novel could hardly be worse. It shows how power may corrupt legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. It shows clear preference for the Senate's aristocratic forum of men of presumed sound judgment and institutional experience over the expressed gullibility of the public and a sensation-hungry press, often depicted as wolves out for blood. The title, taken from a senatorial formula, suggests that power is disseminated through the system and has an orderly course of operation. While this notion is ritually invoked by the narrator ("The whole story of the creation of the American government is the deliberate diffusion of power...," 320), the story itself shows that only a few Senators actually count in the real decision-making, and that influence consists in the greater capability of eliciting favors and applying pressure. Drury often describes the Senate as a kind of exclusive club where members engage in civilized debate ("...amiable gentlemen who like each other and had much rather get along together than tear each other apart...," 103), but his story shows how these amiable gentlemen revile each other on the Senate floor, maneuver to exclude each other from important committees, and make secret deals.

The novel therefore contains a serious contradiction. It tells the story of how power corrupts at the highest levels and in all branches of government and yet it seeks to uphold with platitudes the basic decency and integrity of its institutions. Nor does Milne's platitudinous observation that some men are good, some bad, do much good here. The majority leader and the vice-president, both presented as good men, go along with the President's blackmail, or at least do nothing to try to stop it. The redressing of the moral balance at the end (Van Ackerman is

censured, Leffingwell's confirmation is voted down, and the President conveniently dies) is wholly contrived. It is also highly doubtful in the context of this novel, not to mention the political history of the post-war years, that, as Milne thinks, it is a good that the American system of government permits the freedom to both right and wrong. It is such "freedom" that has allowed the growth of an imperial presidency since the war which the separation of powers, so lauded by Drury, was designed to prevent.

In another of William Kennedy's Albany novels, *Legs* (1975), which relates the career of the gangster Jack "Legs" Diamond, one finds a passage that might describe Drury's unwitting view of the congressional institution. The narrator is a lawyer who has given up a respectable practice and a future career in Congress to work for Diamond:

> When I think back now to whether the Congress or the time with Jack would have given me more insight into American life, I always lean to Jack. In the Congress I would have learned how rudimentary hypocrisy is turned into patriotism, into national policy, and into the law, and how hypocrites become heroes of our people (117).

d.

Although often cited as a distinguished example of literary modernism, with an obvious debt to Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1947) shares the melodramatic plot, surprise revelations, and violent resolution common to both serious and popular American fiction. At the same time, it manages to be a study of regional politics, a *roman a clef* (it is claimed) based on the career of former Louisiana state governor Huey Long and was read, or misread, as a sympathetic account of a dictatorial demagogue by outraged liberal critics (Baumbach 17). Willy Stark's career in a number of respects resembles Long's, e.g. both become state governors in the Bible Belt in the Thirties, but, as I shall argue, Stark is more inspired by Long than a fictionalized portrait of him. The novel's controlling consciousness is the

narrator Jack Burden's and it is his conflict that is worked out. Stark's aide, Burden is a cynically uninvolved young man who comes to seek redemption and self-knowledge by "coming to terms with his past and its burden." The novel is therefore usually read as a resonant moral fable set in a political context, but I shall read it as Stark's, not Burden's story, i.e. mainly as a political fiction. Although Stark is seen only through Burden's eyes, like Jay Gatsby in Nick Carroway's, he takes on a vitality like Gatsby's that survives the limited point-of-view.

Stark's political career begins as humble county treasurer in red-hill country, where he opposes the favoritism and racism of a local boss in the construction contract for a new school, is ousted from office, and tries exposing the boss's corruption by distributing handbills but is prevented by the sheriff, a cohort of the boss. Burden is a big-city reporter who tells the story in a series of articles in which he cynically presents Stark as one who "keeps his faith with the people." When the school collapses from the use of faulty material and children are killed, Stark becomes a legend and Burden decides to help him, a political naïf and "moral rookie." Stark's political style of reciting facts and figures is scrupulous but boring; it is transformed into a folksy populist rhetoric that appeals to the common people's sense of being ignored or exploited by their leaders. His new style adds to his charisma and he eventually becomes governor and finds himself in the position of being able to do concrete deeds. As his manipulative skills increase, however, ends and means become confused, which becomes Warren's ethical focus on the uses of political power. Stark is effective but skirts legality--he has, for example, packed the state Supreme Court with his own people. Conservatives make the familiar complaint that he is "giving the state away" with his social programs, which he pays for by taxing the rich. As his eventual enemy, Judge Irwin grudgingly admits, "He's played it hard and close. But there's one principle he's grasped; you don't make omelets without breaking eggs" (124).

The first sentence, referring to a way of playing poker, and the second, a slogan of Mao Zedong, suggest Stark's effective but undemocratic politics. His moral complexity makes him a conundrum for liberal theory. He pushes successfully for welfare for the aged and infirm, health care for the poor, and increased public education, and pays for them by taxing rich individuals and corporations, revolutionary ideas for his time and place. The monument he wishes to build for his own posterity, for example, is a huge modern hospital for the poor. He demands monk-like poverty and obedience from subordinates (chastity, however, is not his strong suit); no one in his administration is to get rich on graft, kickbacks, or illegal deals.

His other, darker side is revealed in the course of chastising a corrupt state auditor, who has been juggling the books for private gain. He fires the man but blocks his impeachment merely to show the opposition who is really in control and snuffs further protest by threats. His ethically proper Attorney-General Hugh Miller ("clean hands and a pure heart") resigns, objecting to the auditor's escaping the legal punishment that he himself has been so efficient at dealing out. Stark lectures him on the inadequacy of the law: "You made fur fly and put tin-horn grafters in the pen. But you never touched what was behind 'em. The law isn't made for them. All you can do about that is take the damned government away from the behind guys and keep it away from 'em any way you can" (137), a folksy version of the Marxist-Leninist idea of law as the vehicle of the ruling class and the necessity of seizing and holding on to power in a legal situation of structural injustice. Is this revolutionary necessity or dictatorial rationalization?

Warren's answer, unsurprisingly, is a complex liberal one. When the opposition next try to impeach Stark himself for his legal omission with the auditor, he makes a direct appeal to the masses, who rally to his support, an illustration of Weber's idea that charismatic power may override the legal type but also may for the same reason be more easily abused, as is shown by

Stark's use of intimidation. "Do you know what I can do to you?" he asks a hapless victim, and Burden adds, "And he could do it, too. For he had the goods" (147), where the "goods" are the means of bribery and blackmail that he uses to get the opposition leader to vote against impeachment. Stark understands the differences between the means of power, which for him are usually methods of neutralization. Preferring to destroy rather than simply bribe to achieve compliance, he explains: "Bust 'em and they stay busted, but buy 'em and you can't tell how long they stay bought" (232). To destroy Judge Irwin for supporting his opponent, Stark instructs Burden to dig up some "dirt" to smear the Judge's reputation, explaining that there is always something in a man's background that can be used against him, a method that has been used to great effect against presidential candidates in recent years, but it cannot easily be justified as revolutionary pragmatism. Nor, and this is perhaps the important point in Warren's moral indictment of Stark, is the means employed always for good ends, as is seen when Stark's wild son Tom is involved in an accident where a girl is killed and Tom's responsibility is covered up by state police under Stark's orders.

Stark is not so much a Machiavellian or a homespun Lenin, however, as a more obviously American type, a moral pragmatist who believes that what is right is what produces results (Blair 461). It is ironic that what brings about Stark's downfall is an idealistic impulse, the great hospital for the poor for which he wants Adam, a famous surgeon, as director. Both men are imperfect idealists who are doomed to destroy one another: Adam "the idealist doomed by his ideals," because basically powerless; Stark, ruthless with the individuals around him, is fervid only in the defense of the faceless masses (Blair 460, 468). Adam wants no part of Stark, but Burden has obligingly dug up the "goods" for his boss on Adam's father, who once took a bribe (covered up by Judge Irwin), and is therefore able to coerce Adam, pious toward

his father's memory, into accepting the job. Burden can also blur means and ends, giving Adam the justification that at the hospital Adam can do real good. Adam wants to take the job on condition there be no interference from Stark, but Stark gives him a lesson in the realities of power (256-9), whose essence is that Adam could only keep his hands clean in an operating-room. When he practices medicine in a state institution, he is, of course, part of a system of power. The question in the novel persists, however, if high-handed or illegal methods are the only way, or the only effective way of doing the world's business (to which Foucault's answer might be that the established institutional methods are far more effective). To Burden's home-made "theory of historical costs," that "maybe a man has to sell his soul to get the power to do good" (394), one might add that if men needn't sell their souls they can hardly escape having them transformed in the act of modern power formations.

Burden's theory of historical costs, which he also calls the "theory of the moral neutrality of history," would resound with echoes of high-falutin' historical theories but is shown by Warren to be basically flawed. Adam's desire for objective distance is not possible in any real world, but the responsibility of an agent for his actions and its consequences is not thereby removed, although Burden acts as if it were. As Hugh Miller says, "History is blind, but man is not" (436). This becomes the burden of Jack Burden, to accept (in the novel's final words) his place in "history and the awful responsibility of time." He comes to acknowledge the inextricable nature of private and public life when he says that his own and Stark's stories are one story. He has tried to remain aloof, even inert ("The Big Sleep") or think of action as simple reflex ("The Big Twitch"), but his story questions the liberal search for private certainties removed from public responsibility. Consider his concern with discovering and revealing the truth, thought of in that tradition as the supremely individual and self-liberating act. Burden's

revelations in fact destroy several lives. On the other hand, withholding the truth from his mother, like her withholding from him the truth of Irwin's paternity, are noble acts. His work for Stark has been to discover the truth about people, but truth as "dirt" or "goods," material for blackmail. Truth is not innocent and not always liberating.

Stark's life and career, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, resembles Huey Long's (1893-1935). Governor of Louisiana who rose to national prominence before being shot dead by Dr. Carl Weiss for reasons that never became clear (Wilke and Helterman 516), Long instituted a socio-economic reform program opposed by the state legislature but finally pushed through after he gained control of the state through a system of extensive patronage. He built roads, schools, and hospitals, taxed large businesses, especially oil companies, and used pressure and bribery to get his laws passed. He was impeached (1929) but not convicted. In all this he resembles Stark, but unlike him, Long went on to be elected to the US Senate and continued to control Louisiana from Washington through a puppet successor. As virtual absentee governor, Long reorganized the state by virtually abolishing local government and retaining the power to appoint all state employees. He hoped to succeed Franklin Roosevelt as President, and his "share the wealth" plan, which included a guaranteed family income, was in fact far more radical than Roosevelt's New Deal ("Long, Huey" 1607).

It seems that Stark is not a very precise portrait of Long, as Warren has always insisted. He was much more powerful, both in unscrupulous means and effective results, and yet more visionary than the literary character. Stark's vision is reduced to an obsession with an untainted hospital that is revealed to be futile. "I'm building that place, the best in the country, and a bugger like Tiny is not going to mess with it" (233), but it is Tiny, the corrupt underling, who will cut a deal for its construction, who indirectly causes Stark's and Adam's deaths, and who

will succeed Stark as governor after all. Stark and Adam, "the man of fact" and "the man of idea," cancel each other out, leaving the field free for the Tiny Duffys. Warren has retained some of the more "colorful" aspects of Long's legend but suppressed his greater historical success and his socialistic tendencies. This suggests that Stark is not to be seen, as liberal critics feared, as a glorification of a dictator, since Long achieved far greater glory, but perhaps nothing more than the now banal observation that power corrupts (Baumbach offers the suggestion that Stark is closer to Conrad's Kurtz than to the historical Long). The corruption is, in the end, not political (which can, Stark shows, sometimes be effective) but moral, and the story ends firmly in the hands of Burden, since neither extreme, Stark or Adam, is finally acceptable. Although this novel as a study of political power is much more penetrating and interesting than the others I have discussed in this chapter, it too can ultimately be seen as an example of the liberal tendency to evade political realities by transforming them into individual moral or psychological issues.

d.

When I began this chapter by observing that politics is the site where power is legitimately exercised, the reference was, of course, to modern bourgeois democratic politics. In retrospect, however, such a reference, if it were exclusive, would risk canceling out the novels I have analyzed as political. What strikes one in the most general terms is how far the political vision they project is from that of American political theorists like Hannah Arendt and Talcott Parsons, for whom power is essentially "binding obligations," consensual (Arendt) or contractual (Parsons) relations that are enabling, inherently noble. What is common to all the novels examined here is precisely a distrust or disbelief in democratic, consensus-seeking politics, which points to a lack of faith in the kind of constitutional government that is the pride of the

American political system. All these novels share the cynical (or realistic) belief that power works in more devious, extra-official, and illegal ways than the best American political theory seems to acknowledge. This might suggest that novelists are more perceptive than philosophers about political and social reality or that their vision is the more radical one, but the novels in one way or another also share the Machiavellian idea, which both the philosophers named roundly reject, that shrewd, ambitious, and manipulative individuals are more effective, for good and evil, than the clumsy mechanisms of democratic systems.

It may be said that the very laboriousness of such mechanisms do not readily lend themselves to imaginative treatment. Drury is exemplary here: despite his cumbersome efforts to reproduce the essence of senatorial debate, he has to resort to melodrama to get his story told. Since a true political novel of ideas is lacking, the authors must fall back on the psychologizing that is the stock-in-trade of other, non-political novels of the time. These novelists, at this particular historical moment, perceived power as residing in the individual will, which is true of Mailer's radicals, Warren's dictatorial governor, O'Connor's paternalistic mayor, and Drury's maneuvering senators. Their view conflicts with Arendt's truly democratic vision of power as collective, inherent in the formation of political communities, which bases its legitimacy on the past. As Arendt argues, when power seeks to justify itself, it appeals to the future, to unfulfilled promises, to an end outside itself. This is the type of power found in these novels; it is justified, not legitimated.

To be sure, this view may well imply a just criticism of the American political system as a system that does not live up to its declared principles and ideals, and the novels therefore may be said to have their historical as well as aesthetic utility. And yet, to summarize once more the salient points, Mailer's novel is politically confused, O'Connor identifies with his suspect

protagonist, and Drury fatuously supports what he himself shows to be an inadequate system. Even Warren, who presents the most credible historical context and gives a skillful portrait of a charismatic leader, ultimately only suggests ethical questions (means vs. ends, the proper domain of legitimate action) that are probably moot, at least within the terms he has defined them.

The question of context brings up a second negative trait, one that is likely to be fatal for a political novel, the absence of grounding in historical experience. O'Connor evokes a period through the falsifying lens of nostalgia. The *roman a clef* pretensions of Drury's novel with respect to the McCarthy era are not sufficient to conceal the ideological confusion of the author or save the novel from affirming itself as an over-extended soap-opera. Mailer's more serious attempt at a dialectical work dealing with radically opposed ideologies fails through his inability to achieve credible links between past and present, or between events and experience inside and out of his novel, a defect that does not, of course, negate the reality of fictional worlds but calls into question the relevance of political theorizing in a novel devoid of historical contingency. Mailer might have opted, like Orwell, for allegory, but as I have tried to show, an allegorical reading breaks down in a conflict with pseudo-realism and messianic pseudo-Marxism.

Even Warren's novel, much superior to the others as fiction, has fallen prey to simplified solutions in the resolution of its political issues. Whereas in Mailer, the victory of the right-wing is clear, though it leaves room for a vapid and unearned optimism at the end, the mutual canceling out of Adam and Stark conveniently leaves Burden free of political responsibility to reclaim his soiled soul: "Redemption as a happy ending," as Baumbach unkindly but accurately puts it (34), an ending that is, after all, rather pat, since neither extreme turns out to be acceptable in itself (Milne 155). This suggests Sacvan Berkovitch's view of the American liberal

ideology of process as "telos," the capacity to negate conflict by absorbing it as part of a hopeful process leading to a better future.[10] Burden, the disillusioned idealist turned cynic survives the mutual destruction of conflicting opposites to emerge into a hard-won knowledge of himself (though he makes a bow to history in his final words), what will become in later decades the familiar liberal middle way--here between the two personalized extremes of World and Idea.

Warren's emphasis on Burden's complex inner conflicts and the defining of the reader's interpretation of Stark's actions through the filter of Burden's narrative perception has, as I pointed out at the beginning of section (c), become the orthodox reading of the novel by liberal critics. The novel is in fact a good fictional example of the cultural consensus of revisionist liberalism with its view of a given human nature, subject to error and sin, with the interconnected components of good and evil in the individual and the individual's perpetual susceptibility to corruption, in this case by power. These factors make the novel for critics of the new post-war persuasion a "vehicle for the ironies and paradoxes of the moral life and the social history it produces" (Schaub 22).

The presentation of Burden as the novel's center and the view of man as inherently corruptible accords with what Thomas Schaub (*Cold War* vii) calls the new or "revisionist" liberalism of the late Forties and early Fifties, a fearful and yet determined postwar response of writers and critics to the charged political climate and disheartening events which I have described above (cf. Introduction to Part II). Revisionist liberals thought of themselves as "tough-minded" in reaction to the supposedly tender-minded, sentimental, and naive faith in utopian solutions of the older progressive liberals and socialists of the Thirties. In their opposition to Communism and its betrayal of liberal hopes, the new liberals proposed a tough "reality" as

opposed to the "ideology" of older leftists and the exaggerations of the McCarthy right. Both Schaub and Russell Reising posit Lionel Trilling's influential *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) as the basic text for the newer and tougher liberalism, a book that they think became the dominant interpretation of American literature and culture at the time Warren's novel was published and discussed (Reising 93; Schaub 20). Rather than analyzing the political climate more acutely, Trilling adopts in the essays in this work the ahistorical Freudian tactic of positing reality as basically psychological, "an experience of complexity that has its generative roots in the ineradicable conflicts of the private self' (Schaub 21).

Warren, who wrote his first book was on the radical abolitionist martyr, John Brown, was associated with the Southern Agrarians and a contributor to their conservative manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), and yet he was not considered conservative enough to the consternation of Donald Davidson or Allen Tate. For Warren, the "truth" was to be determined in the plurality of contrary voices, an eminently liberal position (Clark 301), one which we are hearing again in the Nineties, with the calls for and celebrations of a new pluralism.[11] Schaub points out that although the New York-based intellectuals like Trilling were ostensibly in conflict with the Agrarians and New Critics (John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks), with whom Warren is also associated (Agrarians and New Critics tend to overlap), both New York critics and the southern New Critics unintentionally produced the discourse of the liberal consensus, as both groups essentially argued for a formalist aesthetic, with irony, contradiction, and paradox as the greatest virtues of literature. For the New Critics, who were greatly influenced by the criticism of T.S. Eliot, the dynamic "tension" of certain kinds of poetry (e.g. the metaphysicals had it; the romantics did not) was what they favored for other kinds of literature as well when they finally turned to discussions of the novel. Social relevance became largely

irrelevant in these discussions, except when social materials themselves are aesthetically ordered, as in Warren's novel. For the New York critics, who held up the European modernists as the only proper models for American prose fiction, form is what kept literature from becoming mere "statement," or worse, propaganda (Schaub 31-35). The worry over producing propaganda instead of real literature is partly the cause of post-war fiction's retreat from an engagement with political issues (and its perceived unrealistic ideologies) and its escape into the more adequately managed complexities of the self. As Schaub summarizes the situation: "The discourse of resistance and reform was no longer dominated by the language of social and economic forces, giving way, instead, to explanatory models based in psychology--to a renewed focus upon the mind" (69).

NOTES

[1] Howe has chapters on Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Turgenev, and James, and, in a chapter devoted to American novelists, Hawthorne, James, and Henry Adams.

[2] These two kinds of definitions, stipulative and reportive, are employed in analytic philosophy (Hospers 32-4).

[3] With this in mind, I do not treat fictions of race, class, and gender here as "political novels," although by a broader definition they would clearly be considered so. Since these kinds of works are concerned, even primarily so, with relationships of power, they are political fictions in the broader sense than I am using in this chapter.

[4] Despite these unimpeachable examples from European literature, when it comes to American novels, Karl's idea of the political novel is less predictable. He discusses Mailer and Trilling, as I do below, as well as Doctorow's and Coover's more recent novels about the Rosenbergs, but also adds, curiously, Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) while admitting,

however, that "we must extend the idea of politics to fit the book, rather than contract the novel to fit a political scheme," i.e. what is usually regarded as a political novel. The "existential grit" of Henderson, surely, is not "political" in the way, for example, the conflicts of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) are.

[5] Howe, for example (20), agrees with the wariness theory but thinks it is a "mistake" on the part of our writers.

[6] Tanner (352) calls the object "that elusive mystery of power" that no party or country can "appropriate or exploit." Sergio Bellei recalls Poe's purloined letter and Lacan's well-known reading of it: "The power of the symbolic order of the unconscious constitutes and empowers subjectivities as they confront each other to possess the missing object, which, while not concealed, controls the exchange of power between them" (private communication). The subject is therefore lost in the collective game of knowledge This is so ingenious that it is a pity Mailer cannot have taken up the suggestion, but the object is after all concealed by and known to McLeod, and eventually to Lovett if not to the reader.

[7] Hiss, in a verdict that is still controversial, was found guilty (1950) and served four years in prison ("Alger Hiss" 381).

[8] This tactical use of blackmail to break a political opponent seems to have been borrowed without acknowledgement from Robert Penn Warren's earlier (1947) novel where the Governor uses almost identical words to describe his intention. In a further similarity, the accused man also commits suicide. Cf. my discussion of the novel below, section (c).

[9] For other *roman a clef* associations, cf. Milne (175-77). Despite his suggestions of historical personages as models for Drury's characters, Milne rightly calls attention to "humors" or typed quality of even the main characters, the typing by explanatory epithets of the secondary ones,

and the resort to gross stereotypes for the foreign diplomats. One has to agree with Cord Meyer (328, whose review Milne cites) that no "fully imagined and complexly motivated human beings confronting with believable anguish the hard choices that practical politics frequently present" appear in the novel. Milne would make an exception for Brig Anderson. While it is debatable as to how "believable" Anderson's anguish is, he is able to defeat the nomination and the President even if he cannot save his own career. His suicide therefore seems unnecessary.

[10] I owe this suggestion to Prof. Sergio Bellei.

[11] Clark, whose essay title is revelatory, wishes to argue that the New Criticism was not the "Tory Formalism" it is accused of being, but that liberal ideal of "something akin to democratic pluralism" (302). He is thus in fundamental agreement with Schaub, although unlike him he evidently approves politically of his new formulation.

CHAPTER 3

"MOVERS AND SHAKERS": PERSONALISM AND POWER IN THE HISTORICAL NOVELS OF GORE VIDAL

"True history is the final fiction" (Vidal)

Among his steady production of novels and essays, Gore Vidal has been writing historical fiction about power in the upper levels of the US government for nearly three decades. *Washington D.C.* (1967) was the first such novel to appear, though it covers the historical period latest in time, the decade following the Second World War. The novel tells of an aging senator, James Burden Day, who finds his power and influence waning, while his former aide, Congressman Clay Overbury, is on a meteoric rise. The contrasting curves of their respective careers are reflected in their personalities, which Vidal means us to see as old vs. new type of post-war politician. Day is the wily old politician who still holds to principles, while the youthful Overbury is ambitious and unprincipled, ready to use any advantage to gain power and able to appreciate the newly increased power of the media and exploit it for his own ends. Despite a distinguished career in the Senate, Day is ruined by one ethical mistake: he takes money to finance his last campaign from the oil lobbyist Ed Nillson, who wants to buy his benign neglect toward the purchase of Native American lands for petroleum exploitation. Collusion as a fictional part of national politics is the axis of the plot. Overbury, who wants Day's Senate seat and knows about the bribe, eventually forces him out of the race, the two men's competition for power complicated by their being personally fond of one another.

Overbury, like John Kennedy, has the political advantages of good looks and a (fabricated) heroic war record, essential parts of the contemporary emphasis on a politician's

charisma in an age when his support of this or that issue is almost secondary to his media presence. After initial hostility to his marriage (from homosexual jealousy), his father-in-law Blaise Delacroix supports his career; Blaise is a powerful publisher and a fearful bully. Both men contrive to have Clay's alcoholic and unfaithful wife, Enid, committed to an institution, using Blaise's wealth, the pressure of their respective positions, and the means of bribes and intimidation for the purpose of forestalling a messy divorce that would threaten Clay's career. Enid is killed in an accident, it is suggested, through combined responsibility of husband and father. In revenge, her brother Peter, who holds leftist views and runs a maverick political magazine, exposes the fraud of Clay's war record, which had been invented by one Harold Griffiths, a closet homosexual (duly rescued once by Clay from arrest and humiliation). Griffiths was a friend of Peter's but sells out to Blaise, becoming an obediently "patriotic" war correspondent. Blaise's newspaper then promotes Griffith's faked account, which serves as a spring-board for Clay's first campaign. Collusion between powerful men (and at the cost of a pathetic woman) thus drives the action.

And yet, at the conclusion, Peter's exposé falls flat: no one believes it, or, if they do, really cares: Vidal explains that what Americans really love despite moralizing rhetoric is a winner. This outcome is somewhat surprising, given Vidal's own declared intentions of exposing and denouncing wrong-doing and hypocrisy in our national politics. These denunciations presumably have the purpose of making people see what really goes in the upper echelons of power, among the so-called "movers and shakers" of our national politics. In an interview, he said of his work: "I am attacking the ruling class of the country, and the economic interests that dominate the United States, and the fact that we have no politics..." (Ruas 63). It is, indeed, the ruling class that Vidal satirizes, although he has nothing much to say about dominant economic

policies, i.e. capitalism early or late. The last phrase in the statement quoted seems to imply that the politics that the US does have is not a true politics, in Jefferson's sense, or even Hannah Arendt's: a collective effort of people bound by mutual promises to constitute a stable worldly structure, which (she thinks) "may be the highest human faculty" (Arendt 175). Nowhere in his fictional works, however, does he give any hint of what a true politics might consist of

Vidal has himself lived among the ruling classes all his life and is neither intimidated nor particularly impressed by them. Although he sets himself up, as in the quoted remark, as some-one in opposition to the ruling-class, I think that a key to his political stance is that he also shares many of its values, especially the notion that political and social change can be effec-tively brought about from above, which may stem from the experience of a cosmopolitan life and long association with various establishments. Born at the US Military Academy at West Point, Vidal is the grandson of a US Senator, Thomas Gore of Oklahoma, from whom he says he derived his fascination with politics, and perhaps (it has been suggested by novelist Diane Johnson) his feeling of upper-class *noblesse oblige* (Johnson 24-25). Vidal is also the cousin of Al Gore, the current Vice-President, and once himself ran unsuccessfully for the House of Representatives, so his attitude toward mainstream politicians may be said to be somewhat ambiguous. Biography apart, his historical novels tend to be icon-busting, as he seems deter-mined to expose, often in wonderfully comic ways, the pious and hypocritical humbugs behind the national myths. Unlike his perceptive political essays, however, there are no alternatives in these works to traditional politics, perhaps because he is primarily concerned with showing the ways things were done in the past, and yet his satirization of those things implies a vision of another, better way of doing them. The only solution that he seems to be proposing is a change, if I may borrow a term from the movies, in the cast of characters.

The failure of Peter in the novel might help explain the failure of the author: exposing the movers-and-shakers is titillating and perhaps even necessary but its effectiveness as a challenge to the *status quo* is partial at best. A personalist view of political power, to which I shall return in my analyses of Vidal's historical novels, must essentially be limited to revealing networks of "old boy" favors, deceit, hypocrisy, the double-dealing and official lies of mainstream politics. His novels, in one sense, amount to a kind of fictionalized retrospective reporting, but although *Washington D.C.*, for example, was published in the late Sixties, with a fictional setting in the post-war period, it surprisingly does not engage McCarthyism except condescendingly and in passing, so that Vidal's reporting in this case at least is partial and omissive. Nor can it go much beyond exposing unscrupulous practices to gain and hold power prevalent among incumbent and aspiring politicians, which few informed people seriously doubt. This method will become something of a pattern in subsequent novels.

This novel was to be the first in a trilogy, later expanded to a second triad of novels, an overall project that would offer a social (upper-class) and political (politicians, generals, diplomats, etc.) history of the United States from colonial times to the present, a more or less complete chronicle, in other words, of the nation's "movers-and-shakers." Historically, Vidal's novels are rather more substantial in detail than O'Connor's, or, for that matter, most other popular American historical fiction, as he attempts to recreate an epoch with a solid basis in the historical record--not only through secondary sources but biographies, letters, documents, and apocryphal tales of historical figures, and the social customs and political events of the time as recorded in books, newspapers and monographs. Respect for Vidal's scholarship can be seen in the heated debate entered into by academic historians (who might ordinarily be expected to ignore him) on the publication of *Lincoln* (1984).

As was seen in the discussion in the Introduction (sec.II) , theorists like Hayden White have stressed the notion of the fictionality of all narrative and the dependence of the historian on narrative to make events comprehensible. For his part, Vidal claims to have blurred the distinction between history and fiction by writing a blend in which historical and imagined events have more or less equal plausibility: "In these books I'm doing the work of a historian or biographer, reflecting on the past and making narratives of it, in much the same way as the historians who interest me the most do...Thucydides, say, who was a proto-novelist" (Ruas 62). Vidal attempts a double angle, to examine what might have happened under differing circumstances, in the light of what acually did happen, so he can, as he says, "attribute motive" to historical figures, which, Michael Wood says, a conscientious historian shouldn't do ("Passions" 30). Since Vidal doesn't, of course, always know what historical figures really said on a given occasion, his method is to invent plausible dialogue for what they might have said, given the context and circumstances, a method that was in fact first employed by Thucydides, although it should be added that probably owing to Vidal's status as best-selling author, he makes his characters sound rather cleverer than they might have in real life. As "historian," however, Vidal does not resemble Thucydides, the forerunner of scientific history (i.e. cause and effect in events, as opposed to the older, anecdotal narratives of Herodotus) so much as the late Roman historian Tacitus, whose gossipy histories of those early movers-and-shakers, the Roman emperors, have a morally corrective purpose. This resemblance points to the essentially didactic mode of Vidal's work. He has expressed a need for the novelist to address a large audience, without which "[the novelist] cannot delight, instruct, reform, destroy a world he wants...to be different for having lived in it" (qtd. by Wood 30). This didactic purpose I shall return to after an examination of the last two novels of the series.

b.

Empire (1988) is set at the turn of the century, the period when American leaders, during the McKinley administration, made a series of decisions that would compromise the nation's traditional foreign policy of isolationism and turn it to the business of becoming an imperial power. The novel begins with the end of the Spanish-American War (1898), a military adventure that officially supported Filipino and Cuban rebels against Spanish colonialism but was economically motivated by the loss of American investments (not mentioned in the novel) and publicly encouraged by the inflammatory reporting of Hearst's newspaper chain. In the novel, Hearst claims credit for creating single-handedly what Secretary of State John Hay dubbed a "splendid little war," for its low "costs," i.e. potentially large political gains and small number of military casualties. The conflict was resolved militarily by Admiral Dewey's victory over the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay and land fighting in Cuba. Theodore Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the navy, had secretly ordered Dewey to assemble the fleet at Hong Kong in advance for the attack on Manila, a story only obliquely mentioned by Vidal but which corroborates his portrait of a devious Roosevelt. Roosevelt later took part in a minor battle in Cuba as a member of a cavalry regiment, a story that Hearst popularized as the exploits of the "Rough Riders," which would give Roosevelt the hero's status he needed for political popularity. As a result of the victory, Cuba was freed, Guam and Puerto Rico became US territories, and the way was opened for the "annexation" of the Philippines, to the understandable dismay of the Filipino rebels, who had counted on American assistance in their struggle for liberation. As it turned out, they merely exchanged one colonial oppressor for another and the ensuing war of resistance was this time waged against their "liberators."

The novel addresses the problem of how to make this flagrantly imperialistic move acceptable. Vidal's Hay thinks that the Filipino insurrection is actually a boon since the US needn't bring its troops home so long as the insurrection continued: "the word 'insurrection' assumed that the United States government was the legitimate government of the Philippines" (108). The US, Hay concedes, was not the legitimate government but the alleged liberators, and "the so-called insurrection was actually a war of independence from foreign liberators turned conquerors." To disguise this unacceptable truth, Hay illustrates how the rhetoric of the new imperial power operates, employing terms like "temporary" and "trustee." Eventually, Hay's astute plan to pay Spain for the islands is adopted (the islands were eventually ceded to the US for 20 million dollars), since, in the prevailing liberal model of contractual power, payment becomes proof of the legitimacy of ownership. "Otherwise," Hays says, "we can be accused of theft, or brutal imperialism, which is not our way, or ought not to seem our way" (71). The blithe Machiavellism of the last phrase is vintage Vidal.

It turns out that Dewey's exploit would make him, like other successful American military leaders, from Washington to Grant to Eisenhower, an excellent presidential prospect, but he is eliminated as a candidate by making foolish statements to the press. One who does know how to exploit this powerful tool is Theodore Roosevelt, who, as we have seen, achieves heroic status with Hearst's support. The novel then relates, and debunks, Roosevelt's meteoric career, first, as reforming (but actually conservative) Governor of New York, an office given him by corrupt Republican bosses of the state political machine; then, as vice-president, an office achieved both by his own show-boating and intriguing at the convention in Philadelphia and the bosses' desire to finally get him out of the state; and, finally, as president, an office he simply succeeds to when McKinley is assassinated.

McKinley is seen sympathetically as a canny operator, rather Papal-like in the serenity with which he exercises power, in contrast to the blustering, aggressively macho Roosevelt. Historian Henry Adams (another character) succinctly describes how McKinley (the "player" of the passage) has engineered the imperial scenario:

> In those affairs where the balance of power in the world suddenly shifts, there must be a consummate player, who calculates his moves. This player puts Theodore at the Navy Department so that he will put the Admiral at Manila; he then responds to the sinking of the *Maine* with a series of moves that lead to a near bloodless war, and the end of Spain as a world-player, and the beginning of the United States as an Asiatic power... (13)

McKinley is not less shrewd at home. He gets financing from corrupt bosses like Mark Hanna, while giving the misleading impression that they are manipulating him.

Another important character is John Hay, who historically was Lincoln's secretary and biographer, then McKinley's and later Roosevelt's Secretary of State. In his famous "Open Door" policy regarding China, Hay outflanked other imperialist nations like Germany and Russia that had designs on Chinese markets. By proclaiming an "open door," a "meaningless" formula, but "no less powerful for its lack of content" (230), Hay managed to avoid the actual partitioning of China (which in the 19th century had been divided into European "spheres of influence") and so secure equal access to the so-called "treaty ports" for the US, in those days very much a minor international power. Rather than an admonition to respect China's territorial integrity (the official reason), the policy served as a way for the US to buy time until it was able to exert its will in Asia. Vidal offers an additional justification. Hay tells McKinley, with the cynicism of the colonialist, since he does not evidently believe it, that it is the task of the Anglo-Saxon races to "civilize and to...*Christianize* the less developed races of the world" (69, his emphasis). This would doubtless sound convincing enough to the American public at the

time but quite astonish both the Chinese, the world's oldest continuous civilization, and the Filipinos, whose country was already 80 per-cent Christian.

Yet, the novel tells of men in high places convinced of this necessity, like Roosevelt himself, the consummate imperialist, who wants to invade China to prevent Russia from grabbing Manchuria and gaining control of central Asia. Roosevelt is candid in his ambition and convinced of his mission to lead the US to inheriting Great Britain's world imperial role. When he abandons the Chinese fantasy for the Latin American reality, Roosevelt treats the hemisphere as the US's back-yard (one of the characters asks, ironically, of the Monroe Doctrine: "Is all the western hemisphere, even Tierra del Fuego, a part of our house?," 23). In 1903, in the interests of securing the Panama Canal (Vidal claims that the Canal could have been built in Nicaragua), Roosevelt encouraged the Panamanians to declare independence from Columbia and sent US warships to back them up. Hay must once again "provide the legal underpinnings for our latest acquisition" (362).

Hay's close friend Henry Adams, the quintessential 19th century mind, is concerned not so much with what happened as why it happened, the "laws" that govern history in the positivist historiography of the time. Vidal questions this obsession with historical laws, and the presumptions of imperialism, through the mouthpiece of Henry James: "You speak of laws of history, and I am no lawyer. But I confess to misgivings. How can we, who cannot honestly govern ourselves, take up the task of governing others? Are we to govern the Philippines from Tammany Hall [the New York political machine headquarters]? Will we insist that our Oriental colonies be run by [political] bosses?" (35)

Besides imperialism, or the exercise of hegemonic power abroad, Vidal's other theme in *Empire* is the power of the press to invent reality and manipulate public opinion. The key char-

acter in this regard is the cheerfully cynical Hearst, who uses his chain of newspapers both to further his own aspirations to political office and to make and break politicians. He himself is defeated by both strong-arm means and, ironically, the media. He loses the Mayoralty of New York City when Tammany Hall simply burns the ballots. He loses the office of state Governor by adverse publicity (on orders from Roosevelt) that suggests he is a dangerous radical. Hearst, a wealthy man, is a populist, though hardly a radical. If one was in favor of an eight-hour work day as Hearst was, Vidal tells us, one was considered a "socialist," which every American is taught from birth to fear and abhor.

The main female fictional character, Caroline Sanford, merely imitates Hearst, in contrast to her half-brother and rival Blaise (from *Washington D.C.*, though younger), who goes to work for him, and in her success as well as her personal life becomes a model of the modern, independent woman. Early in her story she is asked if she knows about power and gives a schoolgirl's answer about Julius Caesar winning a campaign and then writing a book about it. She is told that the book that one now writes is the newspapers. The point is not what happens but "the way that things are made to look that matters now" (11). One might add that, as we have seen in the discussions of Machiavelli and Gramsci, it has probably always been that way. Caroline's ambition begins to take definite shape when she visits Hearst's office and watches him arbitrarily arrange headlines and invent news, not according to truth, information, or even importance, but to provoke a sensationalism that will sell:

> Although money was the source of power in this rude place [i.e. the US, Caroline having been brought up in France], now even less of a civilization than it had been in Burr's day, what she had heard and seen of Hearst that night had convinced her that the ultimate power is not to preside in a White House or open a parliament while seated on a throne but to reinvent the world for everyone by giving them the dreams that you wanted them to dream (96).

The media, as C. Wright Mills theorized in the 1950s, formed personalities by stereotyped models that organized individual perceptions and created aspirations.

Vidal evidently wants to show--what, again, few informed people seriously doubt--how newspapers, which have the power to expose corruption, do not act so much in the public interest as in the interests of the publishers. Hearst and Blaise both purchase some stolen letters of the Standard Oil Company, written by and to politicians and judges concerning political favors or decisions, with payments by the company for services rendered (the now sadly familiar pattern of parallel government with private enterprise and public office working for mutual profit). Both publishers plan to use or withhold publication for best advantage. Hearst wants revenge on Roosevelt by publishing some vague references in the letters that might involve the President in Standard Oil money; no matter that Roosevelt has a reputation as a "trust-buster" for his sponsoring of anti-monopoly legislation or that there is anything substantial in the letters: Hearst will, as usual, invent the context, just as (he reminds the President) he has invented *him*. Roosevelt huffily protests that "history," not Hearst, has invented him, to which Hearst replies with a statement that might be not only the novel's epigraph but that of his whole historical project: "True history is the final fiction" (472).

c.

In his memoir, significantly titled *Screening History* (1983), Vidal elaborates on this point with respect to movies: "How, through ear and eye, we are both defined and manipulated by fictions of such potency that they are able to replace our own experience, often become our *sole* experience of a reality become...unreal" (qtd. by Johnson 24, emphasis given). This statement, which calls attention both to the representative power of the visual media and the absent sense of history in the contemporary world, a gap which is increasingly filled by Hollywood

films and television, would place Vidal squarely in the midst of certain strands of contemporary cultural theory. One problem with the statement is that if film becomes the only reality, how can it be manipulative in the same way that other representative accounts (which imply a reality external to themselves) can? If film has become our only reality, there is no possibility of either manipulation or resistance, and yet it seems that Vidal has not gone over entirely to Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal, in which simulation models replace things (Baudrillard 166ff.), as the statement implies that he still believes in a reality independent of its representations. What I think he means is that these representations are so powerful they *seem* more real than our own (real) experience, thus "replacing" it in our imaginations.

Accordingly, the final volume of Vidal's American fictional history, *Hollywood: A Novel of America in the 1920's* (1990), turns out to be a conventional novel about the early days of film-making, which has some interesting things to say about the power of the image but is not the exploration of representations of reality that the statement quoted might promise. The novel's title is misleading, probably maliciously so, since the novel deals as much with Washington as with Hollywood, but the satirical point is well-taken: the political capital = the movie capital, both places dealing with the production of images and both essentially populated by actors, a point which has been clinched historically by the election of Ronald Reagan.

The sub-title is also not quite accurate, as the story begins in 1917, on the eve of the entrance of the US into the First World War, and ends well before the end of the decade, with the death of President Harding (1923), taking in the main historical events: the War; the great Flu epidemic; the Treaty of Paris; the Wilson administration; the League of Nations and the failure of the US Senate to ratify; Harding's campaign; and the Teapot Dome scandal, with the indictment of top government officials, from which Harding himself is spared by an early death. As

usual, Vidal, concerned with giving a history lesson and writing entertaining fiction, often relies on the higher gossip: an uxorious Woodrow Wilson; FDR's blonde mistress; Theodore's coke-snorting daughter, Alice; Harding with his two mistresses, illegitimate child, and a tryst in a White House closet, etc. If this sensationalist "insider" view of the corridors of power cannot be justified solely by Vidal's background and family connections, he does in fact offer historical information not often known to non-specialist readers--like that the US and Germany were ready to end the War at an earlier date but the European Allies held out for unconditional surrender. Despite the entertainment potential of the gossip, the novel is, like his other historical fictions, a sugar-coated pill of didactic entertainment rather than an historical soap-opera.

Simultaneously with the era's political events and scandals, another story is told, the beginnings of the movie industry in Hollywood. Once again, Vidal can offer an insider's view of a world, drawing on his experience as a screenwriter and connections with the industry's personalities. He bridges the two worlds of Washington and Hollywood through the character of Caroline Sanford, carried over from *Empire*. After her career as East Coast publisher, she rather improbably becomes an early silent-film heroine and the two worlds can be satirically juxtaposed through her participation in both. While she is making a melodrama about the victorious Allied armies, for example, in the "real life" news the German army is overrunning Europe. One of Vidal's concerns is that the movie version of events tends to prevail as what is perceived to be reality. As he says succinctly in his memoir, "In the end, he who screens the history makes the history" (qtd. by Johnson 24).

In *Hollywood*, Vidal shows how propaganda tends toward a hegemonic power, as the fabrication of truth in film is paralleled by the fabrication of truth in politics and the press. The two worlds of movies and politics are separated geographically, West and East coast, but we

are to understand that in purpose, if not in style, they have similar aims (nowadays, in any case, "politics" is often little else but film). In the early years of Hollywood, movies (which the author informs us were called "photo-plays") were perceived as having great potential for political propaganda, and frequently invited the application of political pressure and censorship. The head of war propaganda in Wilson's administration, George Creech, was an advertising man who, anticipating Richard Nixon, justified telling lies as necessary for national security. In one episode of the novel, Tim, a leftist film director makes a movie called "The Strike Breakers" that is banned as subversive. Since the movie is a silent one, Tim simply changes the title-cards in order to favor the bosses rather than the workers, and the film is hailed as a victory for capitalism. Vidal seems to be also making a point about the ambiguity of visual images; for him, *words* are what mean, a point also made by Caroline's never being recognized as "Emma" (her persona as film star) by her friends and only occasionally by strangers. This suggests, too, that Vidal's belief in the power of images is not so strong as he states.

Vidal's historical view is that the American people of the period were not concerned about Germany or Europe but thought of their own country as a haven for disaffected Europeans (including most early film producers and directors and many stars). The country was xenephobic and isolationist but public opinion was induced by effective propaganda to support intervention in the First World War. Wilson makes a private speech to Senator Day (the younger version of the character in *Washington D.C.*) in which he shows how to transform production from domestic to military needs but fears that the corporate interest in war will cause the country to revert to the days of Grant. Wilson, who was elected on the platform of one who would "keep us out of the War," in fact led us into it. In the speech to Congress where Wilson requests a declaration of war, Vidal, in another effective juxtaposition, contrasts the sordid po-

litical motives and the exalted rhetoric of justification by intercalating Wilson's public speech with Blaise Sanford's private thoughts picking apart the phrases to reveal their emptiness of real content (43-6).

The myths of electoral politics are attacked in the story of Harding's election, which is not the result of the liberal ideology of popular appeal to a sovereign people but of backroom deals between bosses and the buying of delegates. The bosses select the nominee and the media take over. Harding is shown to have won the election as the man with the fewest enemies. Mediocre in qualifications but tactically astute, he waits for the party favorites to cancel each other out and then steps in to fill the vacuum, a political strategy Vidal employed in his film about electoral politics based on his own play with the ironic title *The Best Man* (1960).

d.

Although purportedly an "on-the-spot" account, Vidal's narrative has a contemporary tone; *there is an anachronistic effect in the gap between story and discourse, similar to that of a* "period" movie. The historical explanations that the narrator gives show that he could not have been present at the time of the action, so that the apparent temporal realism of the narrative breaks down. Although this is a common enough postmodernist ploy, Vidal seems indifferent to the discrepancy. There is also a somewhat homogenized point-of-view. The various characters--Caroline, Blaise, Senator Day--become at varying moments the narrative focus, and yet the author, or implied author, always seems to be hovering near, ready with a characteristically acerbic quip or pithy observation: e.g. American democracy was "a fiction that the American people in any way controlled their fate. The Constitution had largely excluded them." This remark mocks two national pieties--individual autonomy and the sacred political text--but it could have been spoken by *any* of the characters, or at least the clever ones; it is in fact the same

voice found in Vidal's brilliantly caustic essays. This consistency of tone and sentiment, it should be noted, deviates from the realist mode of the novel (i.e. fully developed characters, linear plot, etc.), since all of the sympathetic characters tend to sound alike, but it has also been said of a writer as different as Don DeLillo that his clever characters all speak in an aphoristic style that make them "emanations" of the author (Aaron 74). Note that this is rather different, since DeLillo uses characters as vehicles not for his own opinions but for a variety of the specialized languages and professional jargons that enter into dialogue and conflict with one another, while Vidal's characters are univocal. The consistency of tone is in fact typical of satirical discourse. Northrop Frye has discussed Menippean satire as a stylized rather than naturalized narrative, which, to be sure, would pertain more to postmodern fictions such as Pynchon's or DeLillo's than Vidal's novels, which tend toward a fully naturalized discourse. Vidal's novels do resemble Frye's characterization of Menippean satire, however, in that they tend to present "people as mouthpieces of the idea they represent," a "vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern" (Frye 308-10).

Much of Vidal's work illustrates the strengths and limitations of satire, which attempts to correct folly and abuse in individuals, institutions, and society as a whole through the classical techniques of wit, ridicule, violent juxtaposition or contrast, parody, burlesque, and caricature. In non-technical terms, it employs shame to expose abuses with the aim of correcting them. And yet, the claim to correct abuses implies an ideal standard from which the satirized persons and institutions are deviant. Satire can therefore be seen not only as critical but as deeply conservative. For one thing, it implies the satirist's access to the truth. For another, the satiric mode, as Richard Poirier says, allows the imagination only to reproduce the environment, or (in the more common American mode), create an alternative ideal environment, a utopia, which shares

with satire the privileging of an idealized society over an actually existing one. Satire is therefore critical but "essentially submissive, in being merely corrective, to the necessary reality of an established society" (*Elsewhere* 16, 42). This view does not perhaps exhaust the complex essence of Swift's work, but it does suggest the limitations of Vidal's.

For a more innovative type of political satire in contemporary literature, one might compare Joseph Heller's *Good As Gold* (1979). Gold, a Jewish professor who lands a job in Washington, models himself on Henry Kissinger, the Jewish intellectual that becomes powerful among the Gentile elite, but the more Gold acts like, or thinks he acts like, Kissinger, the more he grows to hate him, coming to see his model as a secret Nazi, greedy and pompous, "the archetypal schmuck." Heller's method is thus to criticize a powerful politician by the indirect approach of examining someone who imitates him rather than offering an unproblematized fictional representation of the man himself (Walter J. Miller 245).

It can be argued that modern America needs and deserves its satirists quite as much as ancient Rome. Vidal clearly feels that Americans prefer national myths to historical realities and he intends to set us straight about our own past: "What little the average thoughtful American--that is, the 5 per-cent of the country who read books--what little they know about American history, I taught them" (Ruas 60). Apart from the characteristically breezy arrogance and gross generalization of the statement, it is highly authoritarian in its assumption not that history is often mediated by fiction, which is true enough, but that Vidal himself somehow has access to the truth, a "truer history" than the ones available, as it were, superior to others for being somehow in closer correspondence to what really happened. This is not an example, it should be noted, of Hayden White's historicist theory of alternative versions of the past that may in fact be offered in good faith but are inevitably different since they are written from different historical

times and places and with necessarily different ideologies. Vidal seems to believe that there is an unproblematic reality out there that can be misrepresented for political reasons, and that he, Vidal, has discovered and chosen over other willful misrepresentations. It is in fact characteristic of the satirist, from Juvenal to Swift and beyond, that he (and it always seems to be a "he") is unique among his fellow citizens in understanding the corruption of their society.

In contrast to Vidal's statement that the cinematic representation comes to "replace" historical reality, Frederick Jameson has argued that historical novels from Walter Scott onward depend to some extent on previous historical knowledge, the received knowledge one acquires, mainly in school, through the culture's legitimizing, orthodox histories (a knowledge that, as both Jameson and Vidal recognize, historical films and television programs now provide even more than historical novels). This kind of novel, Jameson says, establishes a dialectic between what the reader already knows in this way and the revelations provided by the novelist. Historical fiction thus mediates between one fiction (doxa) and another. Jameson refers specifically to E.L. Doctorow's period Hollywood novel, *Ragtime* (1975), which one is tempted to compare to *Hollywood* since they both have a central political dimension and a parallel story of the early years of Hollywood film, covering roughly the same historical period. Doctorow's political story is a (fictional) radical one, however, about a black revolutionary and his white cohorts. Jameson's point is that *Ragtime* is an example of the new type of historical novel which does not set out (as *Hollywood* and its predecessors do) to represent the historical past but only our received ideas about that past. It "short-circuits genuine historiography" through a procedure that employs a singular, pared-down language and a designation of both historical personages and generic family names ("Son" etc.) that reify the characters so that "it is impossible for us to receive their representation without the prior interception of already acquired

knowledge or doxa" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 70). Implicitly, Vidal recognizes this in his interview statements about teaching Americans the history they haven't learned in school but he evidently thinks there is a "correct" version of events.

All this suggests that any attempt to represent even a more critical version of the past is not unproblematic. Vidal claims to be attacking the class structure of power in the US, but he does so in ways that at least partly reinforce it. His exclusive emphasis on powerful and influential individuals, the movers-and-shakers of history, is a view shared by the class he would be criticizing and helps reinforce that view insofar as it is convincing. The novels are content-oriented, rich in character and incident, but in fact reproduce the world-view projected by the dominant classes and so are (as the Marxists would say) historically incomplete, although they pretend to be comprehensive. As I have suggested above, it seems that, for Vidal, in most cases a mere change of "cast" would suffice: substitute good guys for bad guys, or, in his unpuritanical vision, more interesting and less hypocritical bad guys than the pious banalities usually in power. This personalist view obstructs a situation in which a structural problem of unequal power and institutionalized injustice needs addressing. Both the problems and the solutions are reduced to personalities, basically because Vidal's perception of political power is what has been described earlier (Chapt., Sec. II) as the old liberal "juridical" model of power, as something held by an individual, transferable in the political contract, and subject to abuse when the contractual rights and obligations are exceeded. Vidal's imperial presidents, for example, are Foucault's 18th century sovereigns, exercising power over the social body rather than in it and marking their presence by representation--hence, their concern for public image, the press, and later film and the electronic media, and their use of the old judicial discourse

through which their power is legitimated by being represented to the people in highly visible fashion. People form their subjectivity in relation to this dominant spectacularized class.

Another problematic aspect of Vidal's critique of American political power is his language. I have already pointed out the discrepancy between his characters' language and their supposed historical context. The urbane, self-assured prose, furthermore, in which the various characters all take on a single narrative voice, cannot adequately account for the whole of a "geopolitical reality" such as is found in *Empire*. As Richard Poirier puts it in his review of that novel:

> On the subject of "empire," Vidal is writing outside the dominant traditions in which imperial power is usually represented in English. Melville, Conrad, and, later Faulkner, Mailer, and Pynchon write about the imperial quest as if its source, movements, and results are necessarily concealed; it is a mystery that calls for a style correspondingly elaborate and suggestive, full of hints of mysteries that cannot be revealed...By contrast Vidal's prose is intended to strip American imperialism of its mystery and to deny in the American political landscape the "hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning" that a character in Pynchon finds in a configuration of California lights ("American Emperors" 32).

Vidal's prose, though it aspires to a realist model of linguistic "transparency" suggests, as I have argued above, the monological voice of satire, Poirier's suggestion of the language's flattening out of mysterious byways, where it needs to be more subtly responsive to the concealed aspects of American imperialism. Vidal is unquestionably an improvement over novelists like Allen Drury, who unreflectingly, even fatuously, reproduce the dominant ideology of American power in uncritical clichés, but his conceptual limitation furnishes a less critical perception of American power than those contemporary novelists Poirier mentions who manage to call into question traditional representations of it. Vidal's novels can be fairly said to be representative of that rather overworked critical notion of the "imperialist" tendencies of narrative--closure, locus of authority, conformity to a single vision--and as such may be contrasted to a work like

Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)--to which Poirier alludes above--with its constant challenging of alternative visions and versions of reality, of which more in Chapt. 7b (Cooley 316; Schaub, *Pynchon* 3).

Richard Ohmann suggests how even serious fiction can fall short of challenging political realities:

> Although the ruling ideas and myths may indeed be, in every age, the ideas and myths of the ruling class, the ruling class in advanced capitalist societies does not advance its ideas directly through its control of the means of mental production. Rather, a subordinate but influential class [what Ohmann calls "the professional-managerial class" to which most writers, critics, editors, publishers, teachers and readers of contemporary literature belong] shapes culture in ways that express its own interests and experience and that sometimes turn on ruling-class values rather critically--yet in a nonrevolutionary period end up confirming root elements of the dominant ideology, such as the premise of individualism (Ohmann 91). [1]

Although Ohmann is here talking about canonical works, the point is relevant to Vidal's novels, in which history is a story eminently of individuals exercising their will on the world, acts which, while practically limited in the novels to the conversations of the powerful, are taken to be comprehensive. As in the dominant ideology of formula fiction, US policy is not the product of socio-economic forces so much as that of the adventures of heroes "confronting a series of tests." Teddy Roosevelt's discourse of the Philippines as a "test" of national character (as Vietnam and other misconceived adventures would be called by their defenders in later years) reflects this rhetoric of national character on trial, as do both liberal and conservative rhetoric in this century (Brown 358). Vidal, of course, makes Roosevelt a blustering imperialist in his novel, but the underlying ideology is not therefore canceled. This ambiguity of subversion and affirmation, critical adversity and ideological complicity, is characteristic of Vidal's historico-fictional project.

In conclusion, I might summarize the features of Vidal's historical novels I have discussed that reduce its critical power, as follows: the fiction of an unmediated, represented reality, and the concurrent, unproblematized language that expresses that reality; the dramatization of an essentially banal factuality, principally through the personalization of the historical process already discussed; a linear, coherent plot that best serves this dramatization but that risks falsifying historical complexity; a moral message that the linear plot, realist metaphysic, and transparent language all facilitate. These interconnected procedures are also, it will be noted, structural features of Hollywood cinema, the "classic realist" movies derived from the techniques and assumptions of 19th century novels and plays (Connor 174; Stam et al.). It is therefore somewhat ironic that Vidal's novels, which satirize the Hollywoodization of American reality, so resemble Hollywood movies in their formal features and unexamined assumptions.

NOTES

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[1] Cf. also Fiorin 74 (my transl.): "When the enunciator reproduces elements of the dominant discourse in his own discourse, he contributes in a certain way to a reinforcement of the structures of domination."

CHAPTER 4

POWER AND RESISTANCE IN NORMAN MAILER

a.

Frederick Jameson has written that one of the determinants of a capitalist culture is the split between the public and private, the political and the poetic ("Third World Literature" 69). [1] This split in consciousness, briefly examined in the previous chapter, apparently holds true in American fiction since the 1930s. Novelists who in the Thirties were engaged with social issues came to be loosely classified after the war as "political," while others emerged as "psychological realists," or novelists of manners or of the erotic, etc., insofar as their work emphasized the public or the private sides of experience. For John Updike, for example, a major novelist who has written penetratingly on the domestic life of the American middle-class, political issues and national power struggles remain as a "background" in his four novel "Rabbit" series, which evidently intends to be a social chronicle extending over four decades. Similarly, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth (with the exception of a political satire), John Cheever, J.D. Salinger, Vladimir Nabokov, William Styron (even in his novel of the Holocaust), Walker Percy, Truman Capote, John Hawkes, James Purdy, just to mention the more prominent older male authors (Nabokov died in 1977, Cheever in 1982, Capote in 1989), have all tended to concentrate on their characters' inner lives as if these were somehow autonomous from public events and prevailing national ideologies. The exceptions to this tendency, among the older generation of contemporary novelists, would seem to be Joseph Heller, Norman Mailer, and Mary McCarthy, the latter all the more surprising, since women, mostly excluded from male structures of power, have often been expected to concentrate on the psychological dramas of a more reduced domestic world.

It is certain that the public/private distinction can only be artificially maintained. Raymond Williams says that it is wrong and damaging to assume political institutions and conventions are of a separate order from artistic ones. At the very least, our "descriptions of our experience," such as literary creations, we try to communicate, making private experience public (*Long Revol.* 54-6). While individualism, it is well-known, is the American ideology *par excellence*, even writers who concentrate on the individual's inner life, in order to effectively engage the reality of their time must connect to some extent inner or imaginative life with the national collective experiences out of which it has been formed. Updike, for example, is doubtless aware that this relationship of psychic and political distance holds true especially in the class he writes about, as a part of its distinctive ideology. Jameson claims that maintaining the public/private distinction is worse than a mistake, it is "a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life." It would seem that the tendency to concentrate on private experience at the expense of public in much contemporary fiction is one more example of this malaise (*Pol. Unconscious* 20).

I do not wish to swing automatically to the opposite side of the rift by my concentration on the political aspects of Norman Mailer's fiction, but merely to use him for the present purpose as the outstanding example of the older generation of novelists now working (he was born in 1923), who have engaged with the public issues of their time. Mailer is in fact especially important for the relation of politics and the self. One of the major characteristics of his work is precisely the tension between inner and outer, the conflicting allegiances of the political and spiritual, collective and individual, social and sexual, poetic and prosaic. It has been said, for example, that the essential conflict unifying the diversity of his novels is "the conflict between [individual] will and external power" (Bufithis 289). Mailer's fiction, and even his

life--to the extent that he has made an outrageous public spectacle of his private life, or at least the "private life" he has chosen to make public--tend to contain both sides of the division (assuming that there is a division). What perhaps makes Mailer unique in this respect is that there is no attempt at reconciliation; he seems to thrive on the tension that is generated. I shall examine in this chapter three novels, from the beginning, middle, and most recent phase of his career. If the emphasis is on political preoccupations, the corresponding private ones are not to be understood as negligible in these and other works. They are always at least implied, present in their absence, tugging, as it were, in the opposite direction. In his most explicitly political novel, *Armies of the Night* (1968), he dramatizes this very conflict, and even in a fictional-biographical work like *The Executioner's Song* (1978), in which he examines in detail the life and career of a real-life murderer, the story of Gary Gilmore becomes a springboard from which to launch sharp criticisms of the culture that produced him. This formulation may appear to make Mailer the embattled figure he has so often posed as, torn by the conflict that determines, in Jameson's argument, modern capitalist culture. While this would not be too misleading, one could also argue, as I do, that this tension is actually a way of containing the conflict, a "solution" to Mailer's obsession with power struggles.

For power is Mailer's central concern, and I shall analyze the fiction with this assumption. The earliest novels, for example, have been described as variations on power relations: *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) about men and war, *Barbary Shore* (1951) about men and politics, and *Deer Park* (1957) about men and sex (Tanner 349). One uses the word "men" advisedly in this formulation, for Mailer's fictional world, although it contains plenty of (hetero)sexual activity, is exclusively male, or at least male-oriented. It is not my purpose to examine Mailer's adversarial position as exemplary male-chauvinist (although that would

be a worthy enterprise, for which one might refer to his polemical exchanges with feminists like Kate Millet and the non-fictional work, *The Prisoner of Sex,* 1971), but in fact women do take secondary roles in the fiction. Sex itself is perceived typically in terms of conflict and dominance rather than any kind of emotional fulfillment.

> Mailer's demon is obsessed, as all his novels in some way or other testify, with the meaning of *power:* the condition of vitality itself in the personal, social, and historical realms. Ideologies are merely the political foil of this radical awareness of life, as sex is its personal expression (Hassan 141, his emphasis).

That power is the "condition of vitality itself" suggests that power in its personal manifestations need not be negative, although in Mailer's fiction the power of nature may well be, and the power of institutions always is. Mailer, who launched his long career as *l'enfant terrible* of his generation, has always taken an oppositional stance, both within his novels, as "the perpetual adversary whose character seems an argument against every other character" (Hendin 118) and in society, as public defender of modern writers, who (in his own formulation) "are almost always in opposition to their society" ("Our Country" 299).

b.

War is the *locus classicus* for power conflicts, and yet, paradoxically, the American combat novel has removed the writer from the ideological aspect of power, extracting him from what one would expect to be a highly politicized environment and relocating him in an "elemental area" that hearkens back to the frontier (Karl 95). In the tradition of the adventure tales of the classical American canon, the combat novel provides an all-male alternative to bourgeois society and its women, children, and responsibilities. While necessarily (and, as shall be seen, intentionally) removed by its setting--a Japanese-held island in the Pacific during the Second World War--from ordinary social and political life, *The Naked and the Dead*

(1948) is, nevertheless, a novel about different kinds of masculine, and institutional, power (Poirier, *Mailer* 29). The military conflict between the American and Japanese armies, however, forms the backdrop for other power conflicts the novel is primarily concerned with. The war itself is neutral; it has no ideological value, as the eventual American victory in the island campaign will owe nothing to American military superiority.

At the core of the novel, however, is an ideological struggle, between the Commanding General, Cummings, and his young aide, Lieutenant Hearn, with overtones of generational, class and perhaps homosexual conflict (Poirier 29). In a wider context, the enlisted men are constantly concerned about the presence of some superhuman power, whether person or thing, that seems to be controlling events and circumstances (Tanner 350). This perhaps reflects both Mailer's perception of nature as an often sinister force, and the pervasive paranoia of post-war American fiction in relation to the institutional powers that control individual fates. The paranoia (if that is what it is) has nothing to do with the quite rational fear and anxiety felt by men under the stress of combat. My analysis will concern itself with the human agencies, although in this and subsequent novels human beings will actively engage dark and unknown powers.

The island campaign is presented in a double focus that serves to expose the distant, abstract, strategic or chess-like perception of war of the CG, and those like him, by juxtaposing its perception to another view, literally from the ground, of war as experienced by an infantry reconnaissance platoon ("Recon"). Hearn, part of the CG's staff till he is transferred to Recon, thus serves as a connection between an army's two hierarchically unbridgeable gaps (Hassan 142-43). Despite Cummings' personal charm and professional brilliance, he is a self-confessed reactionary, "a tyrant in a velvet voice" (*Naked* 63). His working motto is the

Machiavellian "make yourself an instrument of your own policy" (66), which, at the locus where power and knowledge intersect --as CG of the island campaign, master of military history and strategy, and in full possession of the details of both geography and military intelligence--he is in excellent position to do.

In the Hearn-Cummings discussions, the issue is one of class. Hearn is fascinated by the totality of the General's power, "which gave a base to whatever he said" (69). Cummings, who sees intellectual potential in his young aide, wants to shape him, break him, if necessary, of his liberal sentiments and ideas, specifically Hearn's distaste for the privileged officer caste to which he rightfully belongs. "Understand your class," he advises Hearn, "and work within its limits. Marxism with a reverse twist."(134). Hearn has attended college, is even something of a literary intellectual, with experience as a labor organizer and a term with a college Marxist organization (he was expelled from it for being too much the "intellectual bourgeois"). Hearn is upper-class but rejects his industrialist father, and yet he cannot wholly embrace left-wing causes either, as Cummings shrewdly perceives. Hearn himself fears that his radical sentiments are not genuine but merely assumed. His main objection to officers is their special privileges, which they enjoy while the enlisted men do all the dirty work and take most of the risks. He thinks (rightly) that the men hate officers for this and (wrongly) that it will impair their fighting ability. Cummings assures him the opposite is true: how well an army fights depends on the material factor of men and equipment available, but also on how low a standard of living the soldiers have had in civilian life. He reasons that peasants make superior soldiers, accustomed as they are to hard labor and physical suffering without complaint; Americans (Southerners are the exception) tend to be unsatisfactory, since they are comparatively rich and have an exaggerated sense of their individual rights. They therefore

have to be broken to become proper soldiers, and part of this process is their becoming convinced of their own inferiority: "The army functions best when you are frightened of the man above you and contemptuous of your subordinates" (139). In this cynical reasoning, class resentment should be stimulated, not avoided, since hate and fear confer, and confirm, power.

As the quote above shows, Cummings is no patriotic fool, but a full-fledged right-wing ideologue, who holds the Hobbesian view that man is naturally given to dominance rather than cooperation and sharing. When he says that man's deepest urge is omnipotence, he is at least speaking for himself, for whom power flows from the top down and any resistance to this flow only calls down repression to staunch it. Punishment is employed as an instrument to instill fear and ensure discipline, and so it must be disproportionate to the offense, or "power becomes watered" (256). Cummings would extend this theory to civilian life to be transformed into appropriate use, for the present machine-age requires that power be consolidated (Hassan 143). For him, the war's main purpose is not the defeat of Fascism in Europe or Japanese militarist expansion in the Pacific, but the translation of the US's "potential" energy into "kinetic" energy, the putting of theory into practice, ever much as important to Fascist as to Marxist theory. Cummings actually believes that the concept of Fascism is sound but unfortunately started in the wrong country. When power, materials, armies are created, he reasons correctly, "they don't wither of their own accord. Our vacuum as a nation is filled with released power..." (254). He concludes that America is the nation destined to carry on the energy that has been released by the war, and the historical process tends toward consolidation: physical (i.e. technical) power for material progress, and political power to enable it to happen. He predicts--and here, perhaps, one hears Mailer's own voice--that post-war policy will be less hypocritical and more straight-forwardly imperialistic. In this, he was wrong; it

was imperialistic right enough, but became even more hypocritical. American liberal ideology could hardly condone, much less promote, a Fascist program.

Their very first talk is an object lesson in power. When Hearn is impertinent and Cummings reminds him of his rank by making him salute him, the pattern of their relationship is established. The two men play chess, which Cummings loves as an analogue of war; the god-like manipulation of pieces is his normal point-of-view. In his project of bending Hearn to his will, he gives his aide humiliating tasks, until Hearn "balks at becoming a chess piece for the General to direct" (248) and stubs out his cigarette on the floor of Cummings' spotless tent. Cummings, who has been balked in the campaign after an initial advance, sees this gratuitous act of defiance as a "symbol of the independence of his troops, their resistance to him...The fear, the respect his soldiers held for him now was a rational one, an admission of his power to punish them, and that was not good enough. The other kind of fear was lacking, the unreasoning one in which his powers were immense and it was effectively a sacrilege to thwart him" (251). The reference to sacrilege reminds one of how rational theories of power would make disobedience not only illegal but immoral. Hearn understandably resents such *hybris*, but his symbolic rebellion merely results in his trading Cummings for Croft, Recon's formidable platoon sergeant.

Croft is the irrational aspect of power in secret alliance with the rational Cummings, a sort of "earthly double" to Cummings' divine aspirations (Hassan 146). [2] Croft exemplifies, at a lower echelon, the General's theory of fear and hate to gain and maintain domination. A natural killer (even in civilian life, where as a strikebreaker he once shot a man), Croft is tough, fearless, ruthless, self-confident, and thoroughly professional; in short, he is perfectly adapted to war. Contrary to the fearful soldiers in his command, he relishes both the terrain

and the dangerous mission. He is an earlier, scarier, but more credible version of Sylvester Stallone's film character, John Rambo. When an inexperienced young soldier panics and is killed by a shell while the platoon is still on the beach, Croft has visions of omnipotence, "odd dreams and portents of power." Like Rambo, he is not so much courageous as pathological, as he shows in the ecstatic machine-gunning episode.

Croft is resentful of Hearn's taking command of what he considers his own platoon. As a leader, he is in fact more effective than Hearn, who tries to "buddy up" to the men, forgetting first, that as an officer they would dislike him, however personable he is as a man, and second, the Machiavellian advice that fear is more effective in the long run than love. They hate Croft, both as person and platoon sergeant, but, as Hearn comes to realize, they recognize Croft's competence. The sergeant is serenely indifferent to their opinion; his only requirement is obedience. The Croft-Hearn conflict is an example of who effectively holds power in an organization versus who officially holds it; i.e. Hearn has the rank but Croft the control. At the climax of the mission, the ambush at the mountain pass, the whole purpose of the patrol (to see if Cummings' planned attack is feasible) is lost. Hearn thinks that to save the platoon he should therefore turn back but he realizes that if he does he will have to face Cummings empty-handed and despises himself for risking the men's lives for an improper motive. Power corrupts, but he realizes he enjoys leadership.

Hearn's fantasy of resistance to Cummings is in the mode of romantic revolutionary, a role that Mailer will pose in later in life and which here he already exposes as insufficient. Hearn reflects that his fantasy of waging guerrilla war against the Cummingses of the world is foolish fancy (one might add, at least for an American), but thinks more soberly that "for whatever reason, you had to keep resisting"(456). One way to do this would be for him to

resign his commission and become a common soldier, giving up his privileges, but that would also mean leaving the men in the hands of the odious Croft, and yet "if he stayed he would become another Croft" (456) . He thus recognizes himself in both Cummings and Croft and their Faustian will to power, but not being ruthless enough to act on this recognition he becomes easy prey to Croft, who gets him killed in the second ambush. Bourgeois intellectual to the end, Hearn has merely a "rhetoric of engagement" and so can remain only disenchanted with the world, another "rebel-victim" of the post-war American novel (Poirier 26; Hassan 147-48).

Croft lacks any scruples and so regains control of Recon, facing only the final challenge of Red Valsen, unconscious anarchist, who resists military rule with indifference, cynicism, and obscenity, carrying on a long, wily duel with Croft, till finally, rejecting the patrol that has become merely Croft's obsession, he raises the specter of mutiny, at which point Croft effectively applies "naked power" by threatening to shoot him. When Red backs down, his will broken, Croft reigns supreme, but his aspiration to total control turns out to be futile, for he is defeated by nature itself, in the form of the mountain, which he perceives, Ahab-like, as a personal affront to his dominance. When the exhausted men are attacked by the hornets and lose their forward momentum, Croft feels he has lost the meaning for himself, since his power over the men had extended to a Faustian desire for power over nature itself. Here, as elsewhere in Mailer's fiction, nature responds with supreme indifference.

Cummings, too, is defeated in his will to power, since, militarily,. the mission has been to no purpose, the campaign having already been won by a fluke, the blundering blind luck of the mediocre Major Dalleson, acting in Cummings' fortuitous absence. The novel ends therefore in a reaffirmation of Naturalism, with Croft frustrated by nature and accumulated

circumstance, and Cummings by chance, for the break-through of the Japanese lines is the result of their hunger, lack of supplies, and bad luck (their CG is killed by an artillery shell). Cummings gets official credit for the victory but realizes bitterly that anyone could have won it; he has been cheated by the decisive but unpredictable variables of war, one of Tolstoy's main themes. As for the men of Recon, they stagger through the action with only their sensations--fear and pain--intact. Like their Civil War counterparts in Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), they have no comprehension of where they are, what they are doing, or why they are doing it.

With the outcome determined by non-human agencies, nature and chance, the only political issues in the novel are the ideological debates of Cummings and Hearn. Mailer thought that he should set his novel in the Pacific rather than in the European theater of the war precisely to avoid the complexities of the European political issues (which included the alliance with Communist Russia, the participation of nationalist partisan militias, and the great question of Hitler's "Final Solution."). He said that "to try a major novel about the last war in Europe without a sense of the past is to fail in the worst way..." and cited Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* (1948) as an example of such a failure (*Advertisements* 28). Shaw's novel, which attempts to see the European war from both German and American sides is, to be sure, much inferior to Mailer's effort, but it is hard to say whether the phrase "without a sense of the past" refers to the novelist or to Americans in general. In either case, there is, once more, the shying away from political realities.

During the war, the conflict in the Pacific was seen by the American public as a straightforward case of aggression by an expansionist and militarist Japanese imperial government. The public preference for the Pacific theater was also the result of racism, since the

enemy there was Asiatic (and both verbal and visual propaganda emphasized the "sneaky Japs"). There is, however, the undeniable fact that the US fleet had been nearly destroyed at Pearl Harbor in a tactically brilliant surprise attack, which was perceived by Americans (has been so until today, as the 1991 commemoration showed) as an unconscionable act of treachery, while Germany only declared war on the US shortly afterward, for reasons that are still unclear. By setting his novel in the Pacific, taking a more neutral stance toward the larger meanings of the war, and concentrating on conflicts within the US Army itself, Mailer in effect removed his novel from history. It could have been written, *mutatis mutandis*, about almost any other war.

Karl has argued that precisely because the novel is apolitical the long dialogues between Hearn and Cummings are "misplaced," while they would not have been in a war novel set in Europe (Karl 97), but this is to fail to recognize Mailer's true interest in the novel, as in nearly all of his novels (cf. Hassan's quote, above): the confrontations of power. In any case, the importance of the dialogues in the narrative structure cannot be denied. The first half of the novel is given over to them, and the second half, the narrative of the patrol, can be read as the illustration of both the temporary effectiveness but ultimate futility of Cummings' theory of fear and power, the theory applied in practice, as it were, with Sergeant Croft the arm to Cummings' brain. In this perspective, too, Hearn is the link between Cummings and Croft, since he cannot be tolerated at either end of the organization.

It might also be objected that the men in Recon are (fictionalized) products of history, even its victims, i.e. sons of the Great Depression, as emphasized in the "Time Machine" flashbacks of their civilian lives, a modernist device Mailer borrowed from John Dos Passos that is inserted into the novel's realist narrative. These individual histories, moreover, are not

connected to a collective perception of American history but neutralized by the brutalizing experience of combat, as the novel constantly shows. Even individually, the lives point up the central concern with power. Martinez, the Tex-Mex scout, represents conflicts of racism and the poor self-image of minorities. Proud to be a sergeant, he was poor and exploited as a civilian. Having assimilated conventional ideology about America and its opportunities, he has only succeeded with his specialized combat skills (he is the only one who kills an enemy soldier close up and is a master-scout) and realizes he is, after all, afraid to call himself a "Texan," since he is not an Anglo like Croft. Gallagher, the "revolutionary reversed," was a cog in the Boston Irish-Catholic political machine, a proto-fascist who had once belonged to an armed anti-Semitic, anti-Communist organization. Poor, ignorant, full of envy and resentment, he represents the *lumpen* always ready for co-optation by the forces of reaction. The representational nature of Recon is especially clear in its cross-cultural ethnic make-up: Chicano, Irish-American, Pole, Jew, Italian, WASP, "hillbilly," etc. (All that seems to be missing is a Negro, but Negroes in fact were in segregated units until after the war). Character as biography, as individual history, has little bearing on the issue of present survival, which depends on the factors of chance and fate, although Croft, as rugged Texas individualist, may be an exception, a theme to which Mailer will return in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*

Mailer, then, does not deal with the Second World War as historical experience, but as an arena in which to spin out dramas of power struggles. These struggles take place in three basic categories: between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between small groups and larger ones. In the first category, Cummings vs. Hearn is, as we have seen, is the familiar ideological one of liberal vs. reactionary. With Croft vs. Hearn and Croft vs. Red, Croft's victory in both cases, since he resorts to violence with Hearn and the threat of it with

Red, is owing to brute force, naked power over their bodies (Red as the undisciplined soldier is recalcitrant to the usual method). In Cummings vs. his (non-advancing) Troops, Cummings as Commanding General possesses both institutional and traditional power (in Russell's scheme), and also takes specific coercive measures to punish what he sees as the men's recalcitrance. This could not, however, be described as "naked power," such as Croft employs. Although this is usually military in Russell's discussion, he says it takes the form of internal tyranny, such as using military force against one's own citizens in civil disruptions, or in foreign conquest, so that, if relevant, it might better describe Cummings' campaign against the Japanese (Russell, "Forms of Power" 20-21).

Yet, Russell might plausibly argue that naked power is what is used on the American soldiers themselves, since enlisted men are often inducted into the army and therefore do not freely give consent to exercise power over their bodies. Yet, citizens of a democratically elected government at least theoretically recognize the army as a legitimate authority entrusted with national defense (although Russell himself, a militant pacifist, would object to this). Prior assent would therefore be given to those authorities to do as they saw fit, within the constraints of the law, even against the will of reluctant or dissenting individuals in the face of unattractive situations like being sent to war, though this argument would be and has been contested by conscientious objectors.

Such an argument would, however, in this case be more than academic, since the men are already present in that exemplary system of power known as an army, whether they have consented (enlisted) or not (were inducted). Their obedience can best be understood by Foucault's notion of "discipline," which is a word much appreciated in military organizations. An army is subject to and subjected by discipline. It produces what Foucault calls "docile

bodies," bodies that are subjected and therefore obedient but, in the same proportion, through the repeated bodily movements of training, the soldiers become apt and efficient as fighters. Discipline has this twofold effect: it increases both aptitude and domination. Civilian recruits are transformed into disciplined soldiers through military "exercises," individual skills are developed along with unit maneuvers, aptitude in the service of utility, which in turn requires precise obedience for maximum efficiency as a unit. Cummings is an effective commander because of his mastery of detail, his concern with the smallest problems as well the overall picture. As Foucault says, "Discipline is a political anatomy of detail", in which everything is turned to account. In his example, Napoleon claimed to discover the minute world of detail in order to master it (Foucault, *DP* 138-39).

Hearn vs. the Army also belongs to the second category (individuals vs. groups), which, as an ideological and class conflict, has more in common--though from the other side of the class barrier--with Officers vs. Enlisted men, the only conflict in the third category (group vs. group). This important final opposition would seem amenable to a Marxist analysis, since Mailer has made a clear division between a privileged officer class and an exploited class of enlisted men. Thomas Schaub, for example, thinks "class analysis had been the basis of novelistic structure" in this novel, but that Mailer was to forego naturalistic narration for a psychologizing, first-person narrator in later novels when Marxist analysis was called into question or fell into disrepute among American artists and intellectuals during the Fifties (Schaub 151). Schaub seems to be thinking of Hearn and Cummings' debate, which structures the novel only in the sense that it provides the basis for Hearn's transference from one order of power to another. The class conflict is, to be sure, latent in Recon's instinctive distrust of Hearn, when he first comes to command the platoon, for while the men distrust

Croft's character and obey his orders, they can verbally abuse him on a nearly equal basis of his non-commissioned rank of sergeant, while lack of respect for an officer could mean a court martial for insubordination. And the conflict becomes overt at several points in the novel: Cummings' advice to Hearn about cultivating class consciousness ("Marxism with a reverse twist"), the barely disguised insolence to Hearn of the enlisted man in charge of taking care of the General's tent, and Cummings' granting of special favors (such as the large portion of fresh meat allotted to a porportionately smaller number of officers) to purposely make the men aware of "their own inferiority," another example of Foucaultian disciplinary power, the denial of the body for the aim of spiritual development.

Yet, a Marxist analysis is problematic, since Marxist theory does not allow power relations between individuals outside of the Marxist concept of their place in the production process, which would seem to exclude the imposed hierarchies of a non-productive military organization (Poulantzas 125-26). It would also be equivocal by similar reasoning to equate the enlisted men with a true proletariat, for the simple reason that soldiers, especially in a wartime situation of universal draft, do not constitute an economic class. The men are distributed not according to class, i.e. their civilian origins, but rank, "the place one occupies in a classification" (DP 142). Furthermore, it is dubious to insist on a class struggle as the basis for power relations *within* the Army (independent of the power relations that cause certain men to be commissioned, others not), because of the preconceived outcome of such a hypothetical struggle. Military uprisings within the ranks or against civilian authorities are historically unprecedented in the US military (although civilians have at more than one point in US history staged anti-draft riots at the prospect of being inducted *into* the Army), and, given the historical and institutional subordination of military to civilian authority, highly unlikely. The

outcome is, quite literally, written in the Table of Operations and Equipment, the structural basis of Army organization always already determining a relationship of perpetual domination over the non-commissioned troops.

c.

Since at least the early Sixties, Mailer has adopted a romantic revolutionary stance of resistance to the counter-culture's bug-bears of encroaching corporate technology (with the consequent perceived loss of elemental sensuous experience), and the political authoritarianism of an "inhuman" bureaucracy and an imperial presidency. The isolated and ineffectual heroes of the first three novels, published in the late 1940s and the 1950s, could find no way to resist what Mailer calls "totalitarianism," which includes not only the hegemony of an all-powerful state, but an increasing insistence in American culture on uniformity and "mass" values implicit in the pop-sociology expression of the period, "the lonely crowd." Nor will the heroes of the first two Sixties novels fare much better, though they are both more resourceful and more determined. The individualism of Mailer's outlook would not, after all, jive that well with the neo-tribalism of a "hippy" counter-culture, or, for that matter, with an effective politics of possible resistance, but in the three Sixties novels, in line with that culture, he takes up the cudgel of a (Thoreauvian?) anti-capitalist, anti-technological, pastoralist (Poirier 26,86,100).

These oppositions become evident in one of Mailer's most important works, the "factual novel" *The Armies of the Night* (1968), which may be considered a companion piece to *Why Are We in Vietnam* (1967), the metaphorical treatment of the latter giving way to a reportorial one, but the oblique approach is at least thematically maintained, since the subject is not the war itself, which remains present yet distant, but the domestic resistance to it. The

novel brings the totalitarianism that American politicians identified in Communism home to the repressive structures of American government. It specifically focuses on events that occurred in October, 1967, when a mass march of protesters against the Vietnam war converged on the Pentagon, locus and symbol of U.S. military power. In the first part, "History as a Novel," which makes up the bulk of the whole, Mailer takes the reader along, via a chronological diary--yet novelistically replete with backward and forward digressions on his own life and work and on the mind and behavior of "corporate America"--to observe his own actions at, and observations of, the March. The account is historical in that it proposes to tell us what happened, but history as fiction, since Mailer knows that objective facts or events are never simply given but occur as effects on the observer or recorder. It is also both eyewitness and autobiographical, since the author is both "present" at the scene of the events but, as he freely admits, constantly shaping the story so as to place himself at their center.

Any interpretation of what happens organizes the information that is presented, but Mailer proposes to go even further in his wish to "write an intimate story of an event which places its focus on a central figure who is not central to the event" (64). This figure, "Mailer," is an eyewitness who does not have to make himself always look good, since he is not one of the leaders or organizers of the event, "but ambiguous in his own proportions, a comic hero" (64) aware of his pretensions and limitations, for "[o]nce history inhabits a crazy house, egotism may be the last tool left to History" (65). Mailer the author (i.e. outside the text) thus writes a book with Mailer the narrator observing "Mailer" the protagonist, who, as character, even has a number of different names: Norman, the Novelist, the Ruminant, the Historian, the Participant--names that affirm the variety of his roles but also attest to his invention of multiple identities, multiplying "Mailers" to adapt to, or perhaps better define, the

multifariousness and insanity of American society (Karl 580). It has been suggested that if the narrative identity is diversified, as it is in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and even the non-fictional *Advertisements for Myself*, it will be more difficult for the internal super-ego, and the external powers of the state, to contain the individual (Bufithis 288). The plurality of identities also points to the crisis of the self that emerged, as we have seen, from the fiction of the post-war years. The multiple selves are in this view Mailer's pluralist equivalent of Ralph Ellison's "invisible" mask hiding a precarious identity. [3] The split personality that the narrator admittedly shares, personified in these multiple narrative selves is, however, a survival tactic, not a "political unconscious," though he does perceive a schizoid madness at the heart of the US : "Any man or woman who was devoutly Christian and worked for an American Corporation had been caught in an unseen vise whose pressure could split their mind from their soul. For the center of Christianity was a mystery, a son of God, and the center of the Corporation was a detestation of mystery, a worship of technology"(200). The businessmen, generals, CIA and FBI agents, and the myriad hucksters of the American Dream are all wrong: America is profoundly un-Christian, which helps explain why the war must go on.

The WASP power-elite is convinced that Communism is the enemy of Christian civilization and so must be relentlessly opposed wherever it seems to be making inroads, a theme that will underlie the incredible antics in Mailer's CIA novel, *Harlot's Ghost* (1991). That Communism is threatening a remote country in southeast Asia is therefore cause for alarm, especially in conjunction with the dubious central thesis of the "domino theory." Mailer summarizes (193-6) the political and strategic arguments of the Vietnam war's supporters (Hawks) and opponents (Doves), only to conclude that, while on the face of it the Doves' arguments are stronger, power is not destroyed by superior argument. Ideology, it is implied, is

more powerful than reason, but the overly patriotic American public can in fact still be swayed, for public opinion has been changing constantly as to whether or not the war should be continued. Yet, the Hawks, who firmly hold every power but the consensus of (reasonable) public opinion they have not been able to mold, are not too concerned about this, and they use the mendaciously effective tactic of appealing to the patriotic public by branding Doves as disloyal or cowardly.

Coercion is, as we have seen, never enough to maintain repression for long without also winning "the hearts and minds" of the subordinated. This is what the U.S. policy in Vietnam conspicuously failed to do and is the main reason the U.S. lost the war; it is also an underlying theme in the novel, as police repression is foredoomed to have an adverse effect on the public's attitudes. It was therefore arguable whether media coverage of the police repression of "unruly" demonstrators turned a conservative public, anxious about "law-and-order" in a society already torn by racial strife, for or against the war. I should say that initially at least the Hawks' hegemonic control of public opinion and their playing on fears of continued civil disruption worked for a while, but failed in the long run, when it became increasingly apparent that a military victory would not be forthcoming and that civil opposition was not restricted to an undisciplined youth. Public opinion was therefore central in the eventual but belated decision to end the war. As Hannah Arendt argues, "[w]hen commands are no longer obeyed, the means of violence are of no use; and the question of this obedience is not decided by the command-obedience relation but by opinion, and, of course, by the number of those who share it" (*On Violence* 66-67). Historically, this is what happened. The war continued long after it was popular, with an empowered minority exploiting the lack of open opposition, but it eventually became so unpopular at home as to be untenable abroad.

Since political arguments in this climate of opinion have made little difference, Mailer offers semi-serious personal ones, such as that any war is bad which has better-armed rich boys fighting poor boys, and yet his analysis of Vietnam (198-9) is not without subtlety, even foresight. His conclusion that Asia was best left to the Asians is, of course, unimpeachable, even though there still existed a mentality about Asia that perceived it as an adjunct of the West, so that people used to ask how it was that we had "lost" China, as if it had been ours in the first place. But the notion that "to leave Asia would be precisely to gain the balance of power" is an inspired paradox, the explanation being that what will eventually ensue with the absence of colonial powers is far too complex to control or even predict. He has correctly perceived the current situation of the end of Communism in the late Eighties (which, however, took place in Europe, not Asia) as another paradox: "In the expansion of Communism was its demise" (199).

Again, Mailer perceives his subject, here a particular historical event, in terms of the adversarial power struggles among individuals and groups in varied combinations. The two major opposing forces of the mass demonstration are the US government, in the monolithic symbolic aspect of the Pentagon and the personal presence of the coercive state apparatus (police and army), vs. a diverse mass of civilian demonstrators, united only by their marching in opposition to government policies. Behind this physical confrontation of demonstrators and police/soldiers, however, is the ideological conflict of Hawks and Doves. Mailer ranges the power of a corrupt U.S. on the side of the Hawks, "corporation-land villains"(104), whose adversaries, a rather pathetic mass of neurotic wimps, are, however, empowered by the forces of history:

> All the healthy Marines, state troopers, professional athletes, movie stars, red necks, sensuous life-loving Mafia, cops, mill-workers, city officials, nice healthy-looking easy-grafting politicians full of the light (from marijuana?) in

> their eye of life they enjoy--yes, they would be for the war in Vietnam. Arrayed against them as hard-core troops: an elite! the Freudridden embers of Marxism, good old American anxiety strata--the urban middle-class with their proliferated monumental adenoidal resentments, their secret slavish love for the oncoming hegemony of the computer and the suburb, yes, they and their children, by the sheer ironies, the sheer ineptitude, the kinks of history, were now being compressed into more and more militant stands...(44)

Such are the unlikely soldiers upon whom the revolution depends. During the March, helicopters of the government and the police hover over these "troops" to remind them of "the secret of who owned the air--corporation-land" (127). The demonstrators' target is the main building of corporation-land itself:

> ...the symbol, the embodiment, no, call it the true and high church of the military-industrial complex, the Pentagon, blind five-sided eye of a subtle oppression which had come to America out of the very air of the century (this evil twentieth century with its curse on the species, its oppressive Faustian lusts, its technological excrement all over the conduits of nature, its entrapment of the innocence of the best--for which young American soldiers hot out of high school and in love with a hot-rod and his Marine buddies in a platoon in Vietnam could begin to know the devil of oppression which would steal his soul before he knew he had one) yes, Mailer felt a confirmation of the contests of his own life on this March to the eye of oppressor, greedy stingy dumb half of the worst of the Wasp heart, chalice and anus of corporation land, smug, enclosed, morally blind Pentagon, destroying the future of its own nation with each day it augmented its strength...(125-6)

In this passage, Mailer the reporter yields to an unleashed narrator who fires on all the familiar targets: the military, nature-destroying technology, brain-washed American youth, the Wasp power-elite, corporate America, all the powers that made Vietnam possible, that keep it going, and that must be resisted.

The conflict over the war itself, which has defined the situation and constituted its background, will be examined in the second part of the novel; in the first part, Mailer concentrates on the conflicts of power within the opposition itself. One initial problem within the opposition, despite the over-all coordination of the Mobilization Committee, was its lack of defined

leadership. Unlike the Civil Rights march on Washington (1963), there was no central organization determining the strategy or even the purpose of the march on the Pentagon, and yet Mailer perceives that, paradoxically, this lack of centralization is part of the demonstration's strength, for "...the authority could not comprehend nor contain nor finally manage to control any political action whose end was unknown" (99). The government could attack the marchers and put them in jail, but in the end it could not comprehend a mass movement that operated, unlike the older Communist movements, without a coordinated plan. In fact, the "solid-as-brickwork logic" of the Old Left had been adopted by the bureaucrats of "the American center." They too are appalled at political activity that is not run by the book.

Another contradictory source of power within the opposition, or at least that part of it called the New Left, often including its "hippy" cohorts, is its new style of politics, with an emphasis on aesthetics. Mailer sees these people as a motley army, one not in uniform but in costume, "...close to being assembled from all the intersections between history and comic books, between legend and television, the Biblical archetypes and the movies." In this war-as-masked-costume ball, "the aesthetics was at last in the politics" (103). The apparent clash between style and action is reflected in the contradictory nature of the new generation's beliefs. The present generation is more in tune with technology than any before it, despite some anti-technological rhetoric, but it also believes in psychedelic drugs, the occult, tribal ritual, and unstructured sexuality. The anti-authoritarian radicalism therefore cannot be repressed in the usual ways, owing to its unpredictable and extremely anti-logical character: "belief was reserved for the revelatory mystery of the happening where you did not know what was going to happen next" (97-8).

Some sort of repression was sure to come, however, as a powerful government could not tolerate civil disobedience. And yet power does not automatically belong to the government since it has to reckon with negative propaganda, for how can the self-styled "leader of the free world" be shown stomping its own citizens without serious loss of face? When marchers begin to go over barbed-wire fences, for example, Mailer has a paranoid vision of concentration camp pens but immediately corrects himself: "he should have divined that the government was not going to pen people in full view of others who were free, nor give fields of such photographs to European papers with any faint reminders implicit of when last civilians had been seen behind barbed wire"(128). Memories of the Second World War coincide with the current technology of total media coverage. Past and present converge to advantage.

This paranoid vision of government repression is not without its reality in the ranks of the demonstrators. The black militants at the March have their own priorities of resisting racism--of which they see Vietnam as merely an exported example--and generally distrust the white Left. If the blacks march to the Pentagon and do not "preempt the front rank, they would lose face as fighters; if they were too numerous on the line they would be beaten half to death" (114). Their relinquishing of the March is not entirely explained by this dilemma. Mailer sees the black militants as a kind of Leninist revolutionary vanguard, sure of their secret power, with their own system of communication and silent movement, who had moved "into that Black twenty-first century when Black Power had succeeded in rendering the white man invisible at will" (112).

For the white demonstrators who do take part, the comedy of their jostling for a place in the front rank in competition for the TV cameras, is not lost on Mailer, who is in turn determined to keep *his* place in the line; if he is going to get his head busted, let it be for that even-

ing's television commentators (119), and he is candid about the many petty "power plays" among leaders and celebrities. On the eve of the March, for example, he argues with a movement lawyer over who is to preside at a public meeting with celebrity speakers. For the lawyer, DiGrazia, meetings are simply meetings, to be endured for the cause, but Mailer's instinct for the spectacle, even if only to play the fool, prompts him to call for an audience vote. When this turns out fairly even, he proposes to give the audience a lesson: "In the absence of a definite vote, the man who holds the power, keeps it" (50), a variation on the cliché, "possession is the better part of the law."

Of these minor, mainly personal struggles, two are illustrative, as one involves the authority of prestige, the other brute force. Novelist Mailer, critic Dwight McDonald, and poet Robert Lowell are the literary stars, "notables" who lend their names to the March propaganda. Mailer admits being jealous of Lowell, who besides possessing a Wasp aristocratic serenity in contrast to what he calls his own brassy Jewish vulgarity, has the reputation of being the most distinguished living American poet, a claim Mailer says he would like to make for himself as novelist. Yet, when Lowell remarks to him that he and his wife (critic Elizabeth Hardwick, who blasted Mailer's latest novel) thought Mailer "the finest journalist in America" (as opposed to the finest novelist), he takes this as condescending insult and supposes Lowell is trying to "neutralize" any future risks of confronting him. When Lowell keeps congratulating him for a more moderate speech Mailer made during a draft-card burning ceremony, Mailer doggedly keeps congratulating Lowell on *his* speech, determined not to lose in this private competitive game of mutual admiration.

In the physical confrontation, Mailer suffers an anti-Semitic slur by an anti-demonstrator in a Nazi uniform. When Mailer returns the insult, a big US Marshall steps in to break up the

imminent fight, but the Nazi persists and is bounced off a truck and rapped with a club. Mailer cannot help wondering whether the Marshal secretly thinks the Nazi is just a contemptible distraction from the real danger, i.e. Communist-inspired demonstrators like himself. Curiously, he does not consider the irony of his being protected by a government lawman nor dwell on the irony of a powerful government so sure of itself that it can wage a grossly unjust war while giving guarantees of free speech and assembly to its own citizens, though the paradox of this situation will indeed become clear in the second part.

The comic ironies of marching against a liberal authoritarian state is further shown by Mailer's pondering the moment he should get himself arrested, trying to time it so as to make a party in New York that evening and warning the Marshall who arrests him to keep his hands off him since he isn't resisting arrest. Getting arrested is a ritual with little danger of violence and only a few hours actual incarceration. The price of confronting authority is therefore comically low, and yet Mailer soon learns that his celebrity status offers the government an opportunity to be vindictive. Expecting to be released immediately, he is given five days in jail for the Socratic offense of negatively influencing the young. There ensues a legal struggle between the judge who is determined to keep Mailer in jail as an example and the dexterous movement lawyer, Hirshkop, who keeps pulling new arguments and legal technicalities out of his sleeve until the judge finally relents. What makes the judge back down, besides Hirshkop's legal virtuosity, is the realization that to resist on this particular case might entrap the government in future rulings, enfeebling that level of courts in dealing with civil disobedience. The government indulges in give-and-take: it reluctantly releases an important law-breaker to ensure flexibility later when more might be at stake.

Mailer's fame also prevents any realization of the romantic dream of being a real, "gun-in-the-hills" revolutionary: "he would pay for the pleasures of his notoriety in the impossibility of disguise" (89). On the other hand, he resists participating in radical organizations because they are too much like bureaucratic sects, "rusty tin cans" that attract the wrong kind of people, mediocrities who join movements to indulge "their self-pity and self-righteousness" (107). This shows the profoundly individualist basis of his politics, since, as Weber emphasized, what counts in an organization is the power it can mobilize irregardless of the personalities of its individual elements. Mailer's more serious objection, that the opposition itself is part of the problem ("...technology-land was the capitalist bastion, and the mediocre middle-class masses of the Left...were the first real champions of technology land," 107), exposes the romantic-pastoralist basis of his position. Consider the following diatribe against liberal academics, the very class of people who were almost unanimously opposed to the war:

> They were of course politically opposed to the present programs and movements of the republic in Asian foreign policy, but this political difference seemed no more than a quarrel among engineers. Liberal academics had no root of a real war with technology-land itself, no, in all likelihood, they were the natural managers of that future air-conditioned vault where the last of human life would still exist (25).

Despite the sociological truth behind this passage, it is one example of what Mailer does throughout the novel. He resists identifying with his true political allies, finding fault with their convictions, personalities, or style, seeking out their contradictions and anomalies and finding points of sympathy with their adversaries. This is partly a need to maintain a minority status for himself, partly a strategy to give his work a dialectical movement, to avoid its becoming just another radical harangue against right-wing America--thus, the sympathetic treatment of the Marshall who arrests him, of the Commissioner who tries him, of the young

soldiers guarding the Pentagon. In opposition to his allies, "Mailer" insists on the need for action, railing against wishy-washy liberals and pacifists whose cautious mood saps revolutionary spirit: "...Mailer had recognized long ago that he was sufficiently devil-ridden to need a little action from time to time, and the promise of these pacifistic moods seemed to be that they would go on forever"(79). This may be no more than Mailer (the protagonist) posing as *An American Dream*'s Stephen Rojack, tapping his demonic side as a source of authentic energy and pretending it is not a fantasy. On the other hand, Mailer (author and public personality) often engaged in provocative or outrageous behavior, it has been argued, not so much as a means of self-promotion, though that is also quite plausible, but as a testing-ground for purposes of his work: "Till people see where their ideas lead, they know nothing," he said. The process is cyclical: ideas lead to action which leads to writing and to new ideas (Bufithis 279). Mailer's quarrel with liberal academics is that they do not see where their ideas lead, preferring the safe harbor of concepts.

In contrast to such people, who can only think of revolution in terms of lawyers, hospitals, and passing out pamphlets, Mailer "liked good character when it issued in action which was visually tumultuous rather than inspiring awe in the legal mind" (66). The key word "visually" tips one off that Mailer is not necessarily extolling violent action as superior to words. He knows, after all, he is writing a book about the March that will ultimately be more effective in its power of persuasion than his own minor physical participation in the event. If he follows his own advice (seeing where ideas lead), it is as if he has to go through the motions in order to produce the book. To be sure, "action" cannot be armed conflict, since any serious attack on the Pentagon would be suicidal. Mailer himself, after all, does not fight the Nazi or a man behind him in the line provoking him or get in a fight in jail, as he expects. Ac-

tion in the context of this historical event is not armed but symbolic conflict, action as theater, a march "on the bastion which symbolized the military might of the Republic, marching not to capture it but to wound it *symbolically*" (65, his emphasis).

In Part II, "The Novel as History," Mailer sacrifices immediacy for objectivity, relating events that he did not actually witness, i.e. history as created by others rather than history as Mailer creating it. As usual, the power struggles are presented in binary terms. Thus, within the opposition, the important conflict is radicals vs. liberals. In power terms, the radicals have greater motivation, as they are more militant and less law-abiding, but the liberals have more resources, with greater numbers and much more money. In terms of influence, the earnest, respectable, and well-behaved liberals have greater influence on the general American public, while the radicals fmction, as it were, as the political conscience of the liberals. Each of these tendencies contains an "alphabet soup" of organizations, for the bureaucratic complexities of which Mailer has little patience. As novelist, he tends to shade ideological nuances in the positions of representative individuals.

Within the militant ranks themselves is a conflict that arose together with the counterculture of the Sixties: Old vs. New Left. Older radicals are not militants gone soft with age; they are "old" because they still employ the "solid-as-brickwork logic" and rhetoric of Communism. Although many have dropped out of the Party, they still retain a Marxist outlook, and their natural enemies are liberals and enlightened professionals. The New Left is younger and politically eclectic; they admire Mao and Che, Fidel and Malcolm X, they emphasize style and aesthetic, they are more inflammatory than logical in their rhetoric, and they prefer improvised rather than meticulously planned tactics. Their natural allies are hippies and blacks.

These two positions Mailer personifies in the two main organizers of the March, David Dellinger and Jerry Rubin. Dellinger is an older, militant but non-violent pacifist from the East Coast who has the difficult job of an intermediary between liberal and radical factions. He realizes the March needs the money and numbers of the former if it were to continually grow. At the same time, the anti-war movement thrives on publicity. Media power could only be supplied by flamboyant radicals like Rubin, the Berkeley "Yippie" whose declared goal was "wholesale disruption and dislocation of American society." Merely another mass protest, without civil disobedience, would cause the peace movement to "become a predictable figure in the tapestry, to be discounted by the power-elite rather than respected"(245), taking, that is to say, its non-effective place as pseudo-opposition to an oppressive state.

This unstable alliance was further strained by the timely occurrence of the Arab-Israeli war in June, 1967 (the New Left, in opposition to the Old, leaned toward the Arabs), and the difficult relationship of white radicals with black militants, who, after the joint militancy of the Civil Rights actions in the south, expelled whites from their organizations. This conflict is "settled" by the blacks, who simply abandon the demonstration as irrelevant to their needs. The Old vs. New Left disagreement on tactics is settled by Dellinger. A mass, peaceful demonstration would be followed by acts of civil disobedience by those who chose them. Behind this compromise solution, however, is the greater struggle between the government and the Mobilization Committee, the ironies of which Mailer summarizes: "...the compromise said in effect: we the government wage the war in Vietnam for our security, but will permit your protest provided it is only a little disorderly. The demonstrators: we still consider the war outrageous and will therefore break the law, but not by very much" (252). These professed attitudes are, as Mailer says, absurd. The situation is unsatisfactory for any long-range goals

and results in the division of tactics in the actual March. The radical organizations that reject compromise stage their own poorly planned attack that results in brutal beatings and arrests. The government does not maintain its own legal fiction during the March, but is true to itself as the legal, but coercive liberal state. It "remained to the end what it had been from the beginning: a part legalistic, a part co-operative, and a part threatening" (293-4).

The external confrontation, summed up in the formula of People vs. Pentagon, Mailer concretizes in the facing lines of demonstrators and soldiers. While "each side is coming face to face with its conception of the devil"(269), the long hours bring about less apocalyptic reactions, as demonstrators by turn tempt and taunt the soldiers. Mailer sees class conflict here, as the demonstrators are urban, middle-class, or hippy exiles from the middle-class, spiritually alienated, secretly in envy (Mailer thinks) of the tough, gritty lives of the virile working-class soldiers. This sociological simplification, however, makes his point of relative power, i.e. moral authority vs. brute force. Although he typically identifies with the abused soldiers, the demonstrators while feeling physically weaker will gain strength from the soldiers, "steal their balls," because they have the moral right on their side. His sympathy therefore shifts decisively in the "Battle of the Wedge," when the troops brutally crush last-ditch resistance by courageous demonstrators.

Another ambiguous element of Mailer's perception of power is the media coverage of the March. The novel begins by quoting an article in *Time* magazine that grossly misrepresents Mailer's antics at the meeting (i.e. according to Mailer, for Dwight McDonald, in his own favorable review of the novel, said the article was "reasonably accurate") (196). [4] Mailer pretends to use this opening to write a book in which he will tell what really happened, though of course his version, while more complete and interesting than the conventional press's, is

just another version. However his antics are presented, as a writer he is particularly indignant over the misrepresentation of his words: "the more one might have to say in a sentence, the worse one would probably sound. Henry James would have come off in a modern interview like a hippy who had taken a correspondence course in forensics"(76). The report on Mailer's arrest makes him a figure of ridicule in jail, the speech he gives when released makes him out to be a hypocritical fool, and *Time* magazine condescendingly calls the experiences related in the novel a "weekend revolution." His indignant attitude, however, may well be disingenuous, since he is obviously aware of the ideological distortion of the "objective" press.

By contrast, he is enthusiastic about the coverage of television and film, either because these media cannot misquote his words, or because he thinks that TV and movies count more than books in shaping public opinion, or because he can more effectively play the buffoon on screen, probably all three. Besides the comic jostling for a good spot in front of the TV cameras mentioned earlier, it turns out that "Mailer" is being filmed throughout his entire experience by a British film crew, so the misrepresentations of his words by the written news media will be corrected, he hopes, by the visual media, as well as his own account in his novel. Even *Time* characterizes "Mailer" in cinematic terms, as "an extra, a bit player who will inevitably be cut out of the film" (120). This points up a dilemma in Mailer's adversarial stance, which needs the media to "record" the revolutionary event but not (mis-) interpret it, as do the newspapers and magazines. However much credence one gives to the presumed objectivity of visual media, Mailer is at least being true to the new (i.e. Sixties) form of aesthetic politics he has discussed, where style is more important than substance, and the "happening" replaces the Old Left logic. The disciplined mode of the "Leninist" Walter

McTeague, a professional revolutionary, accordingly, has been passed by in the electronic age: "Leninism was built to analyze a world in which all the structures were made of steel--now the sinews of society were founded on transistors so small Dragon Lady could hide them beneath her nail" (201). The New Left showed by the political antics Mailer delineates in the novel that the struggle for power in the media, which was a struggle for the means of representation, that took place among the media, the government, and other political interests, was not trivial (Rowe 197). Mailer realizes this during the episode of the US Marshals arresting demonstrators, when for a moment he thought they would be herded concentration-camp style into barbed-wire pens. That could not happen since the television images would call up in people's minds the terrible pictures and films of the holocaust and thus cause the government to be equated at least indirectly with Nazism. In this sense, the media can work as much against official versions of events as in their favor: "Having moved full-scale into the video age, official discourse must now operate within an altered representational economy that it cannot wholly control" (Shapiro 120).

Mailer's involvement with media may be interpreted as a more "postmodern" response to the refusal of such involvement by humanist writers like Bellow or Updike, as is the erasure of boundaries he has effected between his private and public life, much as his personal style of disruptive actor or buffoon is distinct from the serious, restrained personal mode of these writers. The involvement is complex, as public and private become intertwined in such a way that his legend--what in the novel he calls the "sarcophagus of his image" (15) which he might escape from only while asleep--*is* Mailer in a sense, or at least not independent of him. The sarcophagus metaphor shows that he knows how trapped he is in his image, even dead inside it, and yet still distinct from it (Lennon 179-187). Mailer once more takes an ad-

versarial position, doing battle with the powers of public opinion, but it is moot whether he has underestimated their power in trying to pit himself against their manipulation by creating a public personality. His "space" is distinct from both the old-fashioned, high-minded refusal to participate in "publicity," of writers like Bellow and Updike, artists of the private space, and the total personal absence or spatial effacement of the postmodernist Thomas Pynchon, who exists only through his texts. Despite Mailer's provocative behavior, it has been argued that Mailer has in a sense been co-opted by his own presence, so that his rebellious stance simply becomes a part of the system (Lennon 184), his public rebelliousness an affirmation of the system's declared tolerance for difference. The more he attacks television, for example, the more he is invited to appear on talk shows. Rather like Gore Vidal, he finally becomes an acceptable provocation.

d.

Harlot's Ghost (1991) is generically a mixed bag: a spy novel that violates the genre by refusing closure, a historical fiction about the most dubious contribution of the U.S. to the Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency (est. in 1947 by the National Security Act), a *bildungsroman* about a young man's life and education in the "Company," as the Agency is appropriately known to its members, and a coursebook on the theory and practice of espionage and counter-espionage, the covert handmaidens of imperial power. [5] The CIA is perceived in this long (1,168 page) novel as a corporation that invests in secrets, with few limitations on its outlays and no accountability to its stockholders. It was corporate America at its most delirious, with capitalist greed replaced by the reigning attitudes of paranoia, in relation to the Soviet Union, and arrogance, in relation to the "Third World." In this novel, as in so

many other of Mailer's novels, conflicts of power between organizations, and within them, are important, and it is mainly with these that I wish to deal with in this section.

Garry Wills has shown how the CIA emerged from its wartime predecessor OSS by way of British MI-5, which bequeathed it a triple legacy that remains characteristic in the post-war years: 1) social ties, or the "old boy" network among members; 2) colonialism, the manipulation of the "lower orders," often outside the law, for the perceived good of the Empire; 3) peer relationship with the (European) enemy ("CIA" 23). Wills does not make the connection between the three explicit but it is, of course, social class. [6] "Gentleman Spy" Allen Dulles, of the OSS and later director of the CIA under President Eisenhower, was the brother of John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's influential Secretary of State, who instituted the security policy of foreign aid to prevent the spread of Communism and the development of nuclear weapons to keep the Soviets "contained" (that is, respectively, in earlier diplomatic power slogans, "dollar diplomacy" and the "big stick"). In this political climate, Allen Dulles insisted on ideological orthodoxy for his CIA personnel, which Wills says is puzzling, since in the McCarthy years Cold War liberals actually admired the CIA for its ability to keep free of McCarthy's control--the wonderfully absurd notion of the secret police as guardians of liberty. Wills explains this paradox by way of the triadic bequest he has proposed that the CIA inherited from the British; thus, 1) OSS and later CIA personnel were recruited from top U.S. universities and corporations. Secrecy and the consequent lack of official recognition of their deeds caused the formation of close ties of loyalty. 2) The CIA in its formative years, and even before, encouraged its personnel to take the "long view," above merely local politics and with an appeal to a higher morality. Colonialism thus "returned as an ideological empire." Foreign operations, as well as scores of devious schemes within the U.S. itself, made manifest

the CIA's conviction that the democratic process is insufficient and therefore requires secret assistance. The colonizing power needs to impose colonial discipline, even on its own citizens, for their own good. 3) The CIA can only be thought important if the enemy is perceived as such, which tends to magnify the enemy and thus the Agency itself (Wills 23-33). All three of these legacies are relevant to Mailer's novel.

Harlot's Ghost is narrated by one Harry Hubbard, a certified member of what sociologist C. Wright Mills once called "the power elite": the white male, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, wealthy, well-educated at Ivy League prep schools and universities, interlinked by school, corporate, and marriage ties, and shared cultural values, once exclusively East Coast, that hold the top positions of power and influence in American business, the military, and government. Mills argued that this group did not constitute a ruling class in the Marxist sense since their power is not exclusively economic. Harry's father Cal, a CIA officer, is a former member of OSS and a friend of Allen Dulles. Harry is therefore predisposed to his profession by his family background, added to a combination of introverted personality and the rabid anti-Communist ideology imbibed in schools in the post-war years, in which the USSR was often represented as the anti-Christ. At Yale, for example, Harry attends foreign policy forums but eschews political arguments about Republicans and Democrats: "They hardly mattered. Allen Dulles was my president, and I would be a combat trooper in the war against the Devil" (361).[7]

Harry meets the great man himself at the wedding party of Hugh Tremont Montague, the "harlot" of the title, based on the historical James Jesus Angleton, the CIA's own "super-spy". Montague has his own undefined domain of power in the Company, "an empire within an empire," as his friend Cal recognizes, He is the "spook's spook," created by Dulles to keep an

eye on everything and report directly to him: "That way [Dulles] would have a hedge against his own bureaucracy running things without him." (750) This independent figure, paradoxically created to override an unchecked bureaucracy, can threaten the organization by his very independence. The central, unresolved mystery of the novel is the body that all evidence points to as Montague's, or is the whole thing an elaborate hoax he himself has masterminded? Either way, the outcome is disastrous, as it implies that the master-spook, aware of everything going on, was unaware of a plot that made him its victim, or worse, that he has "turned" and become a Frankenstein's monster, a double-agent for the KGB.

Montague, Harry's godfather, protects him when he is afraid a reprimand will go on his permanent file (for failing to find some information for the West Berlin branch when still a clerk) by concocting a complicated procedure of altering cryptonyms so that Harry's real name cannot be traced. When Harry is himself sent to West Berlin, however, he discovers the (historical) station chief, William Harvey, has become obsessed with discovering the clerk, and Harry, who becomes Harvey's personal assistant, is set the paranoid task of discovering who he himself is while concealing it from his obsessive boss. A small deceit to stay out of trouble blossoms into a "structure" of untruth in which Harvey suspects him of being involved in a plot regarding the CIA's secret tunnel into the Soviet communications network. Once more, he has to call on his personal connection with Montague, outside of the official chain of command, to avoid getting in trouble..

Deceit is, of course, the source of power and principal *modus operandi* in the CIA's foreign operations, but the novel shows how pervasive it is even within the Company. Nobody tells the truth to his chief of station, who officially should have access to all officers' information, but he in turn holds out on his district chief, who holds out on his superiors in Wash-

ington. The method of sending/withholding information is called "double entry reporting." Even friends lie to one another. In the "panopticon" situation of central surveillance, officers must communicate to one another only through the central office, but spaces or locales are opened up when the officers use the system for personal use. At one point, Harry is simultaneously lying to his station chief, (the historical) Howard Hunt, Montague, and even his father, which gives him a feeling of power he has never experienced, an "extra-dimensionality." The main skill is being able to keep one's stories straight, without seeming too straight.. As Montague says: "One of the few rules you can count on in our work is that a story will conform in every detail to its earlier version only if the initial account has been artfully fabricated and carefully repeated " (358).

The novel's only truthful link is the letters Harry exchanges with the female officer, Kittredge, Montague's wife, with whom he is in love, in which he gives unauthorized details of his espionage work, but they are not completely truthful after all, as he withholds information compromising to his character. She, in turn, will deceive her husband with Harry, and later, Harry with Dix Butler, despite vows of fidelity to both. Deceit therefore pervades the characters' love relationships as well as their work. Montague makes a metaphorical connection between the two areas in a training lecture:

> "When a man seduces a woman, he may gain her not only by strength, but through weakness as well. That may even be seen as the commencement of love--honest interest in the other's strength and need. When seduction is inspired, however, by demands of power, each person will lie to the other. Sometimes they lie to themselves. These lies develop structures as aesthetically rich as the finest filigree of truth" (403).

Deceit becomes more serious at the national level. Montague says that the expected massive military attack across Europe by the Red Army--the reason, it should be added, for the U.S. military presence in Germany, the creation of the NATO defense alliance, and the

augmentation of the nuclear arsenal--was no longer credible as early as the mid-Fifties, but the CIA and the Pentagon could not let the public be aware of Soviet military weakness for fear that it might "go soft" (as the expression goes) on Communism. "Left to themselves, Harlot says, "they'd just as soon be friends with the Russians" (355). To forestall such an outcome--which would, conceivably, end the Cold War, remove the threat of nuclear holocaust, and save billions of dollars in defense expenditures--the CIA took it upon itself to lead a misguided people to a higher truth. Harlot teaches Harry that the true mission of the CIA is "to become the mind of America"(250), but "not a mind that verifies what is true and not true. The aim is to develop teleological mind. Mind that dwells above the facts; mind that leads to larger purposes" (355). These purposes larger than the truth are, of course, to be determined by the CIA.

The historical abuses of the CIA--interference in the internal affairs of foreign governments, including assassination attempts of leftists and covert support for rightist dictators, chemical experiments in brain-washing techniques, illegal tampering with the mails and wiretapping of American political figures, among many others, are justified by characters in the novel as "that transcendental wickedness that partakes of goodness because its aim is to gain the rightful day" (863). [8] "Communism is the entropy of Christ," Harlot explains. "To oppose it, we must, therefore, create a fiction..." (355). The ideologies of the U.S. as the military and spiritual savior of the world, the CIA as its instrument of secret opposition to the demonic deviousness of Communism, and an alleged higher necessity that cannot condescend to the truth, all come together here.

Mailer shows how it is common policy for ranking members of the Agency to get information on one another as ammunition for possible future power struggles. These are profes-

sionals trained to trust no one, who routinely use and change cover names and cryptonyms, give out misinformation, employ evasive action while traveling, and never discuss their job, so it is not surprising that a certain amount of paranoia is engendered. That is even part of a spy's necessary skills. As Montague explains, "The man with a talent for counter-espionage, the true artist, draws on his paranoia to perceive the beauties of his opponent's scenario" (372). Paranoia is the complement of cynicism, which is the distrust of too neat a story.

Harry moves through the post-war world as a small but integrated part of the Company's crusade: West Berlin; Latin America (Uruguay), where he helps bug the car of a leftist politician and film the love affair of a KGB agent with his boss's wife; Miami, to train Cuban exiles for the Agency's biggest public fiasco, the Bay of Pigs invasion (April, 1961). Of the Miami operations, Harry says: "Perhaps the best way to give you a conception of our power and emplacement here is to note the state and national laws that we are ready to bend, break, violate, and/or ignore. False information is given out routinely on Florida papers of incorporation; tax returns fudge the real sources of investment in our properties; false flight plans are filed daily with the FAA; and we truck weapons and explosives over Florida highways, thereby violating the Munitions Act and the Firearms Act, not to speak of what we do to our old friend Customs, Immigration, Treasury, and the Neutrality Act" (953). He doesn't mention, but Mailer depicts, the private war of clandestine raids on Cuba, sabotage, and assassination plots using Mafia gangsters, even after the Bay of Pigs that would finally end the Cold War.

Wilfred Sheed has complained of the "cartooney" aspect of the characters, the sheer silliness of their anti-Communism, but surely that is part of the point: this was the ideology of American political culture from McCarthyism to Vietnam, and up to the revolutions of Eastern Europe. Mailer's geo-political theories, in any case, have always been those of a maverick

provocateur. As Sheed recognizes, what made Mailer worth reading was "neither his knowledge of the human heart, which is variable, nor his global theories, but his overpowering intuition of men at war--with each other, with civilization, but best of all with and within the organizations created by and for themselves" (42). These "wars" are, precisely, the power struggles between individuals and institutions in their varied combinations.

The *raison d'être* for all the other conflicts in the novel, the Cold War itself, is relatively neglected, just as is the American-Japanese conflict in Mailer's World War II novel. Once again, Mailer wisely refrains from trying to adopt the point-of-view of the "other side," (the closest he comes, significantly, is the double-agent Chevy Fuertes, who is both sexually and politically ambiguous). The whole weight of Mailer's criticism is against how much power these overgrown schoolboys wield, and its often absurd applications in the name of the United States. One measure of the danger is the sheer size and international scale of its penetration. Harlot tells Harry about how the Company taps into everything: finance, media, labor relations, economic production. "Dwelling in an age of systems, we are obliged to draw experts from all fields: bankers, psychiatrists, poison specialists, art experts, public relations people, trade unionists, hooligans, journalists...we have liaison into every game that's going on in this country. Potentially, we can give direction to the land" (210-11). This touted hegemony is perhaps the message of a Mailer who once proposed a "people's CIA" to "guarantee everyone a piece of the paranoia" (qtd. by Sheed 41).

As for internal conflicts, some struggles take place as the result of the Company's being just another entrenched bureaucracy that seems to exist for its own sake. Since its business is gathering, containing, and deciphering secrets, the Agency's officers are even more turned back in on themselves than in other bureaus, in that their accountability to authority is com-

promised by the nature of their work, and power struggles are made more difficult insofar as they cannot be publicly acknowledged. Although the internal structure of the organization emphasizes central control--foreign stations, for example, cannot communicate with each other but must reroute communications through Washington--this control is difficult to maintain in the general atmosphere of secrecy and practices of both routine and elaborate deceit.

The many individual power struggles reflect both personal and institutional conflicts. Examples of the personal type are Harry vs. Dix (social class, homoerotic), Harry vs. Rosen (colleague competition), Harry vs. Cal (Oedipal); of the institutional type, Montague vs. Harvey, Harry vs. Harvey (i.e. subordinate/superordinate), Harvey vs. Bobby Kennedy (rival government bureaus), and yet each aspect is never in isolation. Thus, Montague and Harvey's mutual antipathy and opposite personal styles are played out against a background of independent power domains in the CIA, their having taken opposite sides in the British spy scandal, and Harvey's former position in the FBI. As for institutional conflicts, that between the CIA and FBI is in part territorial. By law, the CIA cannot do domestic spying, though it often oversteps legal boundaries, and CIA officers hold the FBI in contempt as crude blunderers (and as socially inferior). There is some concern that, since the two Agencies who ought to be working in concert often spy on one another, Harvey is in fact a plant by his former boss, J. Edgar Hoover, who, for his part, held power for decades by threats of revealing the contents of his voluminous secret dossiers on leading public figures. At the same time, Harvey is suspected (correctly) by the FBI of furnishing privileged information to the CIA.

Another "territorial" struggle is the CIA vs. the military. In one episode, Harvey gives a tour to a visiting general from the Pentagon of his top-secret "Catheter" tunnel into East Berlin. Despite his obsession with security, Harvey wants to show the military that the CIA's

operation is picking up more information than any operation in history: "Got to remind them of that. Got to keep them in their place" (279) The tunnel turns out, ironically, to be a great source of misinformation, when it is "discovered" and false information emitted by the Soviets. [9] Power for an intelligence operation is possession of information (i.e. knowledge), not the capacity for projecting force, which is properly military. Since the former makes the latter possible, it should have priority, but not overstep its bounds by executing military operations. This is in fact one of the more serious historical abuses of the CIA, an agency that was founded, it needs constant reminder, to gather information for governmental purposes. The conflict can be seen in the Miami episode, where Harvey's wild military operations directly oppose the policies of (the historical) Cold Warrior General Edward Landsdale, director of operation "Mongoose," the covert operations after the Bay of Pigs designed to destabilize Cuba. Landsdale is bent (as Montague had advised) on undermining Cuba rather than martyring it, a policy which, although almost equally despicable, is surely the more pragmatic, and likely to have come directly from Kennedy.

Perhaps the major institutional conflict, CIA vs. the State Department, is the most difficult to comprehend historically, the Agency being presumably subordinate to State and the information it gathers utilized by State in formulating foreign policy. Yet the novel makes clear that the Company constantly makes policy for its own ends, and its secrecy and public unaccountability tend toward bureaucratic autonomy. The US ambassador in Montevideo warns Hunt against stirring up trouble in a democratic country, which Hunt breezily ignores, and the whole business of Cuba in the second half of the novel revolves round the Company's totally independent --and disastrous--operations. The CIA even spies on its superiors in the State Department. Montague gets Rosen, a homosexual, to "turn" his sexual preference in

order to seduce and eventually marry the plain secretary of the State Department's Dean Rusk so that he can have access to Rusk's files.

Finally, the Company comes into conflict with the press, which can be summarized as public information vs. public misinformation. Reporters discover holes in the Agency's cover stories on secret Cuban exile bombing missions with CIA-furnished aircraft, and also blow the cover off the Bay of Pigs invasion. As a result of these (historical) failures being made public, a Congressional committee was set up to whom these independent warriors would be held accountable, and people began to ask why we needed an Agency engaged in covert operations in the first place, that it is folly to allow an organization with unregulated power, allegedly acting in the public interest, to operate without necessary and sufficient public controls that would prevent activity actually harmful to that interest. [10] Moral considerations aside, this is a pragmatic question. As an historian put it, in another context, "If we subvert world order and destroy world peace we must inevitably subvert and destroy our own political institutions" (Commanger).

In a recent article on the CIA's legacy, Thomas Powers has advanced the paradoxical argument that the CIA-KGB opposition actually prevented the Cold War from escalating into armed conflict, "so long as both sides [we]re good at discovering, but not too good at hiding, the secrets that really count." This is likely true with respect to nuclear weapons, since the balance of power achieved through mutual knowledge of their total destructive capacity actually prevented armed conflict between the two major powers. Powers also shows, however, how little the Agency really accomplished in its all-out effort to win the Cold War: much death and havoc but little actual good in Southeast Asia, Cuba, and Central America; its failure to predict major events such as the Soviet atom bomb, the North Korean and Chinese in-

vasions in Korea, the Hungarian Revolt, Castro's victory in Cuba and Krushchev's placement of missiles there, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the collapse of Soviet Communism and end of the Cold War itself.[11] In other words, the CIA failed in its alleged primary purpose of intelligence-gathering in nearly every historical event of significance since the Second World War. If fiction is said to "confront experience in its immediacy and closeness, while ideology is by its nature general and inclusive" (Howe 20), *Harlot's Ghost* has the merit of showing how such monumental failures were possible through the representation of one by the other.

e.

I have suggested that even though Mailer is one of the contemporary novelists in the US most committed to a critical examination of national politics, his notion of power does not solely signify political power, since he is interested also in personal and "natural" forms of power as sources of vitality and renewal. Here, there tends to be a struggle between the realization of the powers of self, its revelation or salvation, emerging triumphant from the socio-political strictures placed upon them, most clearly in *An American Dream* (1965). I have, in any case, discussed novels dealing with power in its broadly political senses--conflicts caused by repressive external forces, and power relations between individuals within organizations and between organizations at various levels of influence and complexity.

Mailer's general notion of power, formed as it was in the post-war period of late Forties and Fifties and the counter-cultural revolutions of the Sixties, is, as should be clear by now, one of repression by hegemonic powers, on the Weberian model, which in turn demands some sort of adversarial or oppositional response. At age twenty-five, Mailer campaigned for Henry Wallace, presidential candidate for the inexpressive Progressive Party, though even-

tually he became disillusioned with the party's alliance with the Communists. At the Waldorf Peace Conference in New York, Mailer said that both Soviet and American governments were imperialist, both concerned with dominating underdeveloped countries to secure new markets. His description of himself as a "radical conservative" may therefore have some substance, as his positions have tended to follow an individualist line in distrusting parties and ideologies of both left and right (in 1969, he ran for mayor of New York City on a secessionist platform, coming in next-to-last). The British novelist Anthony Burgess has observed that what makes Mailer's works interesting to foreign readers (his books have been translated into some twenty languages) is the "sense of protest or counterprotest" (qtd. by Bufithtis 278-79). Mailer's novels and essays confront, almost gleefully, "corporation-land," his perception of the US as a technocratoc, bureaucratic, politically repressive and militarily dangerous state, buttressed by its attendant pieties and fraudulent ideologies. To this (often vague) entity, he seems to be proposing in his fiction and non-fiction an unrelenting resistance.

The politics of resistance in popular American culture has been described as varied strategies of inversion, evasion, opposition, or disruption (Fiske 82). If these possibilities are adapted to Mailer's novels--which, to be sure, the author claims as examples not of popular art (though his novels have frequently been best-sellers) but works of serious literature--"evasion" or "opposition" are the strategies adopted by the protagonists in the novels, excepting the last, *Harlot's Ghost*, where the protagonist is actually part of the system. A potentially radical strategy, "disruption," is found only in *Armies of the Night*, whose protagonist "Mailer," however, slyly oscillates between evasion and disruption. The protagonists in the novels, always the resourceful, independent male of the traditional American canon, typically struggles against some repressive power or is caught in the contradictions attendant upon such

a struggle--an opposition, therefore, more in Durkheim's rather than Marx's sense. If I have sometimes schematized these conflicts in my readings in the form of "x vs. y," it is to simplify their complexity to more easily show their number and variety, and especially to point up the oppositional nature of Mailer's perception of power, its Weberian conception as an essentially conflictual relation.

In *The Naked and the Dead*, the power of military command, i.e. power legitimated by institutional structure and tradition, is both at its highest and lowest levels subverted by individuals (Cummings and Croft) who would go beyond their legitimate institutional functions toward a transcendent omnipotence, an epic *hybris* that is brought low not by their own flaws of character, still intact at the end, but by the impersonal forces of naturalism and chance. Resistance to power in this novel is shown as futile (Hearn is in turn put in danger by Cummings, killed by Croft), given the rigidly hierarchical structure of the military organization in which individual resistance is both structurally and traditionally impossible, as well as by the protagonist's personal shortcomings--his inability to appreciate the formidable resources and motivation of his controllers'.

Armies of the Night would seem to posit a collective resistance of opposition and disruption to a hegemonic regime of government-Pentagon-courts and its ideologically duped allies (brutal cops, Nazi anti-demonstrators, hostile conservative public). And yet the novel is largely a (distinctly American) study of, first, the possibility of collective action and the individual resistance to that possibility ("Mailer's" conflicts with his political allies, or at least his concentration not on political alliance but on their personal characteristics, i.e. his repugnance at their personalities and his sympathy with his natural enemies), and, second, his rewriting of the self, the multiple Mailers, as an act of will rather than the self as socially

constituted. In this most political of his novels, it is therefore fair to say that "he interprets the march on the Pentagon as an existential event filtered through the schizophrenic consciousness of a fictionalized Self" (Schaub 74). But does this mean, as one favorable critic has said, that in this novel Mailer, "finally acknowledged the limitations of radical individualism" by the satirizing of his own persona as existential hero?" (Van Leer 493). Or does it rather mean that Mailer seems to be unaware that he has, as an unfavorable critic would have it, "forfeited any political territory" in his emphasis on the psychology of character and society? (Schaub 73). In this respect, the rise of the New Left, celebrated by Mailer in the novel as the beginning of a new politics, reflects his rejection of a class-based analysis of social problems in favor of a psychological approach that cuts across class distinctions (Fiske 10). Such a rejection, on the other hand, need not imply a rejection of politics. A non-class based form of resistance has been called "poststructural opposition," with unfixed and unstable social categories that are formed strategically and tactically according to issues more in accord with fluid American conditions (Fiske 9).

Finally, in *Harlot's Ghost*, no position of resistance is attempted, as the novel takes place inside the enemy camp, as it were. The false ideology of the Cold War is rather exposed in a third-person narrative of Harry's education in the CIA, and the power of governmental bureaus in examinations of their internecine conflicts. To summarize the conflictual fates of the protagonist of each of the novels I have analyzed, then, it can be said that, in the first novel he is destroyed, in the next two he flees in one and submits in the other, and in the last, he is already part of the system. Only does *Armies of the Night* suggest a revolutionary stance, but even in that novel it is more of an ironic posture than a political position. The struggle is comically in tune with the perceived realities of American power and Mailer's personal rela-

tion to them, though it may also be suggested, as sympathetic critics have done, that Mailer is really showing that political activism cannot truly result from individual rebellion, or that, given the realities of American power, literature rather than political activism is a more viable means of resistance.

In this overview, it would seen that from the evidence of his novels Mailer is aware of the limitations of the individual as a source of resistance. As I have suggested, this may be not only a question of individual weakness but a condition of society. The social fragmentation of contemporary American reality has prevented the unity of "anti-systemic" forces in effective organizations, as Jameson argues, so that ethnic groups, student, labor, neighborhood and regional organizations, feminists, and counter-cultural movements of various types have not been able to coordinate their several oppositions politically, even if what John Fiske calls "localizing" or "bottom up" power has often been effective in specific locales and on specific issues (Jameson, *Pol. Unconscious* 54, nt.; Fiske 11f.).

In *The Authoritarian State* (1942), Max Horkheimer examined the question of resistance of thought, subjectivity, and the individual to the oppression of larger systems. For Horkheimer, this desire for revolution is not found in any place in society, for it is of the reason, which belongs to the individual. Critical conscience can no longer be conceived as theoretical knowledge of the laws of history (as in Marxism) but as the practical experience of suffering. In a mass society, this suffering is of "the isolated individual, who is not ordered or covered by any power" (qtd. by Ferry 505-6). In a totalitarian system, the dominated classes are the victims only in the beginning; later, blood flows from all the people irrespective of classes. For this reason, the place of resistance has become the isolated individual, whose only weapon is the word. Although this is a philosophical position developed in the midst of

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the war, it seems to fit Mailer's situation fairly well. He knows, or least shows in his work, that despite the impotence of the individual as actor in the face of American socio-political reality, as a writer he in fact possesses real power. In this regard, "he resembled many of his postmodern contemporaries, who viewed direct political action with skepticism while preserving literature as a means of patiently investigating the nearly hopeless social and political conditions of our lives" (Rowe 183).

Yet, it is at least questionable whether Mailer, even as a writer, is as radical as he seems to have wished. Thomas Shaub (who calls his chapter on Mailer "Rebel without a Cause") argues that Mailer's radical intentions were in fact undermined by the post-war discourse of the liberal culture he claims to have repudiated (138). Mailer, who once declared himself a socialist, is, as argued above, really closer to a "radical-conservative" individualist. Along with other former radical artists and intellectuals in the US who came to adulthood in the Forties, Mailer had a vision of socialism but no revolutionary party to execute it. Roosevelt's New Deal was, as we have seen, not nearly as radical as its opponents had charged. By1948, the year of the publication of Mailer's first novel, for example, the presidential victory of the Democrat, Harry Truman, "signified the willingness of labor to work within the compromises offered them by government and business" (Schaub 144). By the Sixties, Mailer's attitude toward the New Left, the only potentially revolutionary class since the Thirties, is ambiguous, and in his work he looks to individualist types-- tough, creative loners--for a response to repression, an outlook that Schaub says has its purest form in the essay "The White Negro" (1959), in which Mailer attempts to radicalize the "hipster" as nihilistic individual, a romantic stand-in for a revolutionary class. This effort to substitute psychology for politics "was also one of the fundamental strategies of liberal retrenchment in the face of Hit-

ler and Stalin in the thirties," a "*psychologization* of cultural analysis" and social history that was to prove so influential in the next few decades (Schaub 133-45, 147, my emphasis), beginning with Wilhelm Reich's analysis of Fascism (1933), and finding the most popular expressions in Erich Fromm's *Escape to Freedom* (1941) and David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). In Shaub's view, Mailer too gives in to the "liberal consensus," i.e. he shares in the conformist values he so often rails against. While this judgment may be too extreme, there is no doubt that Mailer psychologizes politics, as in, for example, all three of his Sixties novels. At the end of section (a) of this chapter, I quoted Mailer's rebellious statement to the symposium on American culture in which he maintained that the modern artist is "almost always in opposition to their society." The quote continues: "and that integration, acceptance, non-alienation, etc., have been more conducive to propaganda than art" ("Our Country" 299). The statement taken entire both reaffirms the modernist notion of the artist as someone set apart from his society and the notion of an art that is inherently anti-ideological and, as such, he reaffirms the post-war liberal discourse of an art distinct from a political art (Schaub 61).

As I also suggested in section (a) of this chapter, Mailer has always tried to reconcile or neutralize the polarities of self and world, public and private, by maintaining the tension between them. As Bufithis puts it: "In Mailer's world to test oneself against any implacable power is to be caught visibly in contradictions" (289). Sacvan Berkovitch has argued (with respect to Hawthorne), that the only plausible modes of dissent in the US center on the self, radicalism as interpreted through "polar unities at the heart of American liberalism: fusion and fragmentation...process through closure" (31), which would, to be sure, suggest that the system has in advance co-opted any possible resistance and Mailer has been caught in a struggle to overcome such determinations. In any case, although Mailer's earliest critics,

writing in the McCarthy era, found him dangerously subversive, it can be argued from hindsight that his maintaining the tension between irreconcilable forces is better able to contain conflict than release it. Poirier may be saying more than he means when he says that "[t]he form by which Mailer tries to accommodate diverse and often contradictory feelings finally *takes better care* of frightening impulses both in the self and in society than do the essentially repressive forms subscribed to less critically and often unconsciously by those who charge him with irresponsibility" (Mailer 11, my emphasis). Mailer himself says somewhere that metaphor "exists to contain contradictions," which may be a key to both his aesthetic and political styles.

NOTES

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[1] In a later article in the same journal, Aijaz Ahmad (3-35) thoroughly dismantles this argument with respect to so-called Third World Literatures.

[2] Frederick R. Karl, in contrast to most critics, sees the novel as essentially "about" Croft, whom he calls a "principle of pure being" (Karl 97). As my analysis shows, however, Cummings and Croft are paralleled in character and narrative structure.

[3] I owe the latter suggestion to Professor Sergio Bellei.

[4] Other, highly favorable reviews are: Richard Gilman, "What Mailer Has Done," *The New Republic* (June 8, 1968) 28, and "Hand on the Pulse of America," *Saturday Review* (May 4, 1968) 25-6.

[5] Louis Menand ("From Here to Eternity" 113) sees the novel as a synthesis of Mailer's familiar obsessions (Marilyn Monroe, Kennedy), a psychological study with a new theory of personality ("Alpha-Omega"), an essay on good and evil, an investigative report on the US's secret government, a novel of manners about the American WASP, and a love story. Although

an argument could be made for all of these, I have naturally concentrated on the political angle of the "secret government." Mailer, in this novel, as in the latter two Sixties novels, employs postmodernist techniques: the textual play of embedded manuscripts, mixed genres, mingling of historical and fictional characters, and the refusal of closure (Ryan 54).

[6] Menand thinks that this is what the novel is really about. Mailer does make much of the importance of family connections for the main characters and of the snobbishness of Montague and Kittredge in their scorn of the social pretentiousness of social interlopers like Howard Hunt. In my view, the social connections help establish the CIA as an institution of the power-elite.

[7] The most recent biography of Allen Dulles is Peter Grosse, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

[8] Thomas R. Edwards (44 *et passim*) has given a fanciful reading of the novel as a Miltonic work, in which "intelligence" is spirit as well as information, with the Agency God the father and its networks archangels. For this point, see also Menand (116).

[9] Historically, the tunnel was not discovered as the novel relates but betrayed to the Soviets by the famous spy George Blake, who worked for Soviet intelligence. Cf. Blake's recent autobiography, written from exile in Moscow, *No Other Choice: The Cold War Memories of the Ultimate Spy* (Simon & Shuster, 1993).

[10] It is noteworthy that Mailer himself founded (in 1974) an organization called the Fifth Estate, a citizen's group established to investigate the CIA and the FBI.

[11] Angleton, for example, thought that the recent demise of Communism in Eastern Europe was a massive Soviet hoax, which must be the most incredible example of paranoia in recent American history.

PART THREE - POWER IN THE POSTMODERNIST NOVEL

INTRODUCTION

a.

In the introduction to *City of Words* (1971), reflecting on contemporary (i.e. 1950-70) fictional themes, Tony Tanner wrote:

> there is an abiding dream in American literature that an unpatterned, unconditioned life is possible, in which your movements and stillnesses, choices and repudiations are all your own; and there is also an abiding American dread that someone else is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action, that conditioning is ubiquitous (15).

The dream of unfettered freedom and the nightmare of control, which one might call, respectively the romantic and the conspiratorial modes, are, as Tanner says, "abiding" features of the American novel, and yet in the context of the post-war years, the fear of control, "conditioning," have become especially important. These two opposing perceptions of power, in the form of social restraint and individual liberation have been integral to William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* and to Mailer's three novels of the Sixties (*An American Dream* is an example of both dream and dread in the same novel). The suspicion of some grand conspiracy and its attendant paranoia are socio-psychological phenemona that again become important in the innovative Sixties fiction of Barth, Pynchon, and DeLillo, whose works will be examined in subsequent chapters.

The two perceptions of freedom and control are opposed but not unrelated. Tanner thinks that the illusion of freedom is related to the long-held belief of Americans that their country is uniquely free of the cultural molding of older societies in Europe, and the dread of control to the more current feeling that undefined patterns interfere with their direct contact

with experience. One could plausibly argue that these polar experiences of freedom and dread are responses to the social and political situation of the US after the Second World War, that is, from the late Forties through the Fifties and early Sixties, when a new historical configuration began to emerge.

The familiar idea of the US as a special place has, of course, been part of American mythology since colonial times. The lure of the boundless frontier, the sense of a unique historical mission, the feeling of escape from the social and political restrictions of the Old World, the widespread sense of limitless possibility, in short, the composite elements of the American Dream were there from the beginning and yet were constantly added to and reinterpreted in the course of American history. With the decisive participation of the US in the two Euro-Asian world wars, however, American political and economic power attained a dimension hitherto unknown in the national experience. The immense wartime productive capabilities remained intact for the economic expansion of the post-war peace that would bestow on the American people an unparalleled material prosperity, while American politicians took leading roles in all major international decisions, making and breaking the fates of less powerful nations. In short, the wars that had devastated Europe and Asia, by the fortunes of geography and historical event, made the United States even stronger, with a heady consciousness of itself as a super-power, policeman to the world, an example to be either feared or emulated.

At the same time, other realities underlying this new status and its benefits were moving in their inexorable way toward a growing sense of fear and impotence, fueled by the series of ominous political and military events in the late Forties and Fifties that I have outlined above (cf. Introduction to Part Two). The feeling on the international front that things were out of

control was not alleviated by the domestic phenomenon of McCarthyism and its obsessions with national security, which in the circumstances became "national insecurity": the concern for atomic secrets and communist conspiracies in high places that led to the trials of Judith Coplin, Alger Hiss, Klaus Fuchs, and the Rosenbergs. As we have seen, McCarthy's witch-hunt for subversives in Eisenhower's government, the constant disclosure of alleged security risks, and the illegal wire-tapping of suspects by the F.B.I. all ran unchecked in a nation that had always prided itself on its concern for individual freedom. Abroad, American fear of Communist-inspired revolution was and for decades thereafter has been what Hannah Arendt calls "the hidden *lietmotif* of postwar American policy with its desperate attempts at stabilization of the *status quo*, with the result that American power and prestige were used and misused to support obsolete and corrupt political regimes that since had long become objects of hatred and contempt among their own citizens" (*On Rev.* 217).

Economically, too, the Fifties saw the beginning of the end of older industries (coal, railroads, textiles) and the corresponding rise of giant corporations (IBM, Xerox) and growth industries (synthetics and plastics, electronics), with larger firms swallowing up smaller and corporate wealth and power becoming increasingly concentrated. General Motors, for example, had assets greater than any US state and many foreign countries. By the Sixties, the power of the banks and multinational corporations became consolidated and half of the federal government's revenues went to the military. Capitalist expansion led large firms outside their customary markets into unfamiliar areas of enterprise in the search of new profits (e.g. Knopf publishers became part of the RCA empire; Gulf Oil came to control film distribution). The old entrepeneurial dream of individual effort and gradually increasing success gave way

to a perception of the dehumanizing social and political realities of the "warfare/welfare state" (Dubovksy et al. 415-37).

Two traditional institutions, agriculture and the universities, are illustrative of how American consciousness had radically changed. The pastoral myth of the independent small farmer suffered a series of fatal blows, as small farmers were forced into bankruptcy by falling prices and high costs. Government subsidies to corporate farms also contributed to the rise of huge agri-businesses. And by the Sixties, the academic myth of the intellectual "ivory tower" yielded to an increasing perception by radical students and social critics that the university was an integral part of a militarist, imperialist government, as evidenced by compulsory military (R.O.T.C.) training on campus, the development of high-tech weapons systems by physicists and engineers, the colaboration of social scientists in developing counter-revolutionary techniques, and perhaps most significant, the professional rotation of high-level corporate, governmental, and university personnel. Charles Kadushin, who conducted interviews in 1970 on the political attitudes of university professors during the preceding decade, found that "less than half of [the] respondents wanted to get out of the Vietnam war immediately, most were opposed to Black Power, and an overwhelming majority were hostile to the New Left" (qtd. by Draper 33). The conclusion was that most of the nation's intellectual elite supported the prevailing socio-political order.

1964, the year of the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, which initiated widespread US campus unrest, and of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which initiated US military action in Vietnam, was the real beginning of a turbulent decade that would see the rise of recreational drug-use and rock-and-roll counterculture at home and the escalation of the Vietnam conflict to unforeseen proportions abroad. When Lyndon Johnson, who became President after Ken-

nedy's assassination (1963), ordered the bombing of North Vietnam (1965), the opposition to his foreign policy soon nullilfied his socially progressive domestic program. Worse was to come: more assassinations (Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King), more civil strife, more committment to a deteriorating war, for which explanations were offered that proved as futile as those found during the Korean conflict. Conspiracy theories, which proliferated after Kennedy's assassination, abounded in the prevailing political climate, nor did they substantially diminish in the Seventies. Paranoid social critics like Bertrand Gross believe that fascism will not come to the US in the heavy-handed military coups of Eastern Europe or Latin America but in a "friendly" or insidious disguise: the continued practice of co-opting disruptive elements into the system, an increased governmental tolerance for and use of drugs as social control, the infiltration of suspected subversives and their organizatons. Although it is to be questioned, however, whether such practices ought to be labelled "Fascist," since that term has a more or less specific historical reference, there is doubtless something to be feared in new forms of power and the benevolent "faces" of government, corporations, and the media. These are the preoccupations of writers like Barth, Pynchon, and DeLillo.

b.

Marshall Berman divides "aesthetic modernism" of the 1960s into three broad tendencies, which are distinguished by the overall "attitude" of the artist with respect to modern life. The first tendency is that which attempts to free itself of, or withdraw from, modern life in the direction of the purely aesthetic or formal, which Berman criticizes as "the freedom of a beautifully formed, perfectly sealed tomb" (30). While one can imagine a painter or even a poet taking such an attitude, it is difficult to think of any examples of novelists who might embody it. Even those novelists who concentrate on inner or private experience can ignore but

not evade the social context. Henry James, usually regarded as the paragon for a formal aesthetics for the modern novel, was by no means anxious to ignore society; on the contrary, formal mastery is intended, he tells us, to render "life" more fully.

The second tendency Berman finds is a permanent revolution against "the totality of modern existence," Lionel Trilling's "adversary culture" (Berman 30), which can be taken as the modernist project. The artist seeks to counteract the fragmentation, alienation, and decadence of modern industrial societies by clinging to "the special integrity of personal consciousness or style" (Rowe 165), in which the individual, whose existence is perceived to be threatened by the forces of dehumanization, is the moral, psychological and spiritual center. William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, and Norman Mailer could be cited as contemporary examples of this attitude, writers who came on the literary scene in the 1950s, when the European models of existentialism, the absurd, and individual alienation had a strong intellectual and emotional appeal in the US. In the 1960s, the anti-authoritarian implications of these obsessively personal themes would become clear in a more politicized social climate, and these three novelists especially would oppose a concept of "totalitarianism" implicit in Berman's notion of totality (cf. Chapts. 5 & 6). Berman also rejects this attitude as destructive without being correspondingly constructive, which, however, reiterates simplistic conservative criticisms in the Sixties of proposed revolutionary attitudes or programs. For these writers, it might be countered, destruction means not the tearing down of civilized institutions it has taken so long to build, the classic conservative fear, but "the destruction of some false or deceptive form of experience as the productive condition of the construction of a new relation to the object" (Benjamin & Osborne xi). These two artistic attitudes might be designated, in the terms of Berman's own discussion, withdrawal and negativity, respectively, since he sees

them both as rejections of the contemporary world, to which he opposes a third, affirmative, attitude in the tendency which espouses an erasure of the boundaries between art and other cultural activity, such as technology, politics, and entertainment. This tendency he calls (or rather, he says that artists "called themselves") postmodernist, which critics have characterized as either rupture or continuity with modernism.

Leslie Fiedler first proposed (1969) postmodernist literature as a radical break of novelists like Barth and Vonnegut who merged different genres and embraced popular forms (Connor 108-9). Other theorists, like Ihab Hassan, see postmodernism as just another phase of the rejection of formalism that can be perceived in certain strains of modernism itself (Connor 109), and Berman evidently considers it a growth out of, or synthesis of, the other two Sixties' modernisms rather than a completely separate tendency. Umberto Eco has described the process as a moment when the avant-garde can go no further, at which point a reaction sets in, which may be a conservative retrenchment, the normal production of popular art that goes on without heeding experimental modes, or it may be other than a simple reversal: it may be a dialectical response to the avant-garde, recognizing that the past cannot be destroyed without a logical progression into silence but must be revisited ironically (Hoestery 243). In any case, this tendency is chronologically identified with the Sixties, while the other two modernist tendencies may go back to the Twenties, if not earlier.

The virtue of the postmodernist attitude, however, Berman thinks may be its defect, for it goes too far in its "openness to the modern world." He apparently means that too much openness is capitulation, with a critical refusal "to see and say that some of the powers of this world have got to go" (32). Most other critics, however, see postmodernism as socially critical and politically engaged. Jose Saldivar thinks that postmodern theory is not homogeneous

but a theory in which political contestation is central (521). Linda Hutcheon agrees that it is at least potentially subversive since its "initial concern" is "to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life" (2).

Like modernism, the distinctive characteristics of postmodernism must be seen in relation to both literary history and the immediate cultural context (Chabot 31). Martin Jay sees postmodernism as "a fluid network of proliferating and incommensureable *differances* [Derrida's term] which escape reduction to a finite number of common denominators" (Jay 99). Anti-differentiation implies the abolishing of the modernist institutional self-sufficiency and by extension the reintegration of art into society, which in turn implies a demystifying of the artist as high-priest of the modern world. As Hutcheon says, postmodernism was made possible by modernism's irony, ambiguity, self-referentiality, parody, attention to language, and attack on realist representation, but it contests modernism's ideology of artistic autonomy, individual expression, and separation of art from mass culture and everyday life (15). This anti-differentiating impulse is perhaps the most characteristic feature (or at least most-agreed upon characteristic feature) of postmodernism, which its champions see as democratic and even revolutionary, in contrast to the radical formal inventiveness but ideological traditionalism or even Fascism of modernist writers (Conrad, Pound, Eliot, Yeats, Ford, Woolf) (Connor 104). In modernism, the ideological representation of capitalism that has completely emerged is there with no *prior history* (Donongo 185).

The revolutionary character of postmodernism is, however, not without its difficulties. In relation to history, for example, postmodernism is said to have an abstract conception of the historical process (Rowe 185), a "vulgar deconstructionist paritextualism" or "indiscriminate *differance*" said to arise from the undecideability of all language (Jay 105, 107). Connor's

description of the "dissolution of the universal perspective" of modernism (80), which accords with an "incredulity toward metanarratives" of science and social science that Lyotard (xxiv) finds most characteristic of postmodernism becomes, for Rorty, a neo-conservative incredulity toward all metanarratives that threatens the basis of any legitimacy (Rorty, "Habermas" 84). The promise of reintegration of literature with life must also be qualified somewhat by the ambivalence of the postmodernist writer about the potential of literature for achieving social transformation, the utopian hopes of modernism's transvaluation of the age. Rowe says that postmodernism makes the more modest claim (perhaps in view of modernism's failure in this respect) of a more critical understanding of contemporary society, especially the determination of thought and value by language (182). Linda Hutcheon, with respect to previous dreams of critical autonomy, points to postmodernism's recognition that "there is no value-neutral, much less value-free, place from which to represent in any art form. And there never was" (46). She claims that postmodernism is a "complicitous critique," in that it paradoxically legitimizes culture while it subverts it (15). Postmodernism denaturalizes both realist assumptions of transparency and modernism's self-sufficiency, while retaining in its complicitous way the historical power of both--hence, its ambivalent politics (34).

With respect to literature, what Berman sees as a question of attitude toward the modern world might be supplemented by the postmodern attitude toward aesthetic formalism. The literary works of "high modernism," which reach their acme in the 1920s, were self-conscious rejections of 19th century Realism with its outdated repertorial methods of "capturing life" by attempting to record it. Highly elaborate structure is the hallmark of modernist architecture (planes and surfaces), music (tones and sounds), painting (form and texture), and literature (linguistic organization). In literary criticism, the American New Critics, whose key critical

terms were ambiguity, tension, and paradox, stressed the integrity of the lyric poem and the felicities of its tight, concise form, as literary model, banishing context as irrelevant. In the novel, the stress was on "subjectivist relativism" and individual consciousness (Connor 107). It is not too difficult to connect this individualist and formalist view of art with the oft-noted political conservatism or mild liberalism of the New Critics and to the curious absence of their interest in the contemporary novel, with its sprawling formlessness, notorious delight in "content," and, most recently, problematizing of the conscious self. It is also noteworthy that the supreme work of literary high modernism in English, Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is not only elaborately, even forbiddingly structured, but is also a novel that outdoes Realism itself in the detailed effort to reproduce a time and a place in language. It is to the point that this historicizing impulse in *Ulysses* is held in tension with the anti-historicizing tendency of the mythical parallels.

Postmodernism in literature, then, cannot be seen just as an open or positive attitude toward the world, as Berman says (surely, *Ulysses* is a much better example of that), but as an anti-differentiation, which in one aspect is a reaction to the formalist view of art whose emphasis on aesthetic abstraction tends to favor a clear-cut distinction between high-brow and popular art, and a rejection or revision of the modernist idea that "the various arts have their own essential qualities" (Menand, "Finding" 16). In postmodernist works, textuality becomes more important than subjectivity, i.e. the conjured worlds of fiction are not so much distorted through the lenses of consciousness but dependent on their own textual mechanisms (Connor, 125). Louis Menand distinguishes between this aesthetic of form and literary devices. William H. Gass, for example, is a literary formalist, "an aesthete" in the tradition of Joyce even as he is the contemporary of Barth, Pynchon, and Barthelme, for whom "the aesthetic" is "just

one more ideology of modernism, one more discourse to be parodied, pilloried and debunked." And yet, in Gass's most recent novel, he does not hesitate to employ postmodernist devices (Menand, "Journey" 10). Stylistic characteristics often attributed to postmodernism include a prevailing mode of pastiche, self-conscious playfulness in language, a mixture of high and low discourses that imply the removal of a barrier between popular and high art, a mixture or indeterminacy of genre, and the pervasivness of irony, the rhetorical analogue of intellectual skepticism regarding social and political praxis (Rowe 184). Unlike Rowe, Alan Wilde sees irony not as a distinctive but as a differentiating feature: in modernism, irony is an "unresolvable paradox" which the ironist attempts to resolve by "aesthetic closure" (10, 21). In postmodernism, by contrast, the world is ironically perceived not as merely fragmented but as random and contingent, a condition for which no closure is attempted but is merely accepted (27). Ingrid Hoesterey posits a lack of center owing to an insecurity amid a plurality of discourses as the motive force behind literary postmodernism ("Introduction" xiv). With this refusal to contain incoherence, there is less emphasis on aesthetic ordering and formal organization and an increased tolerance for randomness, multiplicity, and uncertainty (Wilde 45; Connor 115), "the plurality of conflicting formations" (Koslowski 146).

Postmodernist literature is also characterized by a self-consciousness of narrators and characters, who often comment on themselves as literary constructs. The subject, which Foucault posits as a construction of the power discourses of an epoch, is, for postmodernist literature, a verbal fiction, "a literary character in that ultimate novel, history" (Rowe 185). The "historiographical assumption" of postmodernism is the textual nature of history which made it accessible to adaptation and revision (186). This points to postmodernism's return to and use of narrative. While Jameson identifies the "revolutionary" break with the "repressive"

ideology of storytelling a postmodernist trait ("Politics of Theory" 54), Hutcheon argues, to the contrary, that this is a misconception that shows the "danger of defining the postmodern in terms of (French or American) anti-representational late modernism, as so many do" (50). As Hayden White says, the postmodern "is informed by a problematic, if ironic, committment to narrative as one of its enabling presuppositions" (qtd. by Hutcheon 50). Hutcheon insists that postmodernism does not repudiate narrative, as late modernism does, but problematizes it. There is in fact a return to narrative, which, as we shall see with Barth and others, is not straightforward. In both historical and literary postmodern representation, the doubleness remains; there is no sense of the historian or novelist reducing the past to the present and there is no dialectical resolution. The boundaries remain even though they are challenged (71-72).

Menand has recently argued that anti-formalism or anti-essentialism is not, as is often supposed, primarily the work of abstruse philosophical and literary theory, the high-brow postmodernism one is familiar with from contemporary French theorists and their epigones, but an earlier, "cultural work" of middle-brow American artists, that is, "accessible figures who played to a large nonacademic audience": Pauline Kael (film criticism), Andy Warhol (painting), Tom Wolfe (journalism), and Norman Mailer (fiction). Menand thinks that the liberation of art from abstract modernist principles was in fact a great achievement of American culture of the 1960s (17). There does seem to be a postmodernism in literature, at least, that preceded theoretical postmodernisms of current critical debate. Rowe distinguishes the fictional and critical postmodernisms. The first, which he dates from 1965 to 1975, is (Menand's) American literary experimentation, but the beginnings could be moved back to the beginning of the Sixties or even slightly before if one is to accomodate Burroughs, Vonnegut, and Barth, who are the first innovative novelists of the decade. The second, which Rowe

calls "poststructural and deconstructive scholarly approaches," is the advanced French theory of the academy, covering roughly the next decade (1975-85), which feminist and African American scholars have more recently appropriated for their own uses but which has been very influential for literarary and general cultural criticism. Rowe even posits a "third" post-modernism to cover socio-economic and political phenemona, but this turns out to be what other critics identify as "post-industrial society" from the Sixties to the present, with the great importance of a service (over production) economy, and the rise of a society dominated by information and mass-media. A society of smaller scattered powers, as C. Wright Mills said back in the Fifties, became a mass society, in which people had few ties in the community to counteract monopoly control from powerful centers, "which being partially hidden," became "centers of manipulation as well as authority" (*Power Elite* 237). Connor identifies this as "postmodernity," which is distinct from the postmodernism which the main postmodernist theorists have discussed (27). Jameson relates the two in his observation that the Sixties was the culmination of the transition from monopoly to multinational capitalism and that postmod-ernism is the cultural experience of this economic phase which also paralleled great social upheavals ("Periodizing" 78; Chabot 32). Postmodernist culture results from what he calls the "cultural logic" of late (i.e. multinational) capitalism and its commodification of represen-tation itself, with an ever increasing production and relentless consumption of cultural forms. Jameson sees this culture as characterized by depthlessness and a decentering of the self, in which image, signifier, surface (as opposed to modernist depth) and simulacrum reign su-preme

c.

If the Sixties is the beginning of postmodernism in American fiction, civil rights, in the early part of the decade, and the Vietnam War, in the later part, were the great historical events that shaped radical consciousness in the form of the political "New Left." It is noteworthy, however, that the radical literary experimentalists in fiction of the time--Barth, John Hawkes, Ronald Sukenik, etc.--neglected or "marginalized" these questions in their work (Rowe 183). The need for a more politicized art and criticism became even more evident in the Seventies and Eighties, with the rise of a "New Right": the "nouveau philosophes" in France, the conservative political ideologies and economic policies of Reaganism and Thatcherism in the US and Great Britain. The right tended to adopt a rhetoric of liberty and transcendent subjectivity, but the leading conservative philosopher in the US, Robert Nozick, for example, developed a minimal-state, maximum rights theory that is really a theory of anarchism in the Thoreauvian tradition that cannot justly be appropriated by right-wing ideologies of unimpeded individual greed. The libertarian rhetoric of the right could not disguise their desperate calls for hierarchy, discipline, and authority. Since 1968, criticism has been directed, however, not against reactionary positions but mainly against liberalism. Where the conservative image of the self as inherited and trained meshes with a radical view is, according to some commentators, in the recognition of the ubiquity of power and interdependent levels of enforcement. Where they differ is that the conservative stance is not a critique of power but a call to submission.

As was seen in Chapt. 4, this anti-liberal stance can be seen in Norman Mailer, the novelist who most squarely faced political conflict and who, in his Sixties novels, employed postmodernist techniques even though his social vision and political stances remained rooted

in the Fifties. Other novelists, both more traditional (Ken Kesey) and more experimentalist (Vonnegut, Heller) took an apparently radical view of social transformations but, in the end, as shall be seen in Chapter 5, unlike Mailer they tended to evade political implications in an unconscious movement toward a liberal consensus. And yet, these novelists were important in their creation of "literary disruptions" (Jerome Klinkowitz's 1975 term) that undermined modernist tradition and its representations. Raymond Federman sees the the disruptions as formalistic, with the new fiction attempting to explode the modernist myths and stable symbols, and, perhaps beginning with Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, as seeking to drive a wedge between official discourse and the subjects who receive it ("Self-Reflexive Fiction" 1147-48). There would be greater distrust of establishment discourses and the manipulation of history by the mass media and the disappearance of the unequivocal realtion between the real and the imaginary. Reality is shown to be "a fraudulent verbal network" in which it makes no sense to replace one set of illusions for another. Literary targets included the Southern and the Jewish novel, which were perceived as discourses of moral responsibility, guilt, and a silent agreement with official discourse (1152). Federman sees the new self-reflexive writers (i.e. from about 1968 on) as important for their denouncing of language itself as perpetuating lies and illusions, though even older writers, such as Burroughs and Vonnegut had been doing this a decade or so earlier.

Burroughs's restless formal experimentation, his apparent quest for the limits of his medium, are, in one sense, the essence of modernism: the autonomous subjectivity and self-reflexivity and the attempt to break free from the linear structures of realism through random, free-associated blocks of images reminiscent of modern poetry. In the later works he employs the "cut up" and "fold in" methods of composition that he learned from Brion Gysin, a painter:

radical extensions of the juxtaposition of images, essentially a verbal collage technique. These formalist methods and experiments are analogous to those of modernist artists like Pound, Eliot, John Cage, Merce Cunningham (none of whom, it may be noted, are novelists).

At the same time, there are a number of postmodernist features in Burroughs' fiction, which have given his work the status of a prototype in contemporary literary history. For example, Burroughs draws on and mixes a variety of genres, such as Gothic and detective fiction, science-fiction, spy novels, Westerns, pornography, and popular arts like movies. Jennie Skerl even calls *Naked Lunch* (1962) a "pop-art novel," which, along with the collage technique (used ironically) by the Pop artists of the early Sixties, "uses powerful pop icons" for its primary imagery, in the manner of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichenstine (54). It is to the point here that Pop Art is considered an anti-modernist movement, an early manifestation, as it were, of post-modernism (Hoesterey, "Introduction" x), and emerged at the same time that *Naked Lunch*, touted by Mailer and Mary McCarthy, was being read by a larger public. In addition, Burroughs' characters are postmodernist caricatures, flattened "loci" of impersonal forces, quite different from the introspective characters of classic modernist novels (Skerl 50, 55). There is in *Naked Lunch* the now familiar tendency to reduce the novel of depth to the cartoon of surface. Even when writing in the first-person, Burroughs precludes introspection by objectifying and distancing his persona (compare Kurt Vonnegut, whose narrative persona has taken on an increasingly personal tone). With other distinctive stylistic and thematic characteristics, such as the mixing of discourses (e.g. farcical American accents and techno-bureaucratic prose), the obsession with waste and entropy, the introduction of simulacra and the proliferation of conspiracies and their concomitant paranoia, and the dislocation of, and confusion about, the ultimate sources of power, Burroughs has not only influenced his near

contemporaries (Gaddis, Mailer, Vonnegut, etc.) but looks forward to important younger novelists like Barth, Pynchon, Barthelme, and DeLillo.

With the media becoming nearly hegemonic in the Sixties, novelists struggled to assess its power and come to terms with the implications its cultural domination had for literature. Mailer was ambiguous about the media, preferring, as we have seen, television over newspapers and perceiving in *Armies of the Night* (1968) not only the importance of performance in politics but also the centrality of representation in historical events. For postmodern artists like Barth, Pynchon and DeLillo, this tendency has reached its fullest expression. There is no assumption that a real world is simply "out there," waiting to be perceived, understood, and patiently described by the artist. Barth, from the Sixties on, opts for textual play and ludic narratives in an apparent belief that there is nothing at the center of the novelist's representations. Pynchon uses Barthian textual play and the full range of postmodern techniques to construct alternative worlds for a more radical political vision. For DeLillo, the novelist most concerned with the transformation of American consciousness by technology and the mass media, reality is already framed, mediated, and so accessible only through the multiple and competing representations produced by them. He works not with characters so much as "words, images, and representations as his primary material" (Johnston 274). The novelist's task, as the author stated in a recent inverview, is to deal with these materials while maintaining a critical stance toward them, to "absorb and incorporate the culture without catering to it" (Begley 290). If the world is perceived as its representations, postmodernist literature attempts to counteract the tendency to perceive less, making perception equal to the representations by questioning and shifting the frames (Ibid.). This is a radical enterprise, and it is per-

haps not surprising that the political world, which is a world of representations for the purposes of power and its concealment, will itself be represented and read in new ways.

CHAPTER 5

A RADICAL RESPONSE TO "TOTALITARIANISM"? THE INDIVIDUAL ADVERSARY IN BURROUGHS, VONNEGUT ET AL.

a.

I concluded in the Introduction to Part Three that Marshall Berman's judgment that postmodernism is not critical of contemporary life need not be right, and yet his distinction of a "destructive" or adversarial art, one in which an oppositional stance is intimately related to a perceived sense of an authentic self is one that is useful both for the fiction of Norman Mailer and for that of the novelists discussed in this chapter. I have, to be sure, said little enough about the formal properties of Mailer's novels and in fact centered my analysis on his adversarial attitude to "life" (i.e. existing power structures) rather than to any formalism, an indifference to which could be easily demonstrated in his work. Thus, if not structurally, then thematically (attitudinally, in Berman's sense), Mailer, as well as Burroughs and Vonnegut--although both authors may be considered early postmodernists in stylistics, tone, technique, etc.-- are "modernist" in their preoccupation with the preservation of an authentic inner self threatened by modern reality, the (modernist) realization of a "painful gap" between experience and consciousness and the need to "replenish" consciousness with the intensities of experience (Connor 4). In effect, this may be no more than to say that they are also men of their time and place, informed by the material and spiritual structures of American life in the Fifties and early Sixties, which, as was seen both in the Introduction to Part Two and Chapt. 2, tended to produce an inner-directed individual.

Accordingly, the political and social threat perceived by these writers is what Mailer called "totalitarianism," which in the post-war era the political and cultural right-wing iden-

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tified unequivocally with (Stalinist) Communism, but which radical and liberal novelists tended to see, as in Mailer's version, as an insidiously advancing (domestic) state repression that was designed by our leaders to check an even more insidious "creeping socialism" in national political and cultural life. Thomas Schaub, however, identifies the often invoked notion of totalitarianism as the fear of revisionist liberals (among whom he lumps Mailer and the novelists discussed in this chapter) toward "mass society" and "mass culture"(15), a judgement that is not entirely unjustified. Mailer's concept of totalitarianism includes but plays down Soviet expansionism, since he is more concerned with what is happening in his own country and, more importantly, the threat of an intellectual and behavioral conformity of the American masses (in a popular critical phrase of the period, Reisman's "lonely crowd"). Schaub's argument holds that novelists tended to share the declared anxieties of cultural critics about keeping high art aloof from a perceived and threatening contamination from popular forms ("if we cannot stop the ruthless expansion of mass-culture, the least we can do is to keep apart and refuse its favors," wrote the left-wing critic Philip Rahv, qtd. by Schaub 18). This, I think, is an oversimplification since the novelists' response to popular forms is less anxious and more complex, as shown by their often adapting these forms in their own work. Yet, it is true enough that both critics and novelists saw behavioral conformity as increasing to a great extent in response to the astonishing growth of the mass media in the Fifties and Sixties--a conformity which Burroughs, whom I shall argue is the only truly radical novelist of those discussed here, identifies as a result of media and language "mind control."

The concept of totalitarianism in this period was perhaps a scare word, a tactical concept meant to alarm and warn of present tendencies and future possibilities. Most definitions of the concept see the kind of centralized, uniform control of all provinces of life historically

present only in the dictatorships of the present century, the kind of regimes conditioned and facilitated by industrialism and technology, with organization, communications and propaganda as the means for a complete mobilization and terrorist regimentation (*Gleishaltung*) of every individual. In a broader sense than this ideal-type definition, however, totalitarianism may be seen as a tendency in all states aiming at the management of crises and at development by means of a political and ideological monopoly of power. As such, it is part of the modernizing process of nations and societies in the age of democracy, bureaucracy, and pseudo-religious ideologies (Bracher 406-10).

b.

William S. Burroughs, although older than any of the writers discussed in the following section (born 1914), is more radical in every way. Burroughs can be considered a middle term between the individualism of modernist fiction and the politicizing tendencies of post-modernism. Partly due to his appearing on the literary scene during the Fifties and early Sixties, however, he is claimed as a founding father of the Beats, the post-war avant-garde movement that rejected reigning middle-class values and celebrated what was thought of as less alienated and more authentic (i.e. more instinctive) personal existence, with Zen, jazz, existentialism, and other arts of the spontaneous combining with recreational sex and drugs. The connection with Beat fiction, beyond the chronological connection and an incantatory use of language that was perhaps ultimately inspired by that 19th century bohemian, Walt Whitman (Van Leer 493), can also be explained by the Beat writers' own declared enthusiasm for Burroughs's work and his close personal association with Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg (Burroughs, for example, appears as a character in Kerouac's novel *On the Road,* 1957). Kerouac, John Clellon Holmes, and other Beat novelists whose work centered on the anti-

rational self and who experimented with various kinds of "spontaneous writing" might justly claim Burroughs as a forerunner, and yet Burroughs' influence extends beyond the Beats to writers like Mailer and Thomas Pynchon. He reveals in his novels a more political preoccupation with something closely resembling Mailer's concept of totalitarianism, and his paranoid, nightmarish fictional world foresees Pynchon's, making the bohemian ambiance of Beat novels look almost innocent by comparison.

What I call Burroughs's political dimension might seem all the more surprising since his fictions deal with an exclusively drug-oriented world, where extremes of the personal and the irrational come together. Burroughs wanted to show, even in his first and most conventional novel, *Junkie* (1953), that "junk" (drugs, especially heroine) is more than an objective evil; it is a way of life, a kind of substitute for being, with terminal addiction being in effect a state of living death. Even though the emphasis is on the hell of withdrawal, while the joys of getting stoned are not explored (with what might seem a logical perversity to non-addicts, junk is not sought to make one feel good but to avoid getting sick for *not* having it), *Junkie* is not at all a standard testimonial of the type "what drugs have done to me." The original sub-title is "Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict," and by the end of the book, Burroughs's alter-ego "William Lee" has, indeed, made no repentance and no resolutions.

Places of confinement--jails and hospitals--are prominent, and critics have found these the institutional bases for Burroughs's analysis of power in later works (Skerl 51). As Foucault has shown, these institutions are sites where disciplinary power is applied in an exemplary way, with the bodies of the inmates subjected to a strict regimen of well-meaning discipline. Junkies as radically *un*disciplined and anti-social people would seem to be the ideal object for the kind of power Foucault describes as both repressive and socially beneficial.

Yet, even in *Junkie*, and increasingly in the later works, Burroughs's particular notion of "control" ignores the supposedly socially beneficial aspect of even hospital cures (never mind the naked power of the police), which junkies merely see as a means of getting "clean" so that they can be more susceptible to stronger and cheaper doses when they get out. Junkies are controlled by a craving for drugs, a biological need, but the "control addicts" who arrest, confine, watch, treat, and abuse them are themselves controlled by their "need" for power, which is evidently psychological (and pathological), corresponding to the physiological need of the addicts. The novel shows the give-and-take of the struggle between two groups linked by their respective needs.

Burroughs' most influential work, *Naked Lunch* (1959) and the trilogy that follows go beyond this level of a marginalized social group and its struggle with institutionalized powers to envision an "allegorical war of control."[1] The concept of control is broadened to include crucial areas of social experience, such as bureaucracy, the media, and even language itself, all interrelated in their capacity for domination (Burkholder 71). Bureaucracy, to recall Weber's argument, is the means of exercising power over people but a means that soon becomes a power in itself. Language in this connection is the vehicle for both bureaucracy and the media and is itself perceived as oppressive. The media fix fluid experience into received "ideas" and manipulate social roles. The arch-villain for Burroughs is Henry Luce, publisher of *Life* and *Time*, magazines that simplify and mythicize the national experience in ideologically digestible forms and were especially influential in the Fifties, when television had not yet achieved its current cultural hegemony.

Unlike the rather straightforward autobiographical narration of *Junkie*, *Naked Lunch* consists of blocks of fantastic, even surrealistic images, more like an extended lyric than a

narrative, for, although the images constantly blend and shift, there is, as in poetry, repetition of key phrases and motifs and the effect is narrative discontinuity. The imagery, in any case, is obsessively scatological, anal, and bestial in a text in which eating, defecation, and uncontrolled ejaculations are frequently described activities. [2] Although there are narrative episodes in the text, there is no overall narrative structure to give them continuity among themselves; they seem to occur in some non-existent or frozen time. As Burroughs explains in his "Introduction," a junkie runs on "junk-time," which is out of sequential history, since he may spend extended periods of time doing nothing but staring at the wall or (like Burroughs himself before his final cure) at his own shoe.[3] *Naked Lunch* would therefore seem to be a supreme example of solipsistic obsession, with little relevance to public forms of power, but in this novel "junk" expands far beyond its meaning of an addicting substance and the pursuit of an alternative life-style through drugs by the down-and-outs in *Junkie* into a suggestive symbol for social products and fimctions . For example, junk is most evidently money, capitalism's ultimate commodity: "Junk is the mold of monopoly and possession...Junk is quantitative and accurately measurable. The more junk you use the less you have and the more you have the more you use...Junk is the ideal product...the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary...the merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to the product" (Introduction to *Naked Lunch* xxxviii-xxxix). Junk is also a metaphor for other kinds of addictions which, like money and economic exploitation, have wider implications than private hallucinations and obsessions. Besides drugs, the "basic addictions" for Burroughs are sex and power, and for him all three are dehumanizing agents. As with Mailer, sex is an expression of power but without Mailer's emphasis on sex as the source of primitive

vitality. For Burroughs, it is (like drugs) rather a form of controlling and being controlled (Skerl 55; Lee 74-78).

Power, therefore, Burroughs conceives rather narrowly, as illegitimate and dehumanizing control over other people, a control that goes beyond the basic brutalities of naked repression. As the narrator explains, "A *functioning* police state needs no police" (36, his italics).[4] Burroughs's world is the Orwellian one of totalitarian mind-control, where junk is a kind of conditioning, indeed, is itself a metaphor for the conditioned lives we now live. Control is no means to an end but an end in itself: "It can never be a means to anything but more control...like junk" (*Naked Lunch* 163-4).[5] A leading character in this connection is Dr. Benway of "Annexia," a genial monster who has renounced simple brutality for more effective means of control, which can be summed up as his expertise in T.D. (Total Demoralization). He enjoys explaining the methods of "prolonged mistreatment," which combine penetration into private life with the use of drugs for an "assault on the subject's personal identity" (25). These methods, which recall the horrors of Huxley's and Orwell's dystopias, are more effective than ordinary torture since the subject is systematically confused, made to feel he deserves any treatment he gets because there is something wrong with him which is never defined. To this Kafkan condition, Burroughs adds the importance of need in the uses of control: "Junk yields a basic formula of 'evil' virus: The Algebra of Need" (73). The formula applies to all kinds of addicts, including control-addicts like Benway. Bureaucracy is the rationalized institutional procedures that make people like Benway more acceptable: "The naked need of the control addicts must be decently covered by an arbitrary and intricate bureaucracy so that the subject cannot contact his enemy direct" (21).

Control is seen by Burroughs as originating at some point external to the individual and as worse than the private hallucinations brought on by drugs: "Self-induced distortions are preferable to those imposed upon us" (Karl 208; Tanner 119). Not the Puritan (or Freudian) enemy within, but an evil lurking outside waits patiently and cunningly to move in and take over the human host, like the virus so often invoked in the novel--something cancerous that inhabits a person and sucks out his life, leaving, like junk, only the shell, which is functionally dead. This virus, whether in the form of a monstrous parasite or in that of its human counterpart, must be "isolated and treated" (*Naked Lunch* 169). His work therefore claims a therapeutic function, and there is a pervading discourse of hospitals, doctors and, of course, drugs and remedies. In an interview, Burroughs maintained the medical imagery when he explained that he had "diagnosed" the illness in his first two novels and suggested a "remedy" in the next two (qtd. by Tanner 110).

While this devouring evil is pervasive in the world, its source cannot be easily located or even precisely named. Burroughs shares the social dystopia of Kafka and the modernists, but his paranoid vision differs somewhat from that of Pynchon and the postmodernists, for whom paranoia results from an excess of connections. A decade and a half before Pynchon, Burroughs perceived the dread arising from entropy, the notion that energy is running down and the world being exhausted or drained, though he did not develop the idea. As the reference "The Planet drifts to random insect doom" (224) suggests, furthermore, Burroughs sees entropy working not as the forces of physics but through images of organic life. As the virus takes over the junkie's body, he descends to ever lower forms of organic organization (Tanner 118). As material being regresses (e.g. bodies to blobs, men to insects, articulated forms to undifferentiated jelly), on the social level government and corporate institutions, including

organized religion, take over the social "body" for their own needs, destroying it in the process. In the trilogy that follows *Naked Lunch*, a kind of space Mafia called "the Nova Mob" also takes the form of a virus that controls human beings through junk, sex, power, and language. Member-groups within the Mob specialize in certain areas of addiction: the Uranians drugs, the Venusians sex, and the Crab People power. The clusters of image associations are suggestive, including the historical (Nazism and the totalitarian social system of the Mayans), the pseudo-scientific (L. Ron Hubbard's "scientology" and Wilhelm Reich's "orgone box"), and the pop cultural (science-fiction and astrology) (Skerl 58). Class power comes in (in *The Soft Machine*, 1961)) as the Mayan priest ruling-class, and corporate power can perhaps be seen in the "Trek Sex and Dream Utilities" company, although these are hardly more than suggested.

Burroughs's work, then, while looking forward to postmodernist obsessions of paranoia and entropy, has classically modernist preoccupations, as my references to Orwell, Huxley, and Kafka might suggest. The "foreshadowing of the explosion of self" that would characterize fiction in the following decades (Karl 205-11) make Burroughs's world resonate with Henry Miller's comic-horrific view of the US as the "air-conditioned nightmare" and Mailer's individualist oppositions to the dehumanizing structures of American life. For Burroughs, evidently, all that can be obtained is an inner freedom, the liberal-modernist dream of individual autonomy and inner resistance to external repression. In what Burroughs calls his "mythology of war and conflict..." (i.e. the "allegorical war of control" mentioned above), he says: "Hell consists of falling into enemy hands, the hands of virus power, and heaven consists of freeing oneself from this power, of achieving *inner* freedom, freedom from conditioning" (qtd. by Tanner 110, emphasis added). As the eschatological metaphor suggests, this is

essentially a formula for saving one's soul. Frederick Karl, in fact, thinks that everything in this novel and the author's subsequent novels is "a definition of self." In this interpretation, with each successive text Burroughs moves further and further toward Nietzche's *Ubermensch,* a self beyond all control, seeking some ultimate liberation though the paradoxical embrace of degradation in a different order of experience (208). As in the fantasy and detective genre fiction he draws on, Burroughs's strategy of resistance depends on an individual agent of liberation ("Lee" or the "Agent" or "The Exterminator" or other alter-egos in the various works) and, in a more promising move in the manner of some science fiction, of expropriating the technology of the controllers, although this possibility is unfortunately not developed.

In *Naked Lunch*, inner resistance may take the apparently rather simple form of securing for oneself a clarity of vision, an ability to see the "facts" in the face of the encroaching virus, as in the story Benway tells of the devouring asshole that gradually draws out the life of the body into itself, threatening to become an anal tyrant. Since the asshole itself cannot see, it gradually seals off the eyes, which brings on death in the brain (131-2); hence, the importance of clear vision. The difficulty of attaining clear vision is allegorized in "Interzone's" four parties, which is perhaps the essence of Burroughs's vision of power. One party, the "Senders," exercises a biological mind control through miniature receivers installed in the body, which receive one-way telepathic messages from State-controlled transmitters. The Sender must transmit endlessly without receiving, lest he "louse up his continuity" by the admission of another consciousness. This is Burroughs's view of the mass media: mindless, one-way transmissions without meaningful content; the medium is the message, with a vengeance. Television as the crucial cultural product and manipulative power in American cultural

life was just beginning to make itself felt around the time of the appearance of *Naked Lunch*. The Senders are a striking preview of what Baudrillard and other cultural critics say about television, a medium "which suggests nothing, which magnetizes, which is only a screen, or is rather a miniaturized terminal which in fact is found immediately in your head..." (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 220, qtd. by Kellner 70). It also anticipates what Kroker and Cook say about how television transforms and controls people: by "implanting a simulated, electronically monitored and technocratically controlled identity in the flesh" (qtd. by Connor 171). "Mass communications," where the masses in fact don't communicate, are efficient creators of the "totalizing codes" of the dominant culture (Czermak and Silva 50). In fact, they really "fabricate non-communication...if one agrees to define communication as an exchange" (Baudrillard, *Critique* 169).

A second party, the "Liquefactionists," as their name suggests, liquefy or turn people into an amorphous sameness. A (solid) variation of them is the "Divisionists," who divide into clones of themselves toward "an eventual monopoly of one replica," since "every replica but your own is eventually undesirable" (164). These three parties taken together suggest the Fifties' preoccupation with conformity and loss of an authentic selfhood. The only sympathetic party, called the "Factualists," is opposed to the other three. Factualists issue bulletins on various evils perpetrated by the others; for example, they clarify that they are not against telepathy in itself, which would constitute an intimate kind of interpersonal communication, but only against the evil of the Senders' one-way telepathy (167), which constitutes mind-control.

The novel itself can be thought of as Burroughs's own series of Factualist bulletins, meant to correct or "cure" the maladies of the other parties. In a stricter political reading,

however, it is clear that there are Fascist elements in the parties, which he sees as threats to modern life: the total State control via propaganda of the Senders; the Nazi-like genetic control and obsession with racial purity of the Divisionists; in the popular perception of Communism in the Fifties, the Liquefactionist reduction of individual difference. What is noteworthy about the Factualist resistance against the three evil parties is its interest in preserving individual integrity, presumably intellectual and spiritual, though in the novel (metaphorically) physical. Allen Ginsberg made the telling point that the Factualists are, in one sense, "a really respectable conservative party," since they take "a very anti-State or anti-creeping State position" (Ginsberg & Mailer xxvi).

Burroughs's preoccupation with "facts," stable or fixed events or truths, contradicts his technical resolution to avoid the static tendencies of language in favor of a radical stylistic flexibility. His own text does not offer facts, but images and fleeting events that in the nature of things can be only partially apprehended. As he cautions in the "Afterward": "You were not there at the Beginning. You will not be there at the End...Your knowledge of what is going on can only be superficial and relative" (220). That the Senders are identified as the Party most particularly to be combatted is related to their being transmitters of language, the most powerful and dangerous force, though a debased one, from which there is no escape. In the trilogy, similarly, the head of the Nova Mob controls the word, and speech is called "the talking sickness." Burroughs is doubtless not opposed to language itself (impossible for a writer), but to the debased forms of it found in contemporary culture. Like the postmodernist Donald Barthelme, Burroughs's campaign against linguistic "dreck" includes exposure through parody. His resolution to produce a non-linear anti-narrative may be explained by his (Factualist) determination to not himself become a Sender who offers up a fixed and fixing (to

"fix" in junk slang = inject the drug) form of narrative structure: "I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity'...I am not an entertainer" (221). Burroughs has objected to what he identifies as the "Aristotelian construct and its attendant logic," and the limiting structure of subject-verb-object (qtd. by Burkholder 73). Presumably, his real objection is to a discursive narrative structure, since his own sentences, of course, must have these grammatical elements. It is therefore a central paradox of his work, or at least of his intentions, that he must (as a writer) use language in the attempt to go beyond it. Otherwise, he could only follow the logic, first suggested by Beckett, of lapsing into silence, an alternative, given decade after decade of prolific text production, he doesn't seem to have considered, unless "silence" as with Beckett be interpreted as a kind of strategy. Thus, in the trilogy, the Nova Police are good guys who counter the Nova Mob's word-control by silence.[6] Schaub sees both Burroughs and John Barth, in their suspicion of form and projected meaning and, at the same time, their need for the same, as characteristic of the "postwar conflict in liberal discourse between a suspicion of ideology and a desire for action" (79).

c.

Arising from the social and political circumstances of the Fifties, conformity and control were quintessentially themes of the early Sixties, as evidenced not only in Burroughs's avant-garde fiction but also in what were the most popular novels on college campuses at the time: Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), and Kurt Vonnegut's Cat's Cradle (1963), all of which were also critically well-received. Kesey's novel, according to enthusiastic critics, "exposes the repressive institutions of modern industrial societies that demand sterile conformity" (Maguire 447), a description that could be applied to Mailer's novels, and, by way of my political reading, to

Burroughs's. For the powerful structures of Mailer's army or Pentagon, Kesey offers a mental hospital as a metaphor for the system, a conflation of Burroughs's hospital and jail. The hospital, efficiently and repressively run by the formidable Nurse Ratched (suggesting not only "wretched" but "ratchet," a grinding mechanical device used for applied force) is often compared in the novel to a well-oiled machine with wired and interconnected insides, whose corrective mechanisms include routine humiliation, numbing drugs, electric shock therapy, and, ultimately, lobotomy.

In *Madness and Civilization* (tr. 1965), Foucault demonstrated how the treatment of the mad went from repression to more concerned authority. Until the end of the 18th century, an abstract, faceless power kept the mad confined; later, their keepers would hold both the prestige of the authority that confines and the reason that judges, intervening without restraints but with observation and language. Kesey's mental hospital exposes this later system of humane treatment by well-meaning professionals by showing how the usually soft-spoken Ratched can swiftly turn into an avenging angel for the system. Unlike Foucault's impersonal medical staff, who are, after all, committed to curing their patients, Ratched seems determined to keep them within the hospital walls by systematic humiliation disguised as professional treatment. Her means are confinement, reduction to submission through "therapy," and, when that is ineffective, reduced privileges and even physical restraint, a combination of older and newer forms of treatment.

As a microcosm of a repressive US society, the hospital is a system of total control, the worst possible combination of the powers of discipline and surveillance, organizational efficiency (the hospital is called "the Combine"), and the naked power of bodily subjection. It silences minorities (Chief Bromden) and subjugates pathetic neurotics with coercive effi-

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ciency; budding resistance (Ellis, Ruckley) is neutralized in the interest of function. The narrator, Chief Bromden, is another paranoid of Sixties' fiction, who sees the mechanical control of the world so total that he thinks even people have devices inside them. Watching Ratched work, he thinks:

> Practice has steadied and strengthened her until she wields a sure power that extends in all directions on hair-like wires too small for anybody's eyes but mine; I see her sit in the center of this web of wires like a watchful robot, tend her network with mechanical insect skill...What she dreams of there in the center of those wires is a world of precision accuracy and readiness...a place where the schedule is unbreakable and all the patients who aren't Outside, obedient under her beam, are wheelchair Chronics with catheter tubes run direct from every pantleg to the sewer under the floor" (Kesey 30).

The concept and imagery of this passage doubtless owe much to Burroughs, but the perception of control is not diffuse, as often in Burroughs, but hierarchized and highly visible in the figure of what is in effect an institutional tyrant aided by the devices of a dictatorial technological state. Power is therefore centralized and punishment is "spectacular," i.e. for social control of the other inmates both out of proportion to the offense and clearly visible to them. Nurse Ratched's power is "written" on the bodies of those who dare to step out of line.

Her adversary, McMurphy, is a typical hero of the counter-cultural Sixties, even a personification of them, though as gambler, womanizer, and brawler, Frye's low-comic type, since he brings sex, comradeship, and irreverent laughter into the closed and up-tight world of the Fifties and its organizational (wo)man (Klinkowitz 23). McMurphy is the counter-example to the imposition of sameness and loss of self (the hospital's rules for destroying the patients' individuality) and the strong individual who can subvert order and incite rebellion in various ways: refusal to submit or even cooperate, ridicule, selective comprehension, alternative behavior styles, etc. He represents the vital, authentic self that is, however, ultimately

vulnerable to a repressive system. After the usual methods of control and even the brutality of shock-therapy have failed to bring him to submission, Ratched will have him lobotomized, a form of brain-castration for his intrusive and anarchic sexuality.

As personification of the Sixties, McMurphy might also represent the possibility of a cultural revolution, and yet his revolution is only temporary, doomed to eventual defeat, since his confrontational tactics underestimate the power of his adversary and his disruptive role seems limited to the Sixties' deification of "consciousness-raising" (Ibid.). McMurphy's demise is not unrelated to his status as cliché hero of comic books (which, along with television, make up the whole of his culture), and his resistance must necessarily be restricted to that kind of form (Tanner 344). In a rather politically suspect way, too, he is after all destroyed by a system in which the agents of totalitarian repression are a woman and her black assistants. Only the minorities, with their alternative vision of America and their techniques of a Joycean "silence and cunning" (Bromden throughout pretends to be mute) would seem capable of revolutionary action in this situation, since only Brombden in the end breaks free of Kesey's nightmare vision of total control, and yet even his escape (like Mailer's Stephen Rojack's to Yucatan in *An American Dream*), is the romantically impossible return to the pre-civilized world of his Indian ancestors.

Equal critical enthusiasm accompanied Heller's 1961 novel, *Catch-22*, which has been characterized as "savagely radical," aiming "to expose the entire power system of the post-war world" (W.Miller 237). Heller's attack centers on the "power elite," the unholy alliance of the military, politics, organized religion, and big business which arose in the wake of the war, including multinational corporations, which proliferated after the war, gaining trading advantages by developing products at home and manufacturing them abroad. *Catch-22* is

therefore a novel of the American Fifties although its characters and setting are an Air Corps bombing squadron in Europe during the Second World War, a technically innovative use of historical anachronism that will become a feature in postmodern fiction, in which Heller suggests the power situation of post-war historical developments.

The military and the corporation are satirized essentially by conflating the two. The military group in the novel, as Karl points out (311), is much like a business corporation of the Fifties: the commanding officer Cathcart setting production goals (the number of combat missions to be flown) and constantly raising them while competing for promotion with his rival Korn. The pilots correspond to the middle-managers who (here, literally) take the "flak," and the enlisted men are the workers, used but unrewarded by the system. The supreme corporate figure in the novel is the black marketeer Milo Minderbender, whose syndicate is a corporate capitalist cartel, all-encompassing and so above merely national interests that Milo's collusive dealings with the Germans include the bombing of his own squadron. The sole concern with profits and performance and the corporate independence from constitutional rules and allegiances are made clear when Milo is cleared of this enormity by Congress when he is able to show a profit. The war episode illustrates the Fifties' fetichizing of the notion of capitalist "free enterprise."

And yet, despite its anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian message, *Catch-22*, is, at least as far as its anti-hero Yossarian is concerned, another example of the alienated and apolitical self struggling to maintain sanity in the face of the mass pressures and absurd situations of the contemporary world. Yossarian finds himself in the absurdist "catch-22" situation of being unable to escape his C.O.'s pursuit of more and more combat missions, since only by demonstrating madness under stress can he be freed from combat, yet the evident desire to be re-

lieved of it by such behavior would prove a concern for his own safety and therefore that he was quite sane and fit for duty. Eventually, there is no way out but desertion ("What if they had a war and no one came," was the sentimental slogan of the Sixties).

Catch-22, as Thomas Edwards observes, is really an "end of ideology" novel that sees any commitment except to one's own survival as futile. Yossarian's problem is not political but existential, since the real enemy is neither the Germans nor even his own superior officers, but death itself, or rather, his own death (10-11). That he is neither psychologically repelled by violence nor philosophically opposed to it is shown by his own record as a bombardier over many successful combat missions. He is not at all concerned with the victims or his crucial role in what is after all a particularly impersonal method of killing people, but simply wants to end his combat tour and let someone else take over (Muste 8). In this reading, the novel's "glorifying of individual solutions" for people who remain blissfully unaware of what their independence signifies makes it a vehicle for the mentality of the Fifties: Yossarian's escape to idyllic Sweden conceals the historical fact that Swedish corporations produced high-grade steel for Hitler's military machine (Karl 313).

In Heller's more traditional second and third novels, too, the political turns out to be subservient to the personal. In *Something Happened* (1974), a novel about power games and the struggle for status in a civilian corporation, executive Bob Slocum can play the corporate game cunningly. Although the novel shows the destructive power of corporations on individuals (one man jumps from a window; most suffer from constant anxiety), it tends to present Slocum's moral deformation as an interior problem of individual alienation rather than an example of the reifying power of capitalist organization. For an example of the latter, one must turn to the first part of Don DeLillo's *Americana* (1971). In both Heller's second and

third novels, Heller explores large organizations, in which "the struggle for power within the organization...consumes more energy than does the struggle to achieve the organization's declared goals" (Miller 237). In *Good as Gold* (1979), Gold's public career in Washington basically serves to help him understand his own failings: "How much lower would he have to crawl to rise to the top?" In each case, a predictably apolitical solution is forthcoming: Yossarian deserts, the classic "light out for the territory" solution we have seen as so common in the American novel; Gold rejects a generously corrupting Washington to return to his family and Jewish roots, the almost equally popular humanist solution; Slocum shamelessly courts the system but is destroyed, a victim of his own failings and a properly "poetic" justice.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., like Mailer and Burroughs, has been writing novels since the Fifties, and like the latter shows a preference for anti-realism in plot, for chance over causal explanation. His work has been described as absurdist, black comedy, biting satire, etc. whose main theme is "man's need for illusions" (Harris 54) and the consequent offering of acceptable lies (i.e. fictions) that will make the horror of contemporary life easier to bear. Correlated with this brand of existential humanism, several of the earlier novels (the later ones show signs of weariness) have also been read as attacks on powerful institutions and political tendencies in the contemporary world, such as fascism (*Mother Night*, 1961), science (*Cat's Cradle*, 1963), and institutional politics (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, 1965). *Cat's Cradle*, for example, illustrates the Foucaultian theme that there is no disinterested science and no innocent knowledge. The head of the General Forge and Foundry Co. claims that people don't understand scientists, that his factory is involved in "pure research," etc. His employee, Dr. Hoenniker, did much of his research at the factory and turns out to be one of the inventors of

the A-bomb. Hoenniker, a brilliant naif, will, through one of his playful inventions, "ice-nine," eventually freeze the world into lifelessness.

Vonnegut's novels differ from most fictional satire in their narrative tone, which is light, whimsical, apparently neutral, without the controlled anger or willful outrage at the world's absurdities described within. Lacking a "rhetoric of certainty" in which the satirist looks at the world from a superior position and pronounces on it, Vonnegut's "stoical comedy" evidently wishes to improve the world without much hope for doing so (Scholes, *Fabulation* 157, 161). Resignation would therefore be the appropriate attitude to take toward an absurd world (Harris 71), accompanied by Vonnegut's rather homely and sentimental version of Christian humanism, in which we fallen human beings ought to love one another, since there seems to be nothing much better. In its more palatable version, Bokononism, the casual religion of *Cat's Cradle*, eschews any kind of dogmatizing with the (dogmatic) teaching that the world is essentially a mystery and that man's "granfalloons" or false categories are merely imposed upon it. As satirist, Vonnegut wants to expose human greed, cruelty, and especially the human capacity for self-deception, and he has a pessimistic vision on the cosmic scale that is perhaps appropriate to a fantasy-science fiction writer, but what of human history? Bokononism's answer to one of its catechism questions ("What can a thoughtful man hope for mankind on earth, given the experience of the past million years?") is simply: "Nothing" (164). In a passage meaning to praise Vonnegut as "among the best writers of his generation," Robert Scholes puts his finger on Vonnegut's main limitation: "Vonnegut's comic prose reduces large areas of experience to the dimensions of a laboratory slide" (Scholes 204-5).

Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), perhaps best illustrates the author's view of power, the individual as adversary of repressive systems, and the futility of history. The

novel tells of conflict between people and technology in Ilium (i.e. doomed like Troy), which is evidently a fictional version of Schenectady, New York, home of the General Electric Research Laboratory where Vonnegut once worked as public relations writer (Reed 495). Ilium exerts a nearly total control, minus Orwellian thought control, over the population, but the system is ostensibly benevolent, since basic material needs are provided free of charge. Society is geographically and politically divided. On one side of the river are the machines--including the giant computer Epicac XIV, which, like John Barth's WESCAC (for which it may be a forerunner), is humanized--and the engineers and managers who design and care for them. On the other side live the people who cannot intellectually compete and are relegated to government employment in maintenance or the army that merely keeps them busy, so that there is a modified but simple Marxist structure of ruling class in possession of wealth and the means of domination, and dispossessed proletarians who, however, are not exploited in the classic sense, since it is precisely their labor which is no longer needed. In this structure, at least, the novel would be a somewhat prophetic vision of a relatively benevolent capitalist future. One important theme, which is doubtless a criticism of contemporary socialist regimes as well as future capitalist ones, is that people need meaningful work rather than merely material satisfaction as passive recipients of the state.

The adversarial hero, Paul Proteus (i.e. able to blend in, or flexible in action), is manager of Ilium works and believer in science and progress but a man uneasy at his own integration into the system, the smug banality of his fellow managers, and the pathos of the people across the bridge. There is therefore considerable resemblance to Orwell's *1984* (published only three years before) with its lone official who rebels inwardly against the injustices of the totalitarian state, tries to opt out of the system and is destroyed, although Vonnegut's dystopia

is not without its comic elements. The novel points to the theme of anti-machine, since the title reverses the notion of a person producing art via a machine (piano player) to a machine producing programmed music (player piano) where the person is redundant (Tanner 182). It should be recalled, however, that a player-piano is an old-fashioned artifact, while new technology tends to make itself indispensable; at least, the novel will show that a modern society cannot do without what it has already adapted itself to so well. At the same time, it is suggested that for all their convenience machines have their human price: people enjoy doing at least some routine jobs that machines deprive them of, depriving them in the process of part of their humanity.

The Ilium power-structure is a rationalized meritocracy (with the usual petty politicking among the less able) which rewards the managers. What is economically and occupationally relevant is all that is considered useful biographical information, recorded on IBM cards, including IQ, which is public knowledge. The criticism here seems to be against public surveillance of private life and the rationalist disregard of important individual qualities that are not measurable. The paternalistic managers personally resemble present-day prosperous Republicans, resentful of recipients of the welfare state: the working class has been given everything so what more can they want? In contrast to the cynical members of the Inner Party in *1984*, Freud rather than Marx is invoked (Proteus resents his famous father), and these people are more "American," i.e. shallow rather than cynical, in turn adolescent and machine-like. As post-war conservatives, their view is that the lower-classes ought to be more grateful for the public bounty and they tend to blame every sign of discontent on "radicals." Proteus is in fact asked to infiltrate a subversive organization, known as the "Ghost Shirts" after a suicidal Indian resistance movement. This is an anti-machine brotherhood run by intellectual drop-

outs, Finnerty, an old friend and engineer, and the preacher Lasker, whom Proteus meets in a saloon that becomes the command post for the revolt of the proles (which never takes place in Orwell's novel). As with the historical Luddites (1811-1816), an anti-machine organization of workers pledged to destroy machinery, a popular rising accompanied by nationwide sabotage is plotted and executed. In the novel, the rebellion goes out of control (in case anyone thinks Vonnegut is advocating revolution) and the brotherhood destroys everything that any society needs to survive: bakeries, sewage disposal, etc. Like the Luddites, the brotherhood has not distinguished between good and bad technology.

Player Piano is very much of its time (early Fifties) in political implications. Proteus is asked to "cooperate" with the authorities, i.e. finger Finnerty and expose the subversive conspiracy. Although Proteus becomes the symbol of resistance as a (false) Messiah, he is really manipulated by the rebels. He is, therefore, used by both sides, "a typical American hero in wanting to find a place beyond all plots and systems, some private space...a house by the side of the road of history and society" (Tanner 182). The common solution suggested by the last phrase of this citation, the American penchant for a return to the pastoral, is rejected.[7] Proteus buys his "house by the side of the road," an old-fashioned farm, to live and work on after dropping out, but it turns out that he doesn't know how to do manual labor and his wife merely wants to plunder the quaint old furniture for her new house full of the latest gadgets. Finnerty is a model bohemian drop-out, someone the system paternalistically tolerates if only to affirm itself. Lasker, a preacher ("trafficker in symbols") wants merely to make a statement with a Ghost-Shirt suicide charge. The rebellion solves nothing, as Ilium society is seen as too corrupted by progress to adhere to revolution seriously. The leaders turn themselves in to the police and the people begin to rebuild the town and put the machines back together. If

Proteus's fate seems to imply that history cannot be escaped, history as meaningful events does not really exist in the novel. It is merely static, or rather merely recurrent and repetitive events, much like the player-piano in the saloon, the mechanically programmed rhythms of life-in-Ilium.

In his culminating Sixties' novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), which made Vonnegut, like Heller and Kesey, something of a campus celebrity, the protagonist Billy Pilgrim travels in both time and space. This device allows a mixture of fact and fiction, the combination of historical experience--the horrendous Allied fire-bombing of Dresden during the Second World War (which Vonnegut tells us in the novel that he witnessed as a P.O.W.)--and science fiction (Billy is a human freak on Tralfamadore). The time-travel is evidently intended to juxtapose diverse human experiences and attitudes, World War II and Vietnam, for example (which, however, cannot seriously be compared), or war-mongering humans and peace-loving Tralfamadorians, i.e. an actual and an ideal humanity.

Juxtaposition of an accepted reality with an ideal standard is a traditional satirical device, but the effect here is that historical difference is dissolved; "a leveling of experience" occurs (Karl 340), with everything on a single plane of cosmic indifference. Since past and future are conflated to an eternal present, and Billy voyages instantaneously to different worlds, time and place become essentially meaningless. What happens therefore tends to be seen as inevitable, and Billy is resigned to a totally deterministic view of life. He can see all but do nothing: "Among all the things that Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present, and the future" (56). Unable to effect change, he becomes passive, sees the world, as it were, aesthetically rather than historically (Tanner 198). The novel's refrain, "So it goes,"

sums up the prevailing attitude, an expression of resignation, and Tralfamadore becomes an escape to Eden.

Can Billy's lifelong effort to concentrate on the "good moments" and the Tralfamadorian plea for a guilt-free existence be so easily juxtaposed with the horror of the Dresden bombing, which Vonnegut makes resonate, but which must under the circumstances be trivialized? Vonnegut's time-travel has the effect of conflating different events and meanings that, in Karl's nice image, "turns human behavior and history into molasses" (347). Either historical experience is avoided or moral paralysis sets in at the contemplation of such horrors, a dilemma that is not evaded by those contemporary writers, like Primo Levi, who attempt to come to terms with the Holocaust. Vonnegut's protagonists (in contrast to Burroughs's cut-out characters) are given the illusion of human depth but find themselves unable to break free of their consciences or necessary illusions. Like Heller's characters, they are more wary or traumatized observers, survivors, than adversaries to the oppressive forces of contemporary life.

NOTES

[1] The novel was originally published as *The Naked Lunch*, in Paris, 1959. Burroughs himself confirms the story that the three following novels were all parts of an original manuscript that he was producing in pieces and sending to his Paris publisher, Maurice Girodias, of the Olympic Press. Instead of rearranging the proofs as they were returned from printers, Burroughs and two friends simply decided to leave them in the fortuitous order they took on, an order which reinforces the atemporality of the novels and looks forward to further experimentation with atemporal and random organization by Burroughs and other writers (Ruas,

"William Burroughs" 134; Burkholder 72). Given this arrangement, one might justifiably take, as I mostly do here, the four novels as a single text.

[2] Feeding metaphors are appropriate, Tony Tanner says, since the text is about the various ways human identity is "devoured" in modern society (Tanner 115). Defecation is organically the opposite of eating and mouth and anus are confused in at least one of the more memorable episodes. "Shit" is also an all-encompassing metaphor for Burroughs' vision of modern society, as, it will be recalled, it is for Mailer. Ejaculations are frequent and uncontrolled, machine-like, in keeping with Burroughs' insistence on the individual's loss of control over self and desire (Burkholder 72.

[3] First published in *Evergreen Review* (1960) as "Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness," the Introduction actually forms part of the text of *Naked Lunch*, the author's discursive, "scientific" analysis of addition. It functions, together with the "Afterword," as a framing device in which a pseudo-explanation of the journalistic type is offered as counterpoint to the "madness" of the main text.

[4] It is somewhat astonishing to learn that Burroughs attempted in the mid-1930s to get into the OSS, forerunner of the CIA (he was rejected for having cut off a finger joint). He was, however, in his early twenties at this time (b.1914), a decade before he would begin writing, so this move might be put down to youthful romantic notions of being a spy--later he worked for a time as a private detective and is said to admire the popular spy novels of Frederick Forsythe. In any case, he was unsuited to disciplined organizations, being discharged from the Army (1942) for psychological reasons.

[5] Curiously enough, it was the testimony of Ginsberg, poet of the apolitical Beats, and not that of Mailer, both of whom testified on Burroughs' behalf during the novel's long trial for ob-

scenity, who called attention to the importance of power as control in the novel. See Ginsberg's testimony in "Excerpts from the Boston Trial" (i.e. the trial preceding the 1966 Massachusettes Supreme Court obscenity trial, at which the novel was eventually ruled not obscene), printed as a foreword to *Naked Lunch* xix-xxxiv.

[6] The allusion may be to Stephen Daedalus's "silence and cunning." Ihab Hassan ("Literature of Silence" 74-82) has interpreted silence as a form of literary expression. According to Connor (109), Hassan sees modernist literature as enacting a "conmplex silence" encompassing a number of meanings "from refusal to subversion."

[7] Karl (246) thinks the contrary: that the novel argues for a return to an agrarian past, but the farm is abandoned as a solution and the end of the novel shows that there can be no going back.

CHAPTER 6

SYSTEMS, CONSPIRACIES, AND THE ROMANTIC QUEST: JOHN BARTH

"Reality is a nice place to visit, but you wouldn't like to live there." (Barth)

a.

John Barth, the self-declared postmodernist, after two Fifties novels in the existentialist mode, made a radical departure with *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) and subsequent works in which he often combines political themes and a full range of ludic narrative strategies. In this chapter, however, I shall attempt to show that this contemporary master of complex fictions (and, it should be noted, a college professor), has not really gone beyond the post-war liberal solutions to social conflict, has, in a sense, psychologized, even romanticized, the political. At the same time, Barth has added to our understanding of the power mechanisms of American life in the Fifties and Sixties. It may be said that the conflicting notions of freedom and control that Tanner discusses in the quotation I cited in the Introduction to Part Three are intertwined themes of Barth's fiction. For example, both the need for and illusions of individual freedom, and the pervasive but illusive presence of contemporary power are what determine the intracacies of plot in Barth's pseudo-colonial novel, *The Sot-Weed Factor.* In this chronicle of the adventures of one Ebenezer Cooke, self-proclaimed poet-laureate of Maryland, Barth's home state, begin the multiple fictions and play with history that would become staple fare in the postmodernist American fictions of the next two decades.

Cooke is a character from a local historical chronicle who becomes a character in Barth's (pseudo-) historical novel that is also a parody of 18th century English novels, complete with descriptive chapter headings, picaresque episodes, convoluted plot, period language, unsuspected connections, amazing coincidences and surprise revelations. The search

for the father and the protagonist's obsession with chastity recall Fielding's *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*; other classic authors drawn upon, with a certain license, are Rabelais, Chaucer, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Defoe, Voltaire, perhaps others. These multiplying intertextual fictions tend to question the objectivity of history. For example, the main joke (admittedly sophomoric)--the pornographic farce of the impenetrable maidenhead and the ruse of the "sacred eggplant"--is grafted onto the mythico-historical story of John Smith and Pocahontas, a version of history that is already popular legend. In the novel, the story is based on the private journal of Sir Henry Burlingame, which is itself an invented imitation of colonial journals like the diaries of (the historical) John Smith, which in turn were themselves supposedly based on actual experiences but are thought by historians to be full of autobiographical invention. The novel's connection with history is, to say the least, highly oblique.

Barth himself called his novel a "moral allegory." It shares with Warren's *All the King's Men* the classic American theme of an innocence that has evil consequences ("the true original sin," according to Barth) via a story of state politics, although the Louisiana of Warren's novel (cf. Chapter 2d) does not share the proliferating fictions of Barth's Maryland, with its constant disguise and deceit, role-playing and counterfeit, false identity and rumor. These can themselves be perceived as forms of socio-political fictions. Frederick Karl (466) sees allegorical parallels precisely at this point, in the "counterfeit politics" of the Fifties. Maryland in colonial times becomes post-war Washington, and Cooke's journey from innocence to experience parallels the nation's own historical journey from a deluded post-war optimism to the new realities of McCarthyism and the Cold War.

The issue of the counterfeit is suggested in the novel by the absence or disguise of the most powerful figures. For example, Cooke supposedly receives his poetic "commission"

from Lord Baltimore, who turns out, like so many other characters, to be Henry Burlingame III, Cooke's ubiquitous tutor, friend, and would-be lover. At more than one point, Cooke is not even sure whether the man is friend or enemy, assistant or betrayer. Burlingame himself claims to have never seen John Coode, the main political conspirator of the province, who also takes on a variety of bizarre disguises, and there is finally the question of whether Coode works for or against Baltimore or just for himself, and whether Captain Mitchell (who turns out to be Burlingame) works for Coode or for Coode's adversaries. This confusing and convoluted game of who is who, who works for whom and what he is getting out of it, does recall, to take up Karl's suggestion, the elaborate spy and counter-spy networks of the Fifties and the delirious imaginings of some of the period's politicians, notably McCarthy and his congressional ally, Richard Nixon. The conspiracy in the novel, for example, may not even be a conspiracy at all, except as it exists in the understandably bewildered mind of Cooke, previewing Pynchon's equally befuddled Oedipa Maas.

Recognitions and revelations occur only to lead to further mystifications. The master role-player Burlingame, for example, has an ambiguous role with respect to helping or hindering both Cooke's own career and the history of the Maryland colony. At one point, he seems to be a patriot involved in an intrigue to save the colony; at another, he turns out to be the son and brother of Indians who are conspiring against it. His racial and political ambiguity is reflected culturally and physically: he is both civilized and savage, sexually insatiable and anatomically dysfunctional, a multiple ambiguity recalling that of Mailer's equally bizarre character, Chevy Fuertes, in *Harlot's Ghost*. The protagonist's paranoia about disguised identities and doubts about his own role in Maryland's political development gives way to a gradual understanding, a "process of recognitions," whereby he comes to realize that his val-

ues, tested in experience, are counterfeit (Karl 469). This suggests that the complicated plots and colonial power-plays, despite their resonance with historical events of the Fifties, mainly have the role of developing Eben's moral consciousness. This in turn recalls the *denouement* of Warren's novel and the facile closures of the liberal consensus, but the climate of paranoia in relation to national political phenomena strikes an ominous new note to be taken up and sounded by other important novels in the Sixties and Seventies.

b.

Rather than projecting present into the past, Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966) allegorizes the historical present. It recalls the First Voyage of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in the elaboration of contemporary political parallels and the Fourth Voyage in the proposal of animals as a moral counterpart to the evil and duplicity of human beings. In contrast to Gulliver, who ends up renouncing humanity in the name of a race of rational horses, Giles begins life as a goat and becomes humanized by experience, all the while retaining his animal nature as a moral touchstone. The story unfolds on the vast campus of New Tammany College (= the US), part of the University system, but this is a campus novel only in the allegorical sense that University = universe, with West Campus standing for the Western world, an over-extended (800 pages) academic conceit but not without relevance to the period.[1] It was in the Sixties, as I have pointed out in the Introduction to Part II, that radical students became aware of the complicity of the institution of the American university in the so-called "military-industrial complex." College students were being trained for technical and administrative positions in the corporations that manufactured napalm and guided missile systems, and undergraduates in land-grant colleges were required to undergo Reserve Officer military training on campus. The professors, far from living the popular myth of the "ivory tower," engaged in weapons

research and went on the payroll of the CIA, while university presidents and directors became chairmen of corporate boards and high-ranking government officials, sometimes, like Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, all three. If the professors did not avoid political involvement, they did avoid political responsibilty. As Christopher Lasch explains: "The freedom of American intellectuals as a professional class blinds them to their un-freedom...Their freedom from overt political control...blinds them to the way in which the 'knowledge industry' has been incorporated into the state and the military-industrial complex" (98). Knowledge, as Foucault has endeavored to show, does not develop in a political vaccuum and is not politically neutral.

In the allegory, Giles is working on "The Revised New Syllabus" (the novel's alternate title), which suggests what Barth himself called "a souped-up Bible," as well as illustrative autobiography and program for future study. Entities and events of contemporary history tend to have their fictional counterparts. Hence, Campus Riots One and Two are the First and Second World Wars, the perennial enemy East Campus is the Soviet Union and satellite states, and so forth. The tragic and comic are often indistinguishable, however, and history is rearranged and conflated on occasion, so that, for example, figures from the Bible and Greek history and literature are invoked amid references to the Holocaust and the Cold War. The novel is therefore connected with historical events in a particularized but often non-chronological way, owing to its mixture of historical, mythical, and philosophical dimensions (Scholes 86).

New Tammany College, for example, evidently gets its name from Tammany Hall, the New York City Democratic political machine, which began as a force working for the common people, became increasingly controlled by the privileged classes, and ended up as a cor-

rupt instrument of the city's political bosses, finally passing out of existence in 1966, the year Barth's novel was published. The college follows a similar course in its own history, with sinister elements gradually gaining control and power-grabs distracting from the college's primary purpose of "passing" or "graduating" students. Tammany, then, may be the promise and the betrayal of the US political system, or even any large, unwieldy organization where the lust and competition for power perverts original ideals and where an entrenched bureaucracy begins to exist for itself alone.

In similarly inexact correspondences, contemporary historical figures are paralleled. Thus, Max Spielman, Giles' mentor and the developer of the huge WESCAC computer, was persuaded to push the button to release the EAT waves that brought on mass destruction. Max thus recalls J. Robert Oppenheimer, leader of the Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb. Like Oppenheimer, who lost his security clearance in the late Forties for alleged Communist sympathies, Max loses his job when his loyalty is questioned for being a sympathizer of the Student-Unionists (Communists). Yet, in character, Max, an old Jewish humanist, resembles the amiable genius Einstein or Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler much more than the notoriously "difficult" Oppenheimer. Dwight and Milton Eisenhower, Alger Hiss, J. Edgar Hoover, and John Kennedy, perhaps others, make similar "appearances." Although the historical elaborations are more fully worked out, the ultimate effect of this hodge-podge, I would argue, is the reduction of history to molasses, similar to Vonnegut's reductions in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

WESCAC, or West Campus Automatic Computer, is a rather more complex image or symbol of a number of ideas, although it does not fit neatly into the allegorical scheme. While it seems to be Barth's fictional means of examining his satirical and philosophical concerns, it

also serves as an image of contemporary power, a "power-knowledge" that both produces and dominates. Its immediate productive function is as the metafictional narrative "source" of the novel itself. The computer is said to have edited and printed out the memoirs of George Giles, which were also edited by a writer named J.B. (who resembles John Barth) and his publishers, who add a Swiftean "disclaimer" of their own, a device in which Barth ingeniously anticipates criticism by incorporating it into his novel as a preface.

These complex framing devices illustrate the author's judgment of his own work as that of someone whose "talent has to make simple things complicated" (Casciato 30). More than a perverse love of complexity for its own sake, these fictional convolutions are part of Barth's declared project of casting doubt on common-sense reality and its deification in realist fiction. For Barth, realism is a "kind of true representation of a representation of life" (Casciato 26). The proliferation of fictions in *Giles*, which will become obsessive in later works, is to undermine the delusion of mirror-like representations, associated in the novel with Dr. Eierkopf (eye-head). This novel, like *Sot-Weed*, is concerned with self-deception and counterfeit and the corresponding aspiration toward what Barth apparently conceives as real knowledge, so that simple explanations are constantly resisted through artifices of paradox, hyperbole, farce, puns, serio-comic sub-plots, etc. In Barth's work, "the illusion of a single coherent model of reality being erected is constantly negated" (Tanner 247) and, it would seem, the aspiration for a definitive knowledge, knowledge of the "truth," cannot therefore be completely realized.

If Giles is the humanist center of these epistemological questions, WESCAC is the center of its system of power, a "machine" that goes beyond the attributes of machinery even in an early description, where it existed from the early West Campus as a kind of spirit of technology or material progress, though closer to an animal organism than a spiritual being:

> It was put at first to the simplest tasks: doing sums and verifying certain types of answers. Thereafter, as studentdom's confidence in it grew, so also did its size, complexity, and power; it underwent as series of metamorphoses, like an insect or growing fetus, demanding ever more nourishment and exerting more influence, until in the years just prior to my own birth it cut the last cords to its progenitors and commenced a life of its own. It was not clear to me whether a number of little creatures had emerged into one, for example, or whether...WESCAC one day had outgrown its docility, kicked over the traces, and turned on its keepers. Nothing about the beast seemed unambiguous...The whole of New Tammany College, I took it, if not the entire campus, had gradually come under WESCAC's hegemony, voluntarily or otherwise.... (86)

While much of this passage seems to be describing a Frankenstein's monster, the mention of "hegemony" and "ambiguity" and involuntary submission in the latter part suggests more contemporary modes of power, the impersonal bureaucracy of institutions and the normalizing functions of the modern state in which visible leaders are no longer important. The control implied in its calculations is that of the (zero-one) binary system, which for Baudrillard is purely structural (the opposite signs are only functional and reversible), a concept that will also be important for Pynchon.[2]

Ten pages later (96), WESCAC begins to resemble a modern computer, with programs, binary functions, and so forth. One might draw a parallel of WESCAC's development with the history of the earliest automatic controlled computers, the Mark I, from the beginning of the Second World War, to the ENIAC (completed in 1946) and UNIVAC, or Universal Automatic Computer, which became (1951) the first machine to handle numerical and alphabetical data with equal facility. These "first-generation" machines were replaced by the transistorized computers of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which in turn yielded to the integrated circuit models of the mid-1960s and early 1970s ("Computers" 188). Barth's novel, then, appeared at the beginning of the third generation of computers and its plot spans the period of the first two generations, which produced the gigantic hardware suggested by WESCAC. At this pe-

riod, the beginning of what can now be seen to be the computer revolution, computers were by no means taken for granted to the extent that they are today. Wild speculations and fears about the possibilities of "thinking-machines" taking over human destiny were rampant in science-fiction, popular legend, and even ordinary news. The exaggerations of WESCAC, therefore, have an historical basis in this experience.

WESCAC's ambiguity owes to its being both source and devourer of information. It thus suggests positive and productive power as well as instrumental domination: teaching faculty and administrative policy-maker on Campus, but also a new kind of sinister military weapon whose EAT-waves (EAT = Electroencephalic Amplification and Transmission) suggest Burroughs's horrific political parties, and, historically, the radioactive fallout scare (rational enough in a time of intense atomic testing) that was much in the news in the Fifties. West Campus has won the Second Campus Riot, but the waves have caused "mental burn-out" of thousands of Americans, victims of the computer's version of nuclear fallout. WESCAC is therefore partly beneficial, partly destructive, but potentially all-powerful, with a power-knowledge that tends toward ever new sites of human control. It is suggests both Foucaultian and older forms of centralized power. It is a product and a creator of new technologies, and, as physical object, both centrally located and so accessible to Giles's reprogramming, and yet amorphous in its ever-multiplying functions that threaten to evade rather than contend with and resist external control.

As suggestive as the "character" WESCAC is, however, it takes up only a small part of the vast landscape of the novel, in which Giles's quest takes thematic precedence. Allegorical and mythical elements become mixed in Giles's personal story, as he turns out to be WESCAC's son, got upon a virgin via a program for impregnation that would produce a

"Grand Tutor," with the name-acronym GILES (Grand-Tutorial Ideal Laboratory Specimen). Past and future are conflated, with the planned eugenics suggesting the Nazis, who keep turning up, and the computer as father of a messiah, suggesting the god-like status and powers the computer will assume in the near future. As Grand Tutor, Giles is the only one who can change the AIM (Automatic Implantation Mechanism) of WESCAC, analagous to a human will. If successful, he will save West Campus from self-destruction that would result from the computer's proliferating power by defusing the Quiet Riot (Cold War) as the principle agent of East-West *détente*. And yet, overall, this admirable political aim is secondary to the novel's preoccupation with "passing" or "commencement," a vaguely spiritual goal the human race is aspiring to which sounds suspiciously like a secular version of Christian salvation.

The parallels of a political allegory therefore in first instance turn into socio-historical ones. Giles's personal development from goat to man in such a reading may be meant to stand for a pastoral or rural way of life and its replacement by an urban society (Karl 287). Likewise, the *bildungsroman* of an innocent youth's coming of age through bitter experience would become the myth of America itself, along with the moral warning of the dangers of self-deception and false innocence (present as well in *Sot-Weed*). But the insistence throughout the novel on the problem of individual identity (Giles's I.D. card, with its blankness and confusion of names, the False Grand-Tutor, etc.) underlines the meaning of Giles's transformation as an essentially spiritual/humanist one. The computer, at this level, is the symbol of the contemporary obsession with self, Christopher Lasch's "culture of narcissism." The ultimate in narcissistic experience, WESCAC creates and completes cycles without outside interference (Karl 285). In allegorizing his tale, Barth seems to have avoided the "pychologizing" of so-

cial history that radical critics like Schaub noted in Mailer and other Fifties' novelists, since, in the allegory, fantasy elements "stand for" but, crucially, do not replace historical events. And yet, Barth does not avoid what is perhaps the major flaw in his project, since Giles's progress from goat-boy to "graduate" can be read as a reconciliation of the simple virtues of pastoralism with the inevitability of technologism, a mistake that even the often sentimental Vonnegut doesn't make. If unlike Mailer, Barth has been attracted to but has not wholly succumbed to a neo-romantic nostalgia for a pristine (but bawdy) American experience that can no longer be reclaimed, he apparently thinks that these old-fashioned virtues still have a certain vitality and viability in a technologized world.

Myth, philosophy, and history coincide once again in Giles's climactic descent into the belly of WESCAC to transform its AIM. Mythically corresponding to the hero's descent into the underworld, which is classically undertaken for social and spiritual transformation, Giles' triple descent is evidently meant to be a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis of his spiritual goal, which also has ideological meaning and consequence. First, he comes to a position of a clear distinction between "pass" and "fail," which is, ideologically, the conservative belief in the necessity of fundamental and clear-cut distinctions--and an example of binary structural control. This results in disastrous consequences in the (Cold War) boundary dispute between East and West Campuses. Second, his formulation "failure is passage" is the countercultural's radical, but equally mistaken, belief in complete negation, or the destruction of all distinctions, which leads to intellectual arbitrariness and political anarchy, what one might call "Vonnegut's solution." Third, there is what is apparently (and disappointingly) meant as Giles's attainment of wisdom, in which passage and failure are distinct but interdependent (Scholes 84; Tanner 250-1). This solution smacks of a dubious liberal mix of (Emersonian)

individual self-reliance and (hippy) social interdependence, or Barth's admirable but misguided attempt to reconcile American past and present spiritual heritages. It is to the point that the climactic fulfillment of the spiritual and political task of Giles's life, the transforming of AIM, is accomplished through his sexual union with Anastasia in the belly of WESCAC, which results in fertility and spiritual renewal, or, once more, a (sexual) romanticizing of the political. Giles is once referred to as "Enos Enoch [Jesus Christ] with balls," a spiritual savior who will restore sexuality to its rightful place. For one thing, the issues that the novel raises are too grand for such simplistic spiritual solutions as the healing powers of the Sixties' sexual revolution (Karl 288-9). That sex takes place within, is contained by, a computer would make it part of hegemonic control as well, not a supposedly natural alternative. What Foucault calls the "Victorian hypothesis," by which we falsely believe that when we say yes to sex we say no to power is mistaken (Foucault, *Hist.of Sex.* 57) Sex has already been incorporated into the orders of our knowledge (cf. Chapt. 1d).

In his quest, Giles must come to terms with his origins and purpose in life, which links this novel to Barth's "existential" novels, *The Floating Opera* (1956), and *The End of the Road* (1958). He must also manage, accept, support, defuse, or negate the competing versions of power of his associates which aid, oppose, or somehow compromise his own. For the rationalist-humanist Max Spielman, heroes are needed but not especially to be revered, herohood, like red hair or a humped back, being a genetic trait rather than a divine calling, a needed antidote to Nazi deification of heroes. On the other hand, Max believes, despite the historical events that would suggest the contrary, in the powers of WESCAC, its capacity for expansion into beneficial effects, and, since he was responsible for its original programming, the effectiveness of its defense mechanisms. He might therefore be seen to represent what

Mailer denounced in *Armies of the Night*: the liberal professional in love with technology-land, deluded in his rationality, and historically blind.

Max's one-time colleague, Dr. Eierkopf is, however, even worse. A eunuch-like scientist, helpless without the brutish black servant Croaker (a racist stereotype of inarticulate mind, sexually uncontrolled and strong body) represents mind served by body. Either is lost without the other, as is pure spirit, in the form of the Oriental mystic, The Living Sakhyan, who remains mute and motionless throughout. Eierkopf defends "disengaged" intelligence, the false neutrality of positivist science, or knowledge without power. He therefore cares nothing for whom he works, having served the Siegfrieders (Germans) before West Campus and is the foil to Jewish humanist Max. Power resides for him in the laboratory, since for him knowledge is apolitical.

Other characters embody social and literary types as well as political action, or lack of it, in various forms. Leonid Andreich, a defector from East Campus, is a Dostoevskian caricature who fails in his political mission from sentimentalism. Peter Green is a WASP stereotype of entrepreneurial wealth--patriotic yet politically naive, self-deluded but optimistic--complete with neurotic marriage, phony liberalism, racist paternalism, anti-intellectualism, "I'm OK" personal philosophy, cliché-ridden speech, and connections with environmentally polluting industries: a composite, it would seem, of most of the negative strains in the contemporary American character. For Stoker, power is power in the literal sense of electricity, energy, the lifeblood of technology. A sooty Vulcanic figure, dressed in black and leader of a rough pack, Stoker recalls (the stoker) Yank, in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922), the motive dynamic force of modern times and proud of it. Like Yank, Stoker thumps his chest and points to the infernal scene of the furnace-room: "Here's where your power is!" (220).

Finally, Chancellor Rexford embodies both charismatic and organizational power. His boyish looks, persuasive rhetoric, and dangerous policies recall John Kennedy. In his speech initiating the semester, he rejects Giles's aim to change AIM, and upholds the East-West standoff, reproducing the Cold War arguments for nuclear deterrence. In the Boundary Dispute, Rexford shows his credentials as cold warrior, for the secret diplomacy essential to intercollege business needs a convenient front like the Dispute, a policy that shakes Giles with its cynicism.

Counterfeit and disguise may once again allude to political schemes and values, but in this novel they are more directly related to perception, the confusion of illusion and reality. In *Giles*, there is the magician, masker, impostor, return of Northrop Frye's *alazon* figure, Harold Bray, the false Grand Tutor who achieves the power of notoriety through the shifting fake identities and false promises of the trickster, a figure familiar in American public life as small-time politician or commercial huckster, but who in literature goes back to Melville and Twain with an immediate predecessor in Barth's own Henry Burlingame. The difficulty of perception is also suggested by the motifs of blindness, eyelessness, lenses and mirrors. Simply looking, as Eierkopf does, is an inadequate substitute for action, and the transformation of WESCAC, it will be recalled, can only be realized in a sexual *act* in which Giles comes to "know" Anastasia (Scholes 79). The importance and difficulty of accurately seeing is examined in the long parody of *Oedipus Rex*, "Taliped Decanus" (312-54), midway through the novel. Oedipus is the Western symbol of the dangers of cognition, as he begins to "see" only after he becomes literally blind. "Taliped," though a parodic *tour de force*, trivializes Sophocles' tragic figure, which Tanner explains as Barth's sense of the contemporary loss of the value of fictions, that they may be significantly related to real experience 252-53). This is

a point the author will take up both in his well-known essay, "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967), on the impossibility of reflecting life in letters, and the essay's "fictional complement," the ahistorical, metafictional gimmickry of *Lost in the Funhouse*(1968) (Hite 711; Barth, "Lit. of Exhaustion"). These works do not claim a loss of literature to relate to reality so much as the ability of a realist literature to do so. He would undoubtedly point out that Oedipus, while a cultural touchstone, is himself a fiction.

In the context of agents of power, *Giles Goat-Boy* is particularly relevant for its vision of WESCAC, Barth's quite early perception of the powerful role computers were to play in contemporary society, of a centralized power that is also diffuse, the fusion of power and knowledge in both producing subjects and reducing them to submission, and of the increasing role of machines and information in a society where the humans remain politically passive. For these purposes, his rather overblown allegory is an effective vehicle, but this historical perspective is the most superficial in the novel's own terms. The historical parallels are elaborate but tend to be conflated, losing any contextual significance, and suggesting that history itself is nothing more than an elaborate game. Giles's personal struggle within his society, which seems to be the essential point, might actually have better been realized in a realistic fiction (where such conflicts find their classic form), especially if Barth's artistic aim is, as he says it is, "to speak eloquently and memorably to our still-human hearts and conditions" (qtd. by Boyers 730). It may simply be the case, of course, that Barth's humanist ideal runs contrary to his literary practice. Or, as Robert Scholes says (110-12), the fiction of "fabulation," of which he takes *Giles* to be a supreme example, arises from a conflict between mythical and philosophical perspectives, that is, whether man is to be resigned to his fate or, as Giles does, to actively create one, an essentially Romantic project. If this is the case, Barth

has attempted to reconcile the existentialist resignations of Jakob Horner and Todd Andrews, the protagonists of his Fifties' novels, with the possibilities of political action in Giles's changing both himself and his society.

One version of Barth's political vision is the "counterpulling of individual against what weighs him down," including history and systems (Karl 465). Burlingame, in *Sot-Weed*, resists systems and conspiracies by disguise, reshaping himself by taking on false identities. Giles, too, must undertake an Oedipal liberation from a father (WESCAC) that is a kind of supreme system. He functions by shifting between human and animal identities. The Barthian protagonist therefore does not so much resist the power of systems and imposed roles by counterpull (as in Karl's image), as by a transformation of self, by slipping in and out of a convenient identity. Resisting a fixed role in society is a traditional project for the lone male in the American novel, one which in contemporary fiction can be seen from Mailer's Rojack to Pynchon's Profane or Slothrop to DeLillo's Oswald. It is related to a fear of restricted freedom and the paranoia of being caught in someone else's plot that this chapter began with. It is as if systems are so powerful in the US, technology so all-encompassing, and politics so ineffective, that the individual is trapped not only in his impotence to make the connections to effect change but to escape being obliterated as a self

c.

In Norman Mailer's impressively long list of background readings on the CIA he prints at the end of *Harlot's Ghost*, Barth's *Sabbatical* (1982), which preceded it by a decade, is not included but might well have been. In both novels, there is a central, unsolved mystery of a high-echelon CIA officer who has gone independent in certain covert operations and whose body (if it is his) ends up in the sea. Mailer's novel, more richly furnished with historical

detail, could have been entitled "Inside the Company." This was in fact the title of one of the more important non-fictional exposes of CIA covert operations by ex-officers like Philip Agee and Victor Marchetti (both of whom are cited by Mailer and Barth), which appeared in the mid-1970s and which helped both to bring on official investigations of the Agency that brought its public reputation to an all-time low.

Like Agee and Marchetti, Barth's protagonist, Fenwick Turner ("Fenn"), is an ex-officer who repents and blows the Company's cover with a book: KUDOV, code name for Clandestine Services Division (historically, "Covert Operations"). Although KUDOV is an insider's version, *Sabbatical* is an outsider's. The CIA as a regrettable part of Fenn's past is perceived as a political and moral evil. Its escapades keep intruding on but manage to be kept at the margins of the ongoing love story of Fenn and Susan and their sabbatical sailing cruise. It is kept so, at least, until it almost, but not quite, threatens to overwhelm the present with past events and their consequences in a complex network of family relations. In *Harlot*, by contrast, life and education in the Company is an continuing affair and is shown rather than commented on in the interlocking relations of private life and public power.

The main Harlot-like character in Sabbatical is Fenn's twin brother, Manfred ("Count"), a senior officer of KUDOV, who has been missing at sea (from Fenn's boat), for some time. Count was a specialist in Soviet counter-intelligence, the hot-spot in Cold War years, but ran counter-intelligence operations in a number of theaters, including Latin America (Fenn has witnessed his expert interrogation of an alleged right-wing Chilean at a local CIA safe-house). In this novel of *doppelgangers,* Fenn is the liberal writer-*manqué*, who has been recruited by his more worldly brother. Several sinister developments take place or have taken place around his person that serve to thicken the plot of this "near" spy thriller. A nu-

Fenn's ex-wife Marilyn Marsh has herself become, in the seven-year interval of Fenn's marriage to Susan, a CIA officer of some standing. This is a family romance with a difference.

The mystery deepens when Fenn and Susan hole up during a storm in a bay that turns out not be on their charts and in which they witness mysterious sights and sounds that may indicate a CIA site. The meaning of the episode and the links with Count, Paisley, and the Russian defector seem about to be revealed when Fenn meets with his friend and former CIA mentor, Dugold Taylor, and yet their talk only leads to further complexities. Speculation on Count's disappearance takes the form of: a) he was the mole and was kidnapped or killed by the KGB (Dugold denies this), b) like Paisley, he was "deep-sixed" by unknown parties, c) he committed suicide, leaving no trace, to which Fenn later adds, d) as a careless sailor, he was accidentally drowned. Conflicting details do not rule out any of the alternatives. At this point, Dugold pitches Fenn to be a double-agent. The Company would forgive Fenn for his book, and he would have, as CIA's most public critic, the perfect cover. There is a suggestion of coercion in the possibility, to Fenn's horror, of Orrin being recruited. The possibility is held out, too, of Fenn's learning whether or not Gus is alive, since his disappearance is also a matter of speculation. He may have been: a) killed by DINA, the Chilean secret police, b) being held incommunicado in an off-shore prison in exchange for Carmen's information on Fenn, c) being held in exchange for Orrin's research work, to which Fenn later adds, d) rescued from prison by Count (not dead after all) and then both of them drowned in the icy ocean waters while trying to escape.

These multiplying intricacies are engaging to the reader but are not to be unwound. When Dugold suddenly dies of a heart attack, yet another mystery arises (was it of natural causes, or induced? since he told Fenn of CIA research into a new drug that brings on medi-

cally unsuspicious heart seizures). At the funeral, in CIA headquarters (Fenn fears he is being kidnapped), he is pitched again, this time by his ex-wife, and indignantly refuses. At this point, one is left with the following mysteries: What really happened to Count? What really happened to Paisley? What connection is there, if any, between them? Was Dugold murdered, and if so, how was he connected to either of the above? What really happened to Gus? And, most intriguingly, since this is apparently a spy-story, who really is the deep mole? None of these questions turn out to have answers, nor does it seem to bother the intrusive narrator, concerned with Barth's somewhat tiresome metafictional preoccupation with getting the story told, that they do not.

This *dénouement,* or lack of it, in turn suggests alternate possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive. Has Barth simply written a pseudo-spy novel with the joke, as it were, on the reader? This is likely, especially if one takes as analogies *Sot-Weed* as a pseudo-historical novel and *Giles* a pseudo-campus novel. On the other hand, the novel's demonstration of the pervasiveness of CIA penetration into private life and the resulting paranoia point to the ominous systems of Pynchon, as well as Mailer's more well-documented text on CIA penetration into both public and private. The lack of resolution of what may be a major conspiracy concerning national security also suggests a fictional parallel to modern American history's great unsolved mystery, the Kennedy assassination, a story also full of loose ends and irresolvable contradictions, which will later engage both DeLillo and Mailer. Finally, more in line with Barth's previous work, and connected with the first possibility, is that Barth in his refusal to turn out another example of an "exhausted" fictional genre, has produced a postmodernist text, with refusal of closure, embedded narratives, ambiguous narrative voice, the characters' occasional comment on plot and technique, factual/fictional "footnotes," etc.

In this case, *Sabbatical* is not at all the departure it seems to be from the more playful texts of *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) and *Letters* (1979) which preceded it, but is--rather than the political statement its subject would suggest-- yet another novel about making fictions (Karl 486). In this perspective, one might say that Barth has returned to narrative, even a traditional one, but with the postmodernist difference: a simultaneous attempt to insert an historical narrative (CIA in recent history) into the gaps of his "romance" in order to subvert the spy-genre, and to use the spy-genre to threaten to swallow but be (ironically) contained by the romance genre.

Taking the clue from the title, which suggests rest and renewal, and the sub-title ("A Romance"), however, what is after all essential in this novel is Fenn and Susan wending their way through paradisiacal waters, their voyage "a mythical search for Edenic renewal" (Karl 486). That is, in the end, all that is offered, since the multiple questions are simply dropped, and Fenn and Susan literally sail off at the end to "a world elsewhere," to adapt Poirier's phrase, satisfied that there are no answers and engrossed in their own future. The cruise, which apparently served only as the narrative frame, and the life prospects of the main characters (Susan's status as mother after an aborted pregnancy and her unresolved academic career, Fenn's heart condition), which were about to be rendered prosaic by the proliferating complexities of the spy tale, remain after all firmly in place, life goes on, etc.

The novel is not really concerned with recent history since the centrality of the romance is played out against what turns out to be a mere background of historical plots. With respect to power, for example, is the novel merely concerned with the liberal notion of showing how and to what extent the power of a government organization is abused in its unanswerabililty to its reputed authority, and how and to what extent it impinges on the private lives of individual

people? The emphasis on the family network and their collectively sad but hopeful story would point to this, but it would also indicate yet another romanticized solution to the public/private dilemma of American life. The unexplained mystery at the end of *Harlot's Ghost* merely confirms what the novel has been showing all along, but in *Sabbatical* there is no final resonance. The missing persons remain missing, although the family network remains intact, and Fenn and Susan simply get on with their romantic escape. The novel is a good example of the terms of the quotation with which Part III (Introduction) began: Tanner's notion of the contemporary novel's paradoxical dream of both unfettered freedom and dread of invisible plots of conditioning and control. The dream will all but disappear in the novels of Thomas Pynchon.

NOTES

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[1] In another sense, Robert Boyers (730) argues that both *Sot-Weed* and *Giles* are "quintessential university novels," written for people for whom books are central to experience and language is definitive of what matters, a positive judgment that ties in with the frequent criticism of Barth as a merely "academic" novelist.

[2] Prof Sergio Bellei has pointed out to me this notion of Baudrillard's and the pervasiveness of binary structures throughout the novel.

CHAPTER 7

SYSTEM, CONSPIRACY, PARANOIA: THOMAS PYNCHON

"We have to look for power sources..and distribution networks we were never taught." (*Gravity's Rainbow*)

Criticism has duly noted and discussed the importance of the concept of entropy in the fiction of Thomas Pynchon, and the author himself called attention to it in an early story of that name. In physics, entropy is the gradual leveling of energy in any closed system, according to the second law of thermodynamics. Chaos varies in direct proportion with an increase of entropy but also, somewhat paradoxically, differentiation decreases as energy distribution becomes more uniform. The movement, irreversible, is therefore from order to chaos and from differentiation to sameness. Everything--the universe itself--will eventually run down; "heat death" is the destiny of all.[1] This inexorable and irreversible movement, Pynchon, following the model of historian Henry Adams, translates into social terms (Harris 77; Slade 33-4). In this theory, human societies are going the way of physical matter. Besides the natural accidents and disasters we may succumb to, man-made organizational conformity, the entropic state of "de-differentiation," and the dehumanization resulting from exclusive reliance on advanded technologies are transforming the social world into the twentieth century version of heat death, what Pynchon calls "the inanimate."

This drive to inanimateness has become a nearly obsessive theme in Pynchon's fiction. Entropy serves as a central metaphor in what appears to some critics as a humanist project, if not in the manner of Mailer and counter-culture critics of the Sixties who lamented the encroachment of technology (for Pynchon, it is already here, invading our bodies and minds), then at least in alerting us to its usurpation of the human. Pynchon has accordingly been claimed by

humanist critics, notably Joseph Dewey, who see his work as an affirmation and reformulation of humanism in the impersonal contemporary world. There is some justification for this interpretation: a few characters, notably women and blacks, practice values like love, solidarity, human concern, but this practice is not presented fatuously as the alternative to activism but rather as a gesture of heroic resignation, "painting the side of the sinking ship" (*V.* 460) or at least refusal of pessimistic inaction (Harris 91-93). Pynchon seems to resist the retreat into self-absorption, as is evidenced in his first novel *V.*: (1963) by the decadence of the Whole Sick Crew (a satiric view of the Fifties' Beat culture), and the two protagonists, Benny Profane, who realizes that in the end he has learned nothing from his eventful but aimless existence, and Herbert Stencil, who has failed in his obsessive quest for the elusive figure of V. Furthermore, what it means to be "human" has usually gone undefined in humanist criticism, while science fiction and postmodernist literary and critical texts have often rendered the concept problematic, and in Pynchon's work it can at least be defined negatively. One might add that Pynchon's humanism, if that is what it is, is of a rather different order: a major humanist belief, for example, that human life has meaning, remains in Pynchon's work only a possibility. Other critics perceive a Pynchon who is critical of the reigning humanist ideas as obsolete for our time and hence invalid as guides to human behavior (Henkle 215). Perhaps Pynchon can be seen as humanist in the way most contemporary novelists are--as one who laments the loss of value and human potential in a world where technical efficiency, the principle of "performativity" has become the norm (Lyotard xxxiv, 50). His major novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, has been described by Karl (308) in these terms as a story of postwar life as "a continuing process of human means against scientific ends."

The two main themes of *V.* are the contemporary drive toward the oxymoronic condition of human inanimateness, and European imperialism of the early 20th century--a retrospective forewarning against American imperialism of the late 20th century. Both of these remain preoccupations in the later work and both are related to entropy: the first, directly, in the expansive development of technology in our century, perceived negatively as the "expanding empire of the inanimate;" the second, metaphorically (as the latter phrase also illustrates), as the technologically advanced western world, in exhausting itself goes on to draw the life out of cultures that still retain some vitality. The two themes, power as imperialism and power as the technology in its service, come together as the "Culture of Death" engulfs the technologically less developed in "a quest to reduce everything, first other and finally self, to inert matter" (Cooley 308).

Examples of technology as the way to the inanimate abound in *V.* The double-agent Bongo-Shaftesbury has an electric switch sewn into his arm; Fergus-Mixolydian has done the same with electrodes, by which he becomes an extension of his television set. The plastic surgeon Shale Shoenmaker (whose first name suggests inanimate rock) took up his profession after seeing the facial disfigurement of a friend after a plane crash, wishing to "repair the havoc" wrought by natural and human agencies like disease, accidents, and war. This noble motive degenerates with time into an indifference and eventual alignment with the inanimate, shown by the nose-job he gives Esther Harvitz, turning her into a WASP stereotype (Slade 104). The operation, while it is parodically represented as a sexual penetration, loses its intimacy as it is performed with instruments (i.e. the inanimate inserted into the body) and, once accomplished, makes the doctor, later to be Esther's lover, want to transform her entire body in an inexorable forward motion toward inanimateness.

pire to. SHROUD compares the automobile junkyards littering the American landscape to the stacked human corpses in Auschwitz, the death-camps being the culmination and symbol of the 20th century's technology of death.

The *schlemihl* Profane has been proposed as the secular-humanist alternative to the technological society--with his fat body, the desire of various women to mother him, his drifter's existence and refusal to take part in the system, and especially his ineptness with machines and general clutziness in a world of material objects. Against the world of machines, it is claimed, Profane is the underground man of modernism, like fictional predecessors in Ellison, Beckett, and Kafka: marginal but vital--unlike Herbert Stencil a producer of disorder, dynamic and wasteful as his fellow sailors, an "anti-power" (Karl 303). Yet, Profane does not escape in the novel the indictment of inanimateness. Along with his wistful dream of an electronic woman (any problems can be referred to the maintenance manual), Profane is accused, correctly, by Rachel Owlglass of evading any connection with other people (although even this message is subverted, since Rachel herself, despite an overdeveloped nurturing capacity, makes love to her MG). In contrast to Stencil, whose itinerary is guaranteed by his obsession, Profane goes randomly from one situation to the next, a "human yo-yo," taking what he needs without giving anything in return, which rather undermines him as a model of humanism. Furthermore, his random movement between places and among diverse groups without purpose connects him with the constant but aimless and eventually futile movement of entropy, his alternating activity ending in stagnation.

The power of technology is also seen negatively, albeit indirectly, in this novel with respect to its collusion in the military superiority of Europe for colonial conquests. The imperialist theme emerges from a series of late 19th and early 20th century historical incidents, which

are not presented chronologically but filtered through the not always reliable perception of Stencil, the scholar-traveler who spends his life on the quixotic and inconsequential quest for V, a quest for personal fulfillment that recalls both similar quests of the Fifties and/or the mythical quest for "America," which, like V, is difficult to identify (Karl 306-7). The first two incidents take place at the turn of the century, hey-day of European (and beginning of American) imperialism. In the Fashoda crisis (1898), the Western European powers maneuver for advantage in North Africa, with "Machiavellians" still playing antiquated Renaissance games of espionage and intrigue. The reductive colonial gaze of the dominant culture, familiar in canonical colonial narratives, would here seem to be reversed, since both spies and tourists (who are said to inhabit a merely "two-dimensional" geography) are perceived through a number of native (i.e. Arab) points-of-view, in Alexandria and Cairo. And yet, typically, this reversal is only apparent, as the native perceptions are really projections of Stencil himself, who is said to supplement the information assembled on his travels and in his research by "impersonation and dream" (Harris 80). The difficulty of perception applies most forcefully to V. Signs of her proliferate in names and icons and yet Stencil can never solve her mystery, nor does he evidently want to, with his declared method of "approach and avoid." Stencil may in fact fear success, for every referent to V. is related to disintegration, the process of entropy, and it is to the point that she is present in all the historical episodes, being the sole link between them (Harris 82). [4]

Tourists and colonizers are again connected in the episode at Florence (1899), where the explorer Godolphin relates a journey that he alone survived to the strange land of Vheissu (located in an African jungle), which he perceives as the "skin" of a woman with shifting colors, an alien surface that cannot be penetrated or possessed: "They [the tourists] want the skin

of a place, the explorer wants its heart" (188). Godolphin does manage to penetrate the surface on his voyage to the South Pole but to his horror he finds literally "nothing": a vision of the void or the completion of entropy. Where Stencil always hesitates at the brink of discovery, Godolphin has a glimpse and is thereafter deeply disturbed by what he has seen. The imperialist cannot really possess what he has conquered. Godolphin thereafter suffers acute paranoia at imagined plots by Vheissu.

The debasement of the colonizer is underscored in the two most harrowing episodes, which take place in South West Africa. The first (1904) relates the aftermath of a native uprising, the near extermination of the Herero people by the German troops of General Von Trotha, a colonial proto-Holocaust. The naked power exercized on the natives, who are raped and murdered in creative ways, illustrates the inanimateness of their bodies to their conquerors, who renounce their own humanity in the absolute freedom of their violations, a form of "self-reification" (Slade 66). In the second episode, an uprising of the Bondels (1922) and its suppression occurs only as background for the goings-on in the fortress-villa of Foppl, who had served under Von Trotha and is excited by the thought of a reprise. Foppl and his guests, assembled as a "European Conclave or League of Nations" in a mockery of the recently formed League of Nations, indulge in a "siege-party," a sado-masochistic orgy which, in its steadily increasing depravity, is a moral and social equivalent of physical entropy in a closed system. Here, too, Pynchon parodies imperialist fiction, notably Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," with Foppl's Kurzian desire to exterminate the natives--an example of Linda Hutcheon's notion of historiographic metafictions situating themselves within historical discourse (Cooley 313-5, and 323 note 12).

The epilogue of *V.* takes place on the island of Malta (1919) to which the various plots constantly return, and the crises of the historical episodes come to their culmination there. Malta's geographical position has made it the most conquered country in Europe, the quintessential victim of European imperialism. Bombed by the Germans in the Second World War, the island has resisted in its rock-like "tenacity", only to become the assembly point for British forces in the Suez crisis (1956), perceived at the time as the last gasp of the British Empire (as the even more recent Falklands war showed, however, there was still some life in it yet). There are two tiny pockets of resistance. Paola Maijstral, one of several resourceful Pynchon heroines, is an abused Maltese, married to an American sailor (the latest of the conquerors?), but since, as she says, nobody knows what a Maltese is, she can't be labelled or possessed. Her father Fausto, in his successive self-reincarnations, has moved, as it were, in the reverse direction of V., going from resigned colonized native to a fully conscious Maltese convinced of his humanity. Both "characters" illustrate the Foucaultian notion of the instabililty of the self and the capacity of people to remodel themselves according to goals independent of the dominant paradigms.

In accordance with the novel's complexity, the role of history is ambiguous. On the one hand, there is Machiavelli's *Fortuna*, frequently alluded to as a significant factor in events. On the other, there is Stencil, who gives events form through narrative but whose vision and methods, as we have seen, are anything but objective. What he gives is not "history" but "Stencilized" history, that is, historiographic metafictions. Stencil, one of Pynchon's many paranoids, comes to believe in "The Plot That Has No Name" (with a pun on plot, meaning both narrative and conspiracy). In recreating the past, he has distorted it into his own obsessive fiction, which has come to have a reality as meaningful as real events.[5]

Taken separately and together, the historical episodes suggest social entropy, man's pursuit of nihilism. Is Pynchon's work "an attempt to situate Americans in history?" (Wood 28) or, as some critics would have it, does the entropic vision spell the end of history?: "the perspective of the larger ahistorical view which throws into doubt the entire notion of a history in which 'life' has any more significance than 'decay'," (Schaub, *Pynchon* 10; Harris 87). In the latter reading, Pynchon's is a cosmic view rather than an historical one, an interpretation apparently strengthened by the contemporary (1950s) plot of the aimless "yo-yoing" and decadent aesthetic attitudes of the Whole Sick Crew, which would then function as a contemporary comment on the pointlessness of modern history. Entropy reduces human history to a series of meaningless events (which would, to be sure, make Pynchon's alleged humanism equally pointless), but this is perhaps to confuse the idea of physical entropy with its metaphorical social meaning. His next novel will point to possible reversals of the slide of society into an irreversible condition.

Since Pynchon evidently cares about what happens to people, or at least peoples, the inroads into history have to be taken more seriously than John Barth's play with history. One problem, it has been pointed out, is the discrepancy between the power of the comedy of ideas--and one might add, the evocations of a spiritually dead culture--and the rather muted depiction of love, fellowship, community, etc., in *V.*, or even in his most recent novel, *Vineland*, which seem too feeble to be offered as a solution (Henkle 215). Pynchon's vision is dark, but he may be suggesting that there is hope in the fact that, like Fausto, some men actually learn from experience, which would underscore the importance of history. By giving the several historical incidents no causal connection, Pynchon is showing how the plots that men see are their own connection, an insight that works equally well for paranoia and for history and that will again be

taken up by DeLillo. History then is not meaningless since one gives it meaning through the forging of connections and the ordering of apparently random conjunctions. This is, as we have seen in the Introduction, sec. II, the role of both historian and novelist. Events must be interpreted to emerge from random happenings.

b.

Both entropy and history are again important in Pynchon's second, and shortest novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966).[6] The heat loss of physical systems is again replaced by social decay and disintegration, but the Western civilization of *V.* is here narrowed down to the US, called throughout "America," in order to focus on the dream, the what-might-have-been, as well as contemporary reality. That reality is late capitalist society with a dull, uniform, homogenious landscape (signs of entropy), and its citizens reduced to automatons or drop-outs, depending on whether they participate or not in its reductive forces. This loss of human energy is indicated by a central term "waste," which paradoxically may also spell out a possibility for renewal, for the closed system of *V.* may not after all necessarily apply to the US of the Sixties, where people were waking up to what had happened to their country and becoming aware of the possibility of resistance to the socially entropic forces afflicting it (Slade, *Pynchon* 132). The entropic tendency of the whole, Pynchon seems to be suggesting, may be subject to change at a local level through the resistance of the "weak, bottom-up local power" against the "strong, top-down," "imperializing" power (Fiske 11). As Norbert Weiner, the theorist of entropy, put it: "While the universe as a whole...tends to run down, there are local enclaves whose direction seems opposed to the universe at large and in which there is a limited and temporary tendency for organization to increase" (Weiner 20-1, qtd. in Slade 132). Less pessimistic than *V.*, this

novel offers the possibility of such an organization, and in the novel its existence can be at least partly confirmed by historical research and hypothesis.

The central Western myth of Oedipus, which Barth parodied in *Giles*, is again evoked in *Crying*. The tragedy of Oedipus was both an individual dilemma and a crisis of the state. A similar situation exists for Oedipa Maas, although she is a modern (wo)man and so incapable of tragedy in a world where human relationships have been eroded by excessive systemization and reification. In a novel where the central metaphors have to do with communication, the relating of people to people, Oedipa is constantly frustrated in her attempts to make contact or effect connections, not only in E.M. Forster's sense of "Only connect," but in Pynchon's evident desire for community (Oedipa's wanderings in nighttown San Francisco give her a proliferation of information that will, hopefully, lead to community). If this failure is her personal dilemma, it is related to her failure to unravel completely the labyrinthine mysteries of the Inveriarty estate (of which she is executrix), vast in extension but with a curious lack of a center, so that the closure of this possibility remains incomplete. Oedipus's discoveries lead to both self-enlightenment and destruction, Oedipa's only to further mystery or confusion, as the two outcomes of Oedipus remain in abeyance. In her case, lack of self-knowledge reaches new depths, as she becomes uncertain as to whether she is overwhelmingly paranoid or simply going mad in her inability to sort out truth from deception.

Solving mysteries is the province of the detective novel, a popular genre in tune with Pynchon's often flippant tone, cartoon-like names, convoluted plot, and nameless menace. William Spanos says that until postmodernism the novel was based on a "detective novel" premise, i.e. "on a monolithic certainty that immediate psychic or historical experience is part of a comforting...well-made cosmic drama or novel" (qtd. by McCaffery, "Lit. Disruptions"

140). The novel, Spanos argues, was based on epistemological premises--linearity, causality, inductive inference-- that are no longer so certain. As Roland Barthes says, expectation becomes the basic condition for truth: "truth...is what is at the end of expectation...truth is what completes, what closes" (76). In *Crying,* closure is denied as the central truth is still being awaited at the end. It is therefore rather an anti-detective novel, since Poe-esque rationality leads to nothing (Castillo 30-3): "Each clue that comes is supposed to have its own clarity...But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (*Crying* 117-118). The suggestion is that there may be no central, explanatory meaning behind the clues. The capitalized "Word" (the *logos*?) and allusion to the title's "cry" also suggest a revelation of some ultimate, even transcendental truth that is not to be forthcoming. As shall be seen, the mystery is not solved because it is unsolvable.

The clues are provided by a series of male characters, the central one being Pierce Invariarity, invisible, the absent cause of her search, who emits rather than interprets signs (Johnston 57), but does so in bewildering multiplicity. The other men act as interpreters from whom Oedipa hopes to find the referents for the signs, but with each encounter the existence of a referent becomes less certain, since all of the men are in some way not "normal," none of them represent an official discourse that can counterract her paranoid vision (67, 71). Oedipa's surname Maas suggests the "mass" of the solid, middle-class personhood she is endowed with at the beginning of the novel, which is relentlessly "stripped away" from her piece by piece, just as her clothes are in the game of "Strip Boticelli" she plays with Metzger in the first chapter (Karl 360), a metaphorical equivalent of the physical dissassembly of V. After the various encounters with these men, too, her connections with them are severed, she realizes, "one by

one." Thus, her psychiatrist Dr. Hilarius goes mad with visions of avenging Israelis; her husband Mucho retreats into the solopsism of psychedelic drugs; her lawyer-lover Metzger runs off with a fifteen year old girl; the man in the bar says over the phone that "it is too late" for him; the theater director Driblette "takes a Brody" into the Pacific ocean. And yet, there is a sense that justifies her first name. She undertakes the quest despite the opposition, incomprehension, indifference, or loss of these various men (and so is in another sense an embodiment of the new, independent woman of the Sixties, finding her own way in the world), and she shows the Oedipal virtues of courage and determination in the pursuit of truth, wherever it may lead. Unlike Oedipus, she is saved not condemned by her persistence and is *mas* (Sp.) "more" than her male companions, who drop out along the way, "more" perhaps than Oedipus, since she has what he notably lacks, namely, human sympathy. The "escape" of the male characters appropriately parodies the flight of classic male heroes in American fiction who cut themselves off from the possibility of real communication by opting for solitary solutions.

At the beginning of the novel, for example, Oedipa is sensitive to the trauma Mucho has suffered at his old job as used-car salesman, popular symbol of deceit (a familiar Sixties poster of Richard Nixon had the caption: Would you buy a used car from this man?). What has unnerved him is the advance of the inanimate in the practice of trade-ins (he dreams of a used-car lot with a NADA sign: National Auto Dealers Association): people leave traces of their shabby lives in the cars they trade in, so that cars and people come to seem to him interchangeable. Indeed, in the post-war affluence of the 1950s, people were often identified by the kind of car they drove as both social life and status in the US centered on the automobile and, of course, automobile ads try to make the identification complete. Mucho is repelled by the "incest" of people trading versions of themselves in. In accordance with the shift from the old counterfeit

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car-culture of the Fifties to the equally counterfeit communication culture of the Sixties, and the "printed circuit" design of San Narciso, Mucho becomes a disk-jockey (for Baudrillard, commodities give way to cultural products and signs in the reification of people). He distrusts this occupation as well, however, since his voice over the air is distorted, as language and signs will be throughout the novel. For example, in saying Oedipa's name over the air, he must purposely mispronounce it to allow for distortion. When Dr. Hilarius calls Oedipa, he sounds like Inveriarity's imitation-Nazi officer "voice," an involuntary imitation of a comic imitation, and, in another twist, Hilarius turns out to have been a real Nazi.

One of Pynchon's systems of power in this novel is that of the communications media, ever-present and so persuasive its messages seem to stand for reality itself, and yet it is always ambiguous in the novel as to whether the media facilitate or impede real communication. For example, Oedipa's lawyer Roseman is actually writing an indictment of the television lawyer Perry Mason. Her other lawyer, Metzger, with whom she works on Inveriarty's will, looks like, and in fact once was, a movie star. While they talk, Oedipa flips on the T.V. and his image appears in an old movie as the child-star, Baby Igor. As a lawyer, he becomes an "actor" before the jury; Perry Mason is an actor who becomes a lawyer before the camera. A pilot film for a T.V. series based on Metzger's career stars his friend Manny Di presso, who was a lawyer who quit practicing to become an actor who will impersonate a lawyer, etc. The confusion is over which role is real recalls the absent distinctions of sign and referent in postmodernism.[7] The city San Narciso (selfhood is holy: this is Southern California), where she goes to execute the will, looks to her like the printed circuit of a radio, suggesting the inanimateness of contemporary society and, as means of mass communication, the endless chatter of the mass media, but the layout also has a "hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning" where "a revelation trembled

of the surface/depth paradigm: with no "depth," the postmodern world cannot be interpreted and the underlying object (to which the signs and clues point) never emerges. In the hyperreality of contemporary culture posited by Baudrillard, the world is saturated with signs and messages that are simulations of displaced objects that cannot be explained "in a code based on any logocentric paradigm of referentiality" (Duyfhuizen 82; Baudrillard, *Simulacra*).

More recent commentaries (O'Donnell, *New Essays* 11) see the novel as concerned with information processing, another kind of reading of the signs: Oedipa as semiotician, a postal system that may facilitate or hinder communication, and Nefastis's machine, a version of Maxwell's demon, which Oedipa learns about when she gets lost in the Yoyodyne plant. When she goes to Berkeley to see Nefastis, he tells her that his machine combines the physical and informational aspects of entropy, but his machine uses up a lot of energy for a small amount of work. The likeness is in the heat engine's two-stroke cycle of expansion and compression to the binary circuitry of the computer (Hayles 113), a symmetry that will metaphorically be reproduced in the multiple ambiguities and exclusionary choices in the novel, where entropy is manifested not through thermodynamics but cybernetics. In information theory, entropy represents the "noise" or random errors that occur in the transmission of signals or messages ("Entropy"), apt for this story of confused and misinterpreted communications. The more information Nefastis's machine seems to sort out, the more disorder seems to be created, which precisely describes Oedipa's repeated experience in her attempts to sort out true from false information in the deciphering of the novel's main system. As the narrator points out, in the Thirties it was discovered that Bolzmann's mathematical equation of heat loss is nearly identical with Shannon's equation for information loss (Stark 413). As Nefastis tells Oedipa, entropy connects both: "[c]ommunication is the key" (105). Greater disorganization and uncertainty in an information

system, i.e. greater entropy, actually brings greater information. In cosmological theory, models of the universe that do not lead to heat-death have been constructed with entropy giving it the capacity to renew itself (Hayles 112) and something of this sort on the socio-political level is suggested by the Tristero system with respect to the entropic social order of the US, which may not be, as I suggested above, a closed system. But Oedipa's attempt to invoke the demon in the box, which depends on feedback from a human "sensitive" fails, since the box is a only "spiritualist application" of the two laws (Johnston 65). She might be "the channel that will mediate the matrix of cultural information" (Duytfhuizen 81) but the information keeps breaking down in its various transmissions, since "the lines of demarcation" between the transmissions evaporate in the proliferating coincidences she encounters, causing her mediation to fail (83, 91).

Important in all of Pynchon's novels, technology has both comically absurd and sinister aspects, as was seen with the two robots in *V.* who talk to Profane. The San Narciso industry Yoyodyne began by making gyroscopes for children's toys and went on to develop them for guided missile systems. It contributes therefore to the culture of death and markets its destructive weapons as if they were ordinary industrial products (Slade 139). [8] The bar patronized by Yoyodyne employees is called The Scope and features an electronic studio for its bar-room music. The company stockholders sing a glee song of aerospace industries at their meetings. Oedipa and Metzger make love while his film is running on television (Nefastis wants to have Oedipa while watching the news) and a rock group is rehearsing on electrified instruments; the sexual climax coincides with the blowing of all the fuses in the motel. Oedipa is attacked in the bathroom by flying gadgets, notably a can of hair spray, recent ecological villain of the assault on the ozone layer.

Oedipa gets her first inkling of conspiracy in The Scope where Mike Fallopian tells her of the reactionary Peter Pinguid Society (the first of several screwy California organizations), which commemorates the (fictional) first military confrontation between the US and Russia during the American Civil War. Pinguid was the Confederate commander of a ship that was to attack California, but, typically, nobody knows whether it was a Russian or American ship that disappeared, a foreshadowing of the ambiguity of blame for the Cold War. Pinguid, in the California entrepeneurial spirit, retires to become a real-estate speculator. The Pinguid society suggests the delirious logic of the real-life John Birch Society: it is so far to the right that it is against capitalism, since capitalism leads inevitably to socialism, which is aburd since it is Marx's argument. In the Scope's bathroom, Oedipa spies the first of proliferating post-horns; when she witnesses the distribution of mail in the bar in the middle of the night she begins to become aware of the secret alternative mail-delivery system called Tristero, of which the post-horn is the symbol. [9]

The existence of Tristero suggests what Fallopian, who is writing a book on private mail-systems, calls a parable of power in the governmental suppression of mail-delivery competition during the Civil War. Tristero is the subversive link between the espionage in *V.* and the "Firm" in the third novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, international networks of domination, more sinister in their being diffuse and hard to identify, with a Burroughs-like "branch office in each of our brains" (qtd. by Slade, "Thomas Pynchon" 215). For both Foucault and Pynchon, power is ubiquitous and yet elusive (Foucault, *Hist. of Sex.* I 92-92). In Joseph Slade's reading, these multiple conspiracies are employed to "engender a sense of community and to restore a sense of mystery to a cultural waste-land" (211). But conspiracy is more than a medicinal antidote to the modernist vision of a sick modern world, since plots, counter-plots and their attendant para-

noia were, as we have seen, an integral part of the post-war American cultural climate.There is no need to restore mystery to the cultural waste-land if the mystery is part of the culture's problem, a situation amply illustrated in the work of other novelists of the period like Gaddis, Burroughs, Mailer, and Barth.

Conspiracy begets paranoia. Even before Oedipa becomes enmeshed in the pervasive systems and conspiracies of her quest, paranoia sets in. She refuses to take Dr. Hilarius' tranquilizers, fearing that he wants her as part of his experiment of giving psychedelics to housewives. The CIA actually performed drug experiments with unknowing subjects and despite the Sixties' culture hero Timothy Leary, a Harvard psychologist who advised American youth to "tune in, turn on, and drop out," there was actually some suspicion among the more extreme leftist groups in the Sixties that drugs were a conspiracy of the government to defuse revolutionary sentiment among youth (while Oedipa talks to the doctor, she sees the military draft poster of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and saying, "I want you." Hilarius's own face resembles Uncle Sam's). The motel manager Miles plays in a rock group called the Paranoids. When Metzger appears on T.V., Oedipa thinks he may have bribed the local station to run the film as part of an elaborate seduction scheme; she later will come to believe that everything that would follow begins logically with this infidelity with Metzger, a feeling of total paranoid interconnectedness.

As she becomes curious about Tristero, she attends a play with Metzger, "The Courier's Tragedy," by a minor (fictional) Elizabethan named Wharfinger, which involves the (historical) European postal monopoly Thurn and Taxis. At the end of Act III, she hears the name of the Tristero conspiracy, which triggers the quest to determine its occurrence in the play and the signs and symbols that abound, a quest whose stylistic and narrative features resemble a story

by Borges (Castillo 27-44). [10] The play's director, Driblette, tells her that one can assemble all the clues and still not discover the truth. The search for the play's definitive text is also a parody of scholarship. Literary texts are to be the way of verifying the historical truth of a mail conspiracy, but their ambiguity itself creates an ambiguous history (Karl 361). The novel delineates Oedipa's "interpretable indeterminacy" (324), a doubt about the possibility for objective knowledge and the inability to locate the definitive text in the proliferation of historical detail.

The text indeed proves elusive. Wharfinger's play turns out to be one of Baudrillard's displaced objects. There is no script for the play, only paperback copies. Checking the textual variant, Oedipa discovers that the line mentioning Tristero is absent and a footnote warns the reader that the edition containing the line is untrustworthy. The editor of the text, Emory Borz, now teaches (where else?) at San Narciso College, but the bookstore there that sold her her copy has burned down. Borz informs her there is a pornographic version of the play, with the missing line, in the Vatican library but it is inaccessible. Since the line has been suppressed, how was it included in the play on the day she saw it? Even Borz's supposedly definitive text has been censored by the publisher. Borz speculates that Tristero might be connected with another organization, the Scurvhamites, a Puritan sect with two branches, one of which followed God's will, the other a blind automatic principle leading to death (entropy). Everyone in the first sect went over to the second and died. They performed the play as a moral example; like the Pinguid society, it is an organization that intends the opposite of what it professes. In this version, Tristero may be the symbol of the "other."

The next clue that constantly recurs is that of the sinister "black riders" (borrowed from the bad guys in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*?), which Oedipa first encounters in Wharfinger's

commonplace book given to her by Borz, relating the playwright's escape from an attack on a mail coach. An historical marker at the lagoon of Wells Fargo (the US mail service) tells of federal employees massacred by "masked marauders." A certain Hernando Joaquin de Tristero Calavera, a possibly disinherited conspirator of the 16th century, waged a terrorist campaign, with men in black for night concealment, against the postal monopoly Thurn and Taxis. As the historical record is silent, Oedipa and Borz try to reconstruct the complex history of the conspiracy; he speculates on a translation to the US, where the conspirators went underground. The evidence for this is philatelic, stamps being historical documents and another kind of text needing to be interpreted. Governmental issue stamps, it turns out, have been altered: Inveriarity's valuable collection has a watermark with a post-horn on a 1940 issue of the Pony Express (a US government mail service) and the philatelist Ghengis Cohen shows her a German stamp where the bell of the post-horn is muted, suggesting an attempt to mute or silence Thurn and Taxis. The stamp is a counterfeit with a black feather, which along with other evidence suggests a two-hundred year postal fraud. Cohen even has a US stamp with the WASTE acronym spelled out.

By this time, evidences of Tristero and its post-horn symbol are everywhere for her to see. Koteks, the Yoyodyne engineer, was doodling it when she met him. In her nocturnal wanderings in San Francisco (which suggests *Walpurgisnacht*, Joyce's "Nighttown," Burroughs's "Interzone"), where she hopes to "watch nothing happen," she spots the symbol on the pin of a man in a gay bar, which he explains as the symbol of another organization, IA (Inamorati Anonymous), founded by a cuckholded Yoyodyne executive, a victim of corporate capitalism and the communications revolution (he was replaced by an IBM 7094), who in looking for reasons not to kill himself noted on the letters of other would-be suicides a post-horn on the

stamps. He resolved to found, paradoxically, a society of isolates, who would communicate through a postal system. In succeeding incidents, interlocking coicidences multiply. For example, she meets Jesus Arrabal, member of the CIA (i.e.Conjuracion de Insurgentes Anarquistas) whom she had met in Matzatlan on a trip with Inveriarity, who seemed to Arrabal such a perfect embodiment of the capitalist enemy that his faith in the cause is renewed. Inveriarity does suggest the historical entrepeneur, the "Protestant ethic incarnate" of Weber's theory in "the desire to transform nature into buildings and bureaucracies" (Slade 130).[11] As such, he is relevant to leftists like Arrabal, but in this world of late capitalism, in which, as Galbraith argues, corporate power tends to be invisible, he represents the evils of corporate America, the absent center of a far-flung empire. In addition to Mafia connections and real-estate speculation, he turns out to be involved in war-profiteering in the manufacture of cancerous cigarettes, an entrepeneur of death. Some human bones from the dead bodies of American soldiers in Italy killed by the Germans are supplied by the hoodlum Tony Jaguar to Inveriarity (who doesn't pay) to make charcoal cigarette filters. The story connects with Tristero through Wharfinger's play, which has a similar bone plot, and the old man Thoth who wears a post-horn signet ring and recalls dreams of a grandfather that fought false indians who used charred bone to blacken their faces.

All this is disturbing enough, but it becomes even more so when Fallopian tells her that the whole thing may have been devised by Inveriarity as an elaborate hoax. She finds it difficult to believe that such a scheme could have been invented for her, an old girlfriend who has been chosen merely to execute his will, but the ramifications of the will keep expanding until the "sources of evidence...include virtually every aspect of American life in the 1960s" (Meikle 2). The conspiracy appears to function in opposition to everything Inveriarity represents, and yet it also suggested that he may have created or at least subsidized it (Slade 129). Every access to

Tristero can be traced back to Inveriarity: both the theater of Driblette's production of the play and the burned bookstore were owned by him, he owns Yoyodyne, he has endowed the college, etc.: "San Narciso had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them" (*Crying* 178).

As evidence that Tristero is anti-corporate, underground organizations of every type communicate by it, like the IA and the ACDC (Alameda County Death Cult, which suggest Charles Manson's "family"). The suggestive acronyms are both parodic of the debasement of language by bureaucratic organizations and indicative that language is the instrument of systemic domination, as Burroughs held. The central acronym W.A.S.T.E. is at first taken by Oedipa to be a word, "waste," and as such referring to a society of cast-offs, misfits, drifters, and drop-outs from mainstream society and to the detritus produced by technology, but as acronym, "a signifyer underwritten by other signifiers" (Hayles 109), it expands into other meanings, including the revolutionary possibilities of Tristero's eventual alternative to mainstream society: "We Await Silent Tristero's Empire". The organization holds out the possibility of real communication, which is so denied everywhere else in her experience, is a system that would rescue her from an entropic society (Stark 413). The excluded may have created a "separate, silent, unsuspected world" (*Crying* 125) that is not made up only of the poor and excluded of late capitalism and its obsession with performance and profit but of those have been reduced to playing their pre-assigned roles in the corporate economy. Thus, Fallopian thinks that the engineers, brought up on the Myth of the American Inventor, bitter at losing creative initiative in the strait-jacket of a corporation, have adhered to Tristero in silent protest: "Nobody wanted them to invent--only perform their little role in a design ritual, already set down for them in some procedures handbook" (88). The fellow conpirators do not constitute an underclass, or only that, but include even well-paid professionals who have also fallen victim

to the culture of efficiency and performance. The "procedures handbook" would be written in corporate language, a language that disguises anonymity and the routine of ritual.

Unless she is a victim of Inveriarity's hoax ("as a pure conspiracy against someone he loved" 179), Oedipa has either stumbled onto this conspiracy, or is self-deceived into believing it ("crazy"), or is fantasizing the whole thing ("hallucinating"). There is a neat symmetrical pattern to the possibilities: real plot/fabricated plot (hoax) and self-deception/fantasy, a movement from the epistemological to the psychological (Castillo 34). In the first pair, a conspiracy exists, whether Tristero or some other to make her believe in it. In the second pair, she is mistaken, whether rationally, concerning Tristero, or paranoically, concerning the hoax. It is to the point that these apparently exclusive possibilities turn out not to be the only possibilities: if there was only America, "the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia" (137). If Tristero (like God) doesn't exist, she would have to invent it (Kolodny & Peters 85). To become an alien is to recognize her alienation, to be unfurrowed is to get out of the rut of symmetrical choices, and to be paranoid is to be open to new possibilities.

Paranoia when too extreme leads to a metaphysical solopsism and the denial of chance, and, since the paranoid creates conspiracies where none exist, to a passive determinism so total that action is forestalled. And yet, as suggested above, even paranoia has its uses, such as making one aware of patterns of control. As Slade puts it: "[a]s Pynchon uses the concept, paranoia is a sort of holding action for the self, a means by which the individual traces the paths of force in the grids and systems that surround him" (*Pynchon* 244). Paranoia may, paradoxically, even be comforting, since it is the realization or discovery that, as stated in *Gravity's Rainbow* (703) "everything is connected", a situation that might well be preferable to an anti-paranoid world,

"where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (GR 434). As Tanner observes: "both the [total] presence and absence of signs is disturbing" (176) since one or the other would mean either a "plotted or a plotless universe" (180).[12] For example, when Oedipa goes to the ladies room at the theater during intermission, she feels threatened by the blankness of walls devoid of graffitti. The pervasive and often sinister presence of the post-horn suggests a vast conspiracy, but a total lack of signs would imply the void. A "recurring dilemma" for Pynchon's characters "is that to read history for its meaning is also to postulate connections among events in order to *make* them mean something" (Hite 702-3, italics given).

Paranoia is also an American political and cultural style. As form of representation, it was first analyzed three decades ago by the liberal historian Richard Hofstadter. Examples of collective paranoia in post-war US history abound: atomic espionage and McCarthyism in the Fifties, the Kennedy assassination in the early Sixties, the Southeast Asia "domino theory," in the late Sixties etc. This view of paranoia is as a form of knowledge and fear of the interconnectedness of monolithic systems. It is suggested at one point in the novel that the paranoid political climate of the Fifties, during which Oedipa grew up and was educated, has adequately equipped her as reader of signs, if not, as middle-class housewife, for the marches and sit-ins of the countercultural Sixties. Another view of paranoia, the one in this novel, is as a secret knowledge that unifies those excluded by monolithic structures. Like Slade and Tanner, O'Donnell also perceives paranoia as method rather than content, that is, a way of seeing reality as "interconnected or networked" ("Paranoia" 182), a "hyperbolic metonymizing of reality" which is a "mirror-image"of the incorporative aspects of late capitalism that Frederic Jameson discusses: international capital and division of labor, advanced technologies and communica-

tion networks, etc. (Jameson, "Postmodernism" xix). Building on Foucault's theory of the constitution of the self, O'Donnell suggests that this pervasive cultural paranoia "arises within the construction of the 'knowing' subject" within these contemporary political realities (183). The disparate paranoid organizations and lost individuals of *Crying*, in this view, gain identity as unified subjects in their perception of a powerful world:

> Within the realm of the obvious [referring to Baudrillard's "transparency principle" in which everything is visible], saturated by information overload, the paranoid subject is disempowered by virtue of the all-encompassing plots and systems...[but] paradoxically...empowered as one in a growing army capable of reading the signs of these plots and power relations, not to resist or escape them but to formulate an ironic, streetwise attitude toward them...knowing it confers a kind of legitmacy upon the knower (190).

After her night-time experience, Oedipa begins to understand this about the "growing army" of diverse down-and-outs she meets and their connection to Tristero. Individually, she feels impotent and afraid to speak out against the "gutlessness" of her society, as she realizes when she hears the merchant of a shop dealing in Nazi regalia announce his plans to increase production of swastikas ("This is America, you live in it, you let it happen," she rebukes herself, 150). Tristero, however, offers an opportunity for collective action. Without forgetting its sinister aspects, she feels moments of optimism when she thinks of the possibilities of a new order. Stephen Donadio says that "paranoia is the last sense of community left us" (qtd. by O'Donnell, *New Essays* 8), the feeling that Oedipa will come to have for Tristero. Her paranoia has taught her about patterns of control (Slade, "Pynchon" 218), but she remains uncertain, as Tanner says (180), whether she is developing the intricacies of paranoia or discovering America. The two processes may in fact be the same thing.

Oedipa knows that there is a chance of the conspiracy itself being not a paranoid fantasy but real, and her discovery of it accidental; chance, like Fortuna in *V.*, is a real factor. In that

case, San Narciso might be no different from any other American town, and she might have found Tristero "anywhere in the Republic," as she tries to make sense of "what Inveriarity left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America" (178). If the true legacy is not merely the forged stamps of "lot 49" to be auctioned at the end, but "America" itself, its meaning and the "lot" (fate) of all its people, the quest can never be completed, and so remains finally ambiguous, a failed grand narrative, since the America she seeks is itself ambiguous. Like Inveriarity's estate (= state?), it is vast, powerful, manipulative, and yet contains its down-and-out underside, the powerless and the poor, Foucault's disenfranchised, outcast, excluded social elements. "How many shared Tristero's secret?" she wonders, fantasizing about redistributing the estate to the nameless bums and drifters that inhabit, in Michael Harrington's phrase of the Sixties, "the other America."

The alternate spelling "Tystero" suggests Tristero's ambiguity: both the sadness of exclusion and waste, a residue of the possibility of what America might have become, and the terror of renewed resistance and possibility (Tanner 177). The US mail system represents organization, rationalization, efficiency, centralized control, official communication systems, while Tristero is a personal system, functioning on the margins of the official one, or even off of it, as the mute in Thurn and Taxis' post-horn and the concealed water-marks on US-issue stamps suggest. In theories of agency that focus on how people cope with dominant forces (as opposed to theories of subjectivity that focus on the forces of domination)--social agents are "creative, not so much in the production of resources as in the use to which they put those that are available to them" (Fiske 21).[13] If the conspirators, who "constitute the wasted energy of the American social machine" (Harris 95) are "a calculated withdrawal from the life of the Republic, from its machinery" (*Crying* 124). That is, they do not engage in direct confrontation

with the government--it is too powerful for that--but they do not accept their situation passively either, making the choice to establish "an alternative culture within the interstices of the old" (Kolodny & Peters 82), a notion that recalls both Simmel's spaces of resistance, which arise from the inability of any dominating system to achieve total control, and Foucault's "lateral" relations of power, where domination is resisted at a local level in the spaces left by official discourses and practices. John Fiske argues, following Foucault, that official power encompasses both structure and practice, while popular agency, held in check in structural relations, works through controlling practices at a local level, a situation that forms complicit rather than confrontational social relations, i.e. of the type Tristero conspirators indulge in: "...X number of Americans are truly communicating while reserving their lies, recitations of routine, and arid betrayals of spiritual poverty for the official government delivery service" (128).

Oedipa thinks of these excluded agents and their relation to official systems of communication, "swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication, untroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night long, in the thousands of unheard messages" (180). The system may belong to the government but verbal communication belongs to everyone. "She remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else, invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in" (180). The alternative postal system of Tristero utilizes letters, the most non-technological form of communication besides actual speech; it is a postal system in a world where letter-writing is almost a lost art, a system which, with its wino mail-carriers, "waste" baskets for mail-boxes, and misspelled post-marks, mocks official order and language, "words themselves traduced" (Karl 366), like the comically overdetermined names of the characters.

While waiting for lot 49, Oedipa speculates on another kind of waiting, waiting like Ellison's invisible man for an alternative America beyond the reduced possibilities of Inveriarity's America, the America she once slept with. Her lyrical vision calls up the green promise of Jay Gatsby's lost continent and the wonder at how and why it all went wrong, but it is characteristic of a contemporary perception that the narrowing of possibility implied by the official logic of information (which excludes "excluded middles," a logical term indicating what does not belong in precise, Aristotelian syllogisms), is represented by the reductive binary circuitry of the computer:

> The waiting above all; if not for another set of possibilities to replace those that had conditioned the land to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or cry, then at least, at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to break down, to go askew. She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it happened here, with the chances so good for diversity? For now it was like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would be a transcendent meaning or only the earth (181).

If, as Tristero's motto W.A.S.T.E. indicates, their conpiratorial strategy consists of "waiting above all; if not for another set of possibilities...then at least...for a symmetry of choices to break down" (181). The either/or choice of the last sentence in the passage is implicitly denied. The unresolved resolution of the novel can be seen as a refusal of the symmetrical "either/or" structure of the paranoid Fifties, the Communist/American alternative of McCarthy and Dulles and their ilk (Kolodny and Peters 79). The symmetry of choices in the novel includes the binary symmetry of the radical Manichean Scurvhamites and the 0/1 of technological hardware, with their reductive systems and exclusion of multiple possibilities. This would suggest that the members of Tristero wait for their lost inheritance, America and its original lost or betrayed possibilities (Harris 98): "How it had happened here?" At the very least,

Tristero offers the possibility of "a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise in life, that harrows the head of everybody American..." (*Crying* 170).

No commentators on the novel, however, seem to have been troubled by the "Empire" in W.A.S.T.E. and the possibility of its monolithic emergence from a conspiratorial organization: the rise of the Soviet Union and its empire from Lenin's oppositional organization is the most notable modern historical example. That was, to be sure, "an alternative to the political and economic system" of the US and historically not likely to happen there, but what Pynchon would seem to substitute is not another empire to replace the present one but "the idealized anarchy Jesus Arrabel dreams of" (Harris 98), the radical freedom of the deaf-mutes whose convention dance Oedipa is swept up in, each delegate dancing to his own rhythms and somehow, miraculously, not colliding with the others. The image evokes Thoreau's radical anarchy of each man marching to his own drummer and a utopian society of no central control. By virtue of their very differentness, however, the various excluded groups would not be likely to constitute a single community (Johnston 67). In this reading, *Crying* becomes a novel of its time, reflecting the frustrations in the 1960s at the failure of mainstream politics to effect change and the failure of the utopian hopes of the counter-culture.

c.

It may be of interest at this point to briefly compare Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* with Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, its exact contemporary (both published in 1966), since both novels, structured around a quest plot, deal with the power of systems, conspiracies, and technology, but in ways that are different enough to suggest how postmodernist texts may be distinguished in their political perceptions. Both novels narrate the quest of a protagonist, Barth's for personal identity, in a picaresque, loosely digressive mode, and Pynchon's for a national destiny and

meaning, in a tightly organized circular pattern of repetitive images more appropriate to a paranoid vision of society. Both novels employ the central Western myth of Oedipus, Barth parodically, but with parallels, such as the search for origins, that go beyond parody; Pynchon, ironically, in that the protagonist's determination does not avail her of final meaning. Both novels are concerned with systems: in Barth's, a humanoid computer with positive and negative functions, which turns out to be penetrated by and intimately related to the protagonist. In Pynchon, the system is an unknown quantity whose positive and negative functions remain in balance: a millenial conspiracy involving sinster acts of violence and transgression or an adversary of a potentially more dangerous system, the political and economic system of the United States.

Barth's notion that people are literally created by a technological system suggests Foucaultian notions of how they are culturally "produced." Conspiracy in *Giles* is related either to Giles's aim to change the computer's destructive program or allegorically to political events of the time and their psychological effects, what Hofstader called the "paranoid style in American politics," which sees conspiracy everywhere and so devises other, real ones, to combat them. Conspiracy in *Crying* is more harrowing for being ambiguous, and for the "fear and revulsion before the new and ever more systematized conditions of industrial society" evoked rather than allegorized (Jameson, qtd. by Berthoff 42). Barth's novel ends not ambiguously but inconclusively.

While *Crying* is a model of concision, Barth's *Giles* is a centrifugal work that attempts Garcia Marquez's notion of a "total novel," what Frederick Karl calls "a complete world made possible through artifact," so all-inclusive that it transforms the Cold War of the Fifties into the campus revolts of the Sixties, subsuming under the reigning fiction of "campus" everything in American experience (Karl 284, 463), and in the process becoming either a sensational

failure (Karl), a brilliant frivolity (Tanner), in which "the illusion of a single coherent model of reality being erected is constantly negated" (247), or a major fictional achievement (Scholes). The "frolicsome evasion" charged by Tanner (240) may be mitigated somewhat by the novel's satirical devices and by Barth's apparent desire to show up an essential gamesmanship of domestic and international politics, as well as an indulgence in Barth's own stated preference for fiction with "a sense of game, invention for its own sake" (Stevick 216). Here, however, Tanner is surely right when he opines that Pynchon produces a serious study of consciousness in contemporary America, while Barth simply mocks plots at excessive length, which is ultimately sterile and boring since it provides no "compensating new sources of interest" (180).

Crying, although it has no direct historical reference, better evokes its time and place, showing in the cultural perceptions of the Sixties how rationalization has eroded human relationships, post-industrialism has "overlaid the world of nature with comprehensive artifice" and its networks become so pervasive that the human dimensions of the world are no longer comprehensible (Slade 213). Tanner's suggestion of the characteristic feeling in contemporary American fiction that "[i]f there has to be a system...then I will make very sure that it is a system of my own choosing and making" might apply to both novels, but in Barth, it seems, the question is of individual choice. Verbalizing is a way to live in reality even when it is inadequate to explain it. His heroes play with the configurations of language without really believing in them. Language is primary for Barth and his characters tend to take the line of the first part of Tanner's statement quoted at the beginning of the Introduction to Pt. II, that the unpatterned, unconditioned life is somehow possible. The second part of the statement, that patterns are imposed from without, is Pynchon's view and seems much closer to rendering contemporary American experience, as the cultural condition of paranoia would suggest.

d.

To discuss Pynchon's encyclopedic *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), which was compared by early critics to Joyce's *Ulysses* and has been recently described as an "historical and cultural synthesis of western actions and fantasies" (Simon 55), in the detail with which the much briefer *The Crying of Lot 49* has been treated would doubtless require a book even longer than the novel itself. I shall therefore conclude this chapter on Pynchon with an epilogue that examines a few points in *Gravity's Rainbow* relevant to my general discussions of power in contemporary fiction, especially technological and corporate power.

The paranoia engendered by unknown powers in this novel is inspired by a mysterious conglomerate operating during and after the end of the Second World War. Called "The Firm" but usually identified only as "They," it is feared, resented, unknown but knowing of dark secrets. Part of the paranoid vision is that the apparatus of war, physical and bureacratic, is "simply another fimction of the overarching industrial complex that runs the world, and that the war is used by the real rulers of the world as a means of redistributing raw materials, industry, and power" as well as making individuals more amenable to control and direction (Muste 15). Except for this last provision, the war itself has little to do with human beings. As the black Herrero leader Enzian puts it: "It means the War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted...secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology...The real crises were crises of allocation and priority...among the different Technologies, Plastics, Electronics, Aircraft, and their needs which are understood only by the ruling elite" (521). It is to the point that the extraordinary rise of American corporate power historically corresponds to its importance in war-time production. The Firm is thus a metaphor for the new power of multinationals, which was becoming manifest during the 1960s, when

Pynchon was planning his novel. Such firms by definition go beyond national boundaries, controlling information and technological networks and by extension the socio-political forces within them. They have taken over the old "corporate nationality" of firms like General Motors or US Steel, which "once incarnated the wealth and well-being of the nation in the 1950s" (Wilson 223).

The national scope of *Crying* is accordingly expanded to the entire post-war western world and even beyond (African *schwarzkommandos*, Argentine anarchists in a stolen submarine, etc.)[14] and by the lack of any direct break between wartime and the immediate postwar period, since profit and not national goals is the only motive for such firms. Ideologies give way to strategic alliances with either side, and Americans and Brits, Russians and Germans make deals among one another: "The real business of the war is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing and can be left to non-professionals...The true war is a celebration of markets" (GR 105). Despite its being relegated to second place in this quote, the violence is hardly incidental to the business. As Slade points out, "[s]ince They include generals and admirals as well as politicians on boards of directors in the interlocking companies, the cartels can control the actual destruction during the war, either by direct command or simply by exchanging the materiel of war between themselves" (*Pynchon* 179).

That business blurs the line between war and peace is, as we have seen, not new to Pynchon. A number of novels about the Second World War have suggested that war is "a manifestation of economic and social control" (Muste 15). It will be recalled, for example, that General Cummings in Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* wants to extend the organizational apparatus of war to peacetime use in pursuit of American domination, and Milo Minderbender in Heller's *Catch-22* disregards national conflicts to build up a transnational syndicate whose

only goal is profit. One important difference in Pynchon from these previous perceptions is the pervasiveness of the Firm and its essential invisibility. In the novel, "They" are both more powerful and less knowable than the highly visible wartime political leaders Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and Hitler. As was seen with Foucault, power does not consist in a substantive instance or agency of sovereignty, but its mechanisms are distributed among different centers and not unified at a single point, such as a state: the novel's "Rocket-City" is accordingly everywhere and nowhere, both fixed and flowing points of power, and a state of mind. That is to say, "They" represent the institutions and methods of late capitalism but also the state of mind which makes it a system that is productive, unequally distributive, and destructive: "Taking and not giving back, demanding that 'productivity' and 'earnings' keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit" (412). The disturbing contemporary notion that the victory of capitalism is now complete, that it cannot be destroyed precisely because of its pervasiveness and invisibility is foreseen in the novel by Father Rapier: "It is possible that They will not die. That it is now within the state of Their art to go on forever--though we, of course, will keep on dying as we always have. Death has been the source of Their power"(539). There is evidently an increase in pessimism between the former novel and this one. There are no viable alternatives offered to Their power (the "Counterforce," for example, fails in its mission) and Their control is perceived to be actually increasing, just as Foucault maintained, with the means of domination supplied by the developing physical and human sciences.

Historically, the Zone suggests the war-zone, i.e. where battles take place, of the war proper, and the partitioning of Germany into zones by the Allies at the end of the war, as well as the entire postwar western world. It also shares much with the surreal, frontierless anarchy,

lawlessness, and menace of Burroughs's Interzone: "There are no zones but the Zone" (GR 333). The Zone is both a proto-capitalist ("like the very earliest days of the mercantile system," 336) and late capitalist world since, as Slothrop learns, "drugs, sex, luxury items," the classic currencies of war-torn zones are no longer the real currency, since "information is the only real medium of exchange" (258). The Zone is also "a void not yet rationalized" (Slade, *Pynchon* 204) and so a locale of possible escape or at least temporary evasion from Their system, although Slothrop becomes the center of multiple systems of surveillance there by Them, who are tracking him for mysterious ends, in one instance at least, to neutralize the threat of Enzian's black troops, who are building a rocket (00001) of their own. "They" may be unnamed Allied forces, secret organizations and spy networks, but also Russians, Germans, western corporations like Shell, as well as I.G. Farben, the war-production group that totally controlled the German war-effort, from even before the war (GR 631). Tchitcherine posits a transnational "rocket-cartel," "[a] structure cutting across every agency human and paper that ever touched it. Even to Russia... "Russia bought from Krupp, didn't she, from Siemens, the IG...?" (566).

The Firm functions according to "a mind-set derived from rationalization" (Slade, "Pynchon" 214), the characteristic feature Weber identified in modern power systems, which, according to him, leads both to emancipation from traditional "behavior" as opposed to action properly speaking, and inevitably to instrumental rationality, abstract rules, and bureaucratization (Raynaud 1280-81), a tendency that has become even more pronounced in an era of transnational business. Weber is explicitly invoked in the meditations on the postwar scene by Dr. Rozavolgyi on the war as a result of the "Fuhrer-principle": "...if personalities could be replaced by abstractions of power, if techniques developed by the corporations could be brought to bear, might not nations live rationally? one of the dearest Postwar hopes: that there should

be no room for a terrible disease like charisma" (GR 81). Weber, who was not writing from the post-Fascist perspective of 1945, was not nearly so afraid of charismatic leaders, since charismatic power, he believed, is inherently unstable, depending as it does on the continued belief in the charismatic leader. Furthermore, Weber thought charismatic figures, who had an essentially irrational appeal, might alter overrationalized systems. He was correspondingly more wary of the inherently stable character of impersonal bureaucracratic power, precisely of the type the doctor thinks the new world situation calls for, but which, Pynchon suggests, may be worse than the disease it is supposed to cure. The Counterforce and other oppositional organizations, which would oppose Them, fail because they too are limited by rationalization. This need not mean total control is inevitable, since entropy works on closed highly-ordered bureaucratic systems even more effectively than in nature. The novel shows that rationality in a world of chance is "absorbed into the irrational, or into forms of doom, as rapidly as it asserts itself" (Karl 450). The chaos of the Zone is concomitant with the freedom from bureaucratic control enjoyed there (Slade 214-15). Again, as in *Crying*, anarchy rather than resistance seems for Pynchon to be the viable alternative.

The characters at the White Visitation, indulging in bizarre pseudo-scientific experiments "the thrust of the maniacal and irrational into logical and rational plans" (Karl 448, note), constantly worry about what They know, and nearly all the huge cast of characters will each in his or her own way feel this power in their lives. In reoccupied France, the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop finds himself involved in incidents meant to confuse his identity, a process that "They" employ in the interest of control. As Foucault argued, the abstract conception of who we are is to a certain extent determined, and the power that institutions have over people comes in a large part from their ability to deny them their individuality. For Slothrop to claim his identity, he

must escape the systems that define him, but that turns out to be impossible. The fragmentation, physical and emotional, seen in *V.* and *Crying* is carried to an extreme here with the fragmenting of Slothrop's very being at the end, and is shown at another level by the pairing and splitting of various characters.

Paranoia is, as might be expected, the existential mode. Slothrop, for example, fears that he will be blown to bits ("just zero, just nothing") by a rocket with his name on it, but beyond this specific fear (which will turn out to be justified only in reverse and in a metaphorical sense, since his pursuit of the rocket leads to disintegration), a less specific paranoia cannot be shaken off: "There are times when Slothrop actually can find a clutch mechanism between him and Their iron-cased engine far away up a power train whose shape and design he has to guess at...But he can't fit any of it into a pattern..." (207). If the paranoid's feeling for connectiveness seemingly eludes him, he does feel that he might be controlled from without: "all his life of what has looked free or random is discovered to've been under some control, all the time..." (209). He is pursued by major Harvey's gang in Germany and another group in Zurich, but are the two connected? The ramifications are complex and seemingly interconnected in the by now familiar paranoid mode.

Slothrop is part of an elaborate plot to discover what gives him the ability to detect V-2 rocket bombs directed by the Germans onto London in the last years of the war. As with Mailer, sex and power tend to be linked. Slothrop's semiotic indicator is his penis, since his erections correspond to the incoming rockets and his potency contrasted as a vital principal to the rockets' death principle. Slothrop, who becomes "the rocketman," a title suggesting a comic-strip hero, fucks nearly all the female characters, but the equation of (potent) penis and (sterile) penile rocket will have more negative implications, with the thrusting masculine principle when

devoid of its biological base seen as antithetical to nature. As one character meditates: "love, among these men...had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts, with winning and losing...Beyond simple steel erections, the Rocket was an entire system won, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of loveable but scatterbrained Mother Nature" (GR 324). This is what Captain Blicero ("Lord of Death"), who is Lt. Weissman carried over from the siege party massacre in V., and here the SS coordinator of the final rocket project in Germany, must learn "to understand truly his manhood" (324). Weissman/Blicero is sexually linked to the leader of the Counterforce, the Herero chief Oberst Enzian, who had been Blicero's slave-lover in Africa. This is hardly a Mailer celebration of masculine virility, since the love triangle of rocket-Blicero-Enzian is homosexual and fetishist (and therefore sterile).

Slothrop's peculiarity will turn out to have conditioned during his infancy by the sinister Pavlovian, Lazlo Jamf, and financed by I.G. Farben. Jampf thinks Slothrop is a threat to the world, perhaps because, since Slothrop reacts to the stimulus in advance, his erections are a reversal of the usual cause and effect relation, an analogue of the rocket itself, which explodes before its incoming sound is heard (Karl 448-9). Jamf, a true professor on the inanimate, is also the inventor of Imoplex G, the synthetic plastic used in the rocket. As he tells his chemistry students: "stay behind with carbon and hydrogen [i.e. the chemistry of organic life] or move beyond. Silicon, boron, phosphorous...move beyond life, toward the inorganic... Here is no frailty, no mortality" (580). The ultimate rocket, Blicero's 00000 "simple steel erection," is Weber's true charismatic figure ("It really did possess a Max Weber charisma," 464), pursued and venerated by so many but fated in this capacity to frustrate, like the obsessed engineer Pokler who sacrifices his wife and daughter in a concentration camp to his transcendent vision of the ultimate fetish-object, or the schismatic branch of the exiled Africans ("the Empty Ones")

"in love with the glamor of a whole people's suicide" (310), devotees of "The Doctrine of the Final Zero" (525), who, as victims of colonialism, prefer tribal suicide to succumbing to a "Christian death." It is also, as a product of Weber's rationalized power, the culmination of new technologies, ultimately sterile: designed to bring death, it is itself dead, as are those who are devoted to it.

The sterility of the rocket is extended to its internal parts, especially the magic plastic Imoplex (it is used as a wrapping for Gottfried, Blicero's sex-slave who rides the final rocket in a futile attempt to give it life), "the first plastic that is actually *erectile*" (699, italics given), suggesting its substitution of living tissue, a "peculiar polymer" that can assume shapes ranging from rubbery amorphous to high resistance to shocks and temperatures of any kind. "Plastic" becomes much more than Mailer's metaphor for the sterility of American life, although it is doubtless significant that the plastics that are to serve the German war machine were first developed at DuPont, an American company. The implied criticism also goes beyond the profit motive of Mailer's charge (in 1959) that "the prosperity of America depends upon the production of the means of destruction" (*Advertisements* 176-77). The prospect is much worse: that inanimate technologies have triumphed over organic nature itself ("Plasticity's central canon: that chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of Nature" (299)) is a major theme in the novel and a tendency (cf. the discussion of *V.*), Pynchon sees, together with colonialism, as leading to the culture of death: "plasticity's victorious triad of Strength, Stability, and Whiteness..how often these were taken for Nazi graffitti" (250).

The culture of death means not just the products of technology, such as death-dealing weapons, but the rationalizing process itself that leads to inanimateness, and loss of choice, spontaneity and vitality. The dominance over nature of applied physics, chemistry, and mathe-

matics in weapons technology is aided by the use of psychology for human control. It will be recalled that Foucault's delineation of the development of the social sciences posited normalizing patterns of behavior for subjugating human populations with greater efficiency and less "cost." The two scientists interested in Slothrop and the V-2 as corroboration of their theories are illustrative of a science in the service of the inanaimate vs. a science more responsive to the complexity of life: Pointsman, a Pavlovian behaviorist, and Roger Mexico, a statistician of random events. Mexico, whose science resides in "the domain *between* zero and one--the middle Pointsman has excluded from his persuasions--the probabilities" (GR 55) and who eventually abandons his research for a woman and "a kind of existential anarchy," is obviously more sympathetic to Pynchon than Pointsman, who goes mad in the Zone (the contemporary world), where his too rigid sense of cause and effect makes no sense (Morgan 203). Pointsman as a principle of anti-life is also shown by the episode in which he nearly castrates Slothrop. Yet, Mexico and a number of other sympathetic characters who try to resist the system--Slothrop, Katje Borgesius, Pirate Prentice, for example--are all involved in some aspect of psychological warfare and serve to some extent the war-making functions of the Firm (Muste 16). They often discover much later that they have been manipulated by "Them" even while thinking they were acting independently (Slothrop) or as part of the opposition (Prentice).

The Rocket is also pursued by a number of others, each for his own reason; one character even thinks of it as a Text to be annotated and explicated, and there are frequent references to it as the "Grail," the rocket that is the "visionary apocalyptic missile." Like the quest objects of *V.* and *Crying*, it never materializes and the questers one by one burn out in the attempt. The quest in this novel, however, is both for a real and a symbolic object, for unlike V. and WASTE, there is no question that real rockets exist nor that they have the power to destroy ur-

ban civilian populations (Morgan 203), like the V-2 rockets that wrought havoc and terror on London in 1944. At the same time, the technology that has made the rocket possible represents the new physics of relativity and quantum theory that envisions a world of probability, indeterminacy, and mathematical descriptions of things interconnected in space-time. The new physics has supplanted the older classical physics of cause and effect, the relation between objects and forces, which is the basis of "Their" authority (Slade, *Pynchon* 215). Science is therefore not inevitably bad, since it may serve as the basis for metaphysically undermining Their dominance. The arc that the V-2 traces in the sky is an image of a dual function in the novel: its metaphysically romantic promise of an escape from gravity and the earth, and the inevitable return to earth as a bomb, the path tracing the parabola that so mesmerized General Cummings of Mailer's first novel. The first half of the flight is, of course, illusory since it implies the second, but it captivates a number of people in the novel, most notably Captain Blicero, who make the rocket a veritable fetish object of their private and collective obsessions.

A rocket as a cultural icon and fetichized object is not only a product of a novelist's imagination, as can be seen in the recent historical example of a president's and the media's promotion of the Patriot missile as virtual hero of the Gulf War. Flanked by two Patriots painted red, white, and blue, President Bush, showing a "belief in the technological sublime as an agent of historical redemption," gave a speech (1991) at the Raytheon plant praising both the missile and its local manufacturers as patriotic (Wilson 219). Bush's mythicizing of a technological product is even more relevant to Pynchon's fiction in that, as it was later pointed out, some of the missile's most "intelligent" components were manufactured in foreign countries. Bush's oversight illustrates the obsolete notion of nationalism in the postmodern economy, "an

international matrix of sign-flow and cash-flow that recognizes no national boundaries beyond increasing profits of mega-capital and the mandates of technological innovation" (Wilson 223).

NOTES

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[1] This description, based on the theories of mathematician Norbert Wiener and physicist Herbert Clausius, is summarized in Harris (77). Lord Kelvin (1852) said that the second law of thermodynamics is "a universal tendency to the dissipation of mechanical energy" (qtd. in Hayles 110). See also Koslowski (142-43).

[2] Prof Sergio Bellei points out that Poe anticipated this development in his short story, "The Man That Was Used Up."

[3] Interestingly, this death-by-disassembly will become a feature in contemporary sci-fi films: e.g. *Alien* (1979), *The Terminator* (1984), *Robocop* (1987).

[4] Some critics have identified V with Robert Graves' figure of the White Goddess, a major European myth of the eternal feminine. Graves is concerned in his work about the debasement of the myths that the White Goddess embodied and the rise of the pseudo-religions of science and technology (Henkle 209). As I have argued, Pynchon is himself concerned about the latter but his V is, if anything, a parody of Graves' goddess and he does not advocate anything so regressive as a return to the mythic.

[5] These notions are important in Nabokov's novels. The narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (who happens to be called "V"), like Stencil, discovers that his subject has assumed several identities (Henkle 208).

[6] Petillon points out that the plot and situation of *Crying*--estate, cryptic will, secret society, etc.--closely resembles another novel, *The Conversions* by Harry Matthews (1962). There has been the usual ingenious speculation about the title. "Crying" and "lot" are the technical terms

for auction announcements, as the reader learns on the last page. A lot can also be a "plot" of land, with the usual play on that favorite postmodernist word: the lot is a plot, "a circumscribed place (perhaps a gameboard)" and the narrative plot is a secret plot which if revealed "will demonstrate only the machinations of a game" (Castillo 27). The number 49 may allude to Hexagram 49 in the *I Ching*, "revolution," which always begins in conspiracy, or to Psalm 49: "one who dies shall take nothing with him," perhaps a reference to Inveriarity. The 49th day after Easter on the liturgical calendar is the day before (awaiting) Pentecost, and the 49 days in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, etc. (Petillon 137). Inveriarity's name suggests Sherlock Holmes's nemesis, Dr. Moriarity, and Conan Doyle actually wrote a story (1892) called "Lot 249" (Meikle 287), or a portmanteau derived from "inverse rarity," a philatelic term (Duyfhuizen 82). All of this is compatible with Pynchon's formidable erudition.

[7] Prof. Sergio Bellei adds that it also suggests a universe of infinitely reversible signs, in which the search for origins is pointless.

[8] Pynchon, who started college as an engineering student, has experience with the military- industrial complex, having worked for Boeing aircraft in Seattle for two and a half years, writing technical documents (Winston 284-85).

[9] In an interesting example of the postmodernist conflation of life and art, muted post-horns began to appear as griffitti across the US within a year of the publication of Pynchon's novel (Kolodny and Peters 79). This might also be a refutation of Gore Vidal's contention that hardly anyone in the country reads novels nowadays.

[10] The theme also suggests Borges: the story "the Babylon Library," for example, is about an organization called The Company. See Tanner's discussion (45-46).

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[11] Slade points out (174) that Inveriarity is the name of a village in Scotland near Dundee, seat of the Protestant Reformation under John Knox.

[12] "Chaos or totalitarian order; meaninglessness or paranoia; void or dark design--these are the polalrities of Thomas Pynchon's *oeuvre*" (O'Donnell, *New Essays* 2).

[13] Slade (139) tells of the "black box" conspiracy in the US of the late Sixties and early Seventies that managed to feed off the Bell telephone monopoly: some people developed a device that imitated the tones that trigger telephone circuits and could thereby call anywhere in the world without paying fees, yet another example of the interconnection of life and art.

[14] Rowe (185) says that scholars still find precise historical details in *Gravity's Rainbow* that are disguised as fantastic episodes.

CHAPTER 8

POWER IN THE WORLD/POWER IN THE WORD: DON DELILLO

a.

Criticism has been slow to recognize the relevance of Don DeLillo, but his work takes up most of the themes discussed with respect to power and postmodernism. As a novelist who began publishing in the early Seventies but came to academic recognition mainly in the Eighties, DeLillo has arguably taken over from Pynchon as the American novelist most in tune with the public history of his time. He has recognized that power in the contemporary world is shifting and invisible; and again and again he refers to "the connections between language and power, and to the confusing fluidity of both" (Kucich 335). If, as Foucault has shown, those who control the word have the power to both undermine and construct personal and social identities (Poster 79-80; Guareshi et al. 15), DeLillo is concerned with resisting the tendency of some "languages" to usurp the free play and multiple possibilities of language, to impose a univocal pattern which is analogous to and complicit with political systems of control and domination. His novels, as we shall see, propose alternative strategies, illustrating Bakhtinian heteroglossia (cf. Introd. sec.II), the theory that texts produce conflicts of competing discourses, which may supplement or contradict each other, be juxtaposed or interrelated ("Discourse in the Novel" 292).

DeLillo tries to identify the radical structural changes in our consumer/information era, what Jameson calls the multinational or world stage of late capitalism, "whose principle of structural intelligibility is for the first time virtually completely invisible to the individual subjects whose lives it organizes" (Rev. of *Names*, 116). DeLillo's "America" is populated not by things but by simulacra and is not so much a place as a system of codes that determine

and control people's consciousness. The postmodern metropolis is, as with Pynchon, the field of action: "'Elsewhere,'" which is "mapped geographically in the popular imagination of the modernist era," is mapped in DeLillo's novels "geologically, as the subterranean segment of a global political and economic circuitry, the world of conspiracy" (McClure 105). What results is a generalized paranoia of a society of nearly total surveillance. As one of his characters says, "When technology reaches a certain level, people begin to feel like criminals...The facts about you and your whole existence have been collected" (*Running Dog* 93; Shapiro 129).

In his most Pynchon-like novel, *Ratner's Star* (1976), which invites comparison with *Gravity's Rainbow*, science, technology, knowledge, information glut, and corporate power come together in a story of a sequestered group of oddball scientists assembled to decipher a message from outer space. [1] The promise of science-fiction gives way to the fictions of science and the largest of several "looking-glass" inversions when it is discovered that the message was originally sent from earth. The emphasis is "on the ungrounded nature of knowledge" (Hite 719). Mathematics, which the author has called the most secret of public communications systems, is the field of the boy-genius protagonist who deciphers the message, the prediction of an unexpected eclipse from a vanished race of people. The scientists, who are really quirky theories expressed in extended monologues rather than communicating characters, recall Swift's members of the Royal Academy and their absurd experiments in the Third Voyage of *Gulliver's Travels* (Day 77). They eventually abandon interest in the content of the message to try to create a metalanguage that may control all future messages. Self-absorbed projects and a science in pursuit of an apolitical knowledge are exposed in the form of a multinational cartel run by Elux Truxl, who wants to use advanced science to control the

international "money curve" and manipulate financial markets. The novel thus gives both analogies and mathematical and technical contexts for corporate power (Molesworth 146, 155; Cain 271).

DeLillo's preoccupation with the mass communications media has been evident from his first novel, *Americana* (1971). As a successful New York television executive, David Bell (the name recalls the telephone company), is a functional part of the communications network, and yet he yearns for freedom from its all-encompassing influence. Bell himself is shown to be entirely shaped by the media. The son of an aggressively successful advertising executive whose motto is "move the merch," i.e. sell the merchandise, and who keeps an extensive film library of TV commercials he constantly views with his son. Advertising is "the dream of entering the third person singular," a substitute self for the empty one people feel they possess. Bell first feels "the true power of the image" as a boy when he sees a larger-than-life Burt Lancaster on a movie screen, which forms his image of solid masculinity. Later, he majors in film at college and as an adult continues not only to see movies after work but dresses and talks like a film star, exercising Hollywood seduction routines on his girl-friends. His wife he visualizes as someone on TV.

Weary of the organization men at his job and their diverse power plays, he takes the opportunity of a location assignment to film Indians in Arizona--the west as frontier and renewal--to realize a personal project of filming the major moments and characters of his life from scripts he works up on location in Ft. Curtis, his midwestern home town. Since he uses substitutes, actors, for his characters and film is after all a communications medium, it is to be doubted that he has really "escaped" the civilization of eastern corporate life. Nor is it clear whether the film is to communicate anything at all, since it seems to be made only for himself,

both film-maker and audience. Like Jack Burden of Warren's *All the King's Men*, Bell feels he has to come to grips with his guilt in relation to his dead mother and the burden of his own past, yet it is to the point that Bell can only do so by making a film. The novel, accordingly, examines family psychology within mass communications technology (LeClair 33). It is not therefore an escape from the world to self, as in so many post-war novels seen so far, but, like *White Noise* (1985), an analysis of the reaction between private consciousness and mass systems. The quasi-madness of Bell's mother and the kinds of disturbances of the competitive executives in New York (to which one might compare Heller's alienated executives in *Something Happened*), for example, are not, or not merely, private obsessions.

Bell makes the film, creates substitute images of his past, to compensate for "object-loss," much like Herbert Stencil pursuing in his own way the absent V. The film is also a way of integrating or rather reconstructing a dispersed self (LeClair 42-3). The film as representation is complicated by the fact that it is "seen" only through Bell's verbal description of it, via a book he is now writing, and we are reading, about his past, a removal both spatial (he writes from somewhere out of the country) and temporal (the writing takes place years after the film, which is itself filmed years after the events). Furthermore, the film only partially depicts events of Bell's life; other events are imagined or improvised under his direction. He tries to use rather than escape the technology that has conditioned him and his culture.

When he goes from mid-west to far west, however, Bell finds that the competitive, hierarchical and alienated life of New York television executives differs in style but not in essence (i.e. drink and sex) from that of the test-drivers in Texas, and the track itself may be a metaphor for the executive rat-race he thinks he has left behind (LeClair 48). The track is the space of the automobile, the network that of television, two different commodities that have

transformed the space of the country, the first literally, the second electronically (47). The automobile both allowed people to explore the country (Kerouac's beats in *On the Road* depend on cars and Bell himself is on a classic spiritual road trip of his own), and helped them despoil it, but television has transformed people from questing (if aggressive) agents to essentially passive consumers, with its one-way and spatially intrusive ("Senders") transmissions that Burroughs saw as the essence of control. There is both an economic and a symbolic parallel: "the television industry produces messages the way the auto industry produces objects" (47), but communication itself is in the service of commodities since TV exists mainly to sell products and the commercials really take precedence over the programs, as Bell's father admits. Baudrillard describes the situation as the transformation of a society in which the mode of production is dominant to one in which the *code* of production becomes primary (Kellner 61). The production of signs replaces the production of objects, with a resulting loss of value even for the products themselves, which as far as television is concerned are interchangeable. It is to the point that Bell's television program "Soliloquy," which features people talking about their lives, i.e. an attempt to transmit human values, was canceled. Real people come second to commercials, as is shown in Bell's own family, where his father ignores his mother but remains ever absorbed by his film-library of recorded ads.

In *White Noise* (1985), the two sites of experience are the supermarket and the television screen, which turn out to be not so different since the potential solidity of food gives way to the insidious chemical ingredients, the gaudy packaging and glaring advertisements of supermarket offerings. Both supermarket and TV screen offer representations and are principally loci of desire (Goodhart 121-22). In the novel, the culture critic Murray Siskind affirms the plenitude of "psychic data" in both supermarket (WN 37) and television (51). Television

is more intrusive in this novel than in *Americana*; in fact, everything here is "mediated." The set is constantly on in the home of Jack Gladney and his family, breaking into the family's conversations, even their dreams, as when Gladney hears his daughter murmur in sleep "Toyota Celica." He sees himself watching his children sleep as "a TV moment." His son Heinrich plays chess by mail with a convict who killed five people after hearing voices speaking directly to him from TV

A favorite family activity is watching disasters--earthquakes, fires, floods, explosions; it seems that the representation of death on the screen has a curiously anesthetizing power, with mortality reduced to spectacle (Siskind, for his part, gives a course at the college in "car crash movies"). Real danger in an information culture becomes illegible since the signs are commodified (Shapiro 129). The constant replay of mass death serves to reduce the anxiety of Gladney, obsessed with his own mortality, as does the academic mastery of mass death, in his role as Chairman of the Department of "Hitler Studies," but these means tend to be ineffective. The sheer overload of data from technological culture--TV, radio, tabloids--threatens not only to drown out thought but signals the presence of death that the title alludes to (Saltzman 808). The language of this culture tends to the condition of noise, the entropic running down of meaning into undifferentiated sameness. One may try to defect from the lack of differentiation, the homogenizing effects of mass culture, but defection threatens disappearance (810): "What if death is nothing but sound...Uniform, white" (WN 198).

The central plot device is an ecological disaster officially designated as "The Airborne Toxic Event." "We need an occasional catastrophe," a colleague tells Gladney, "to break up the incessant bombardment of information" (66). The disaster is real, causing the family's dislocation and Gladney himself to ingest a potentially lethal dose, and yet it can be experi-

enced only as media information, which in this culture defines the real. The event "resembled a national promotion for death, a multimillion dollar campaign backed by radio spots, heavy print and billboard, TV saturation" (158). One might expect, for example, the disaster to cause medical symptoms that would then be registered and reported, but Gladney's daughters keep acquiring the symptoms described in the previous news broadcasts. The phenomenon itself undergoes a descriptive transformation that alters its reality from an innocent-sounding "feathery plume" to a more ominous "black billowing cloud" to its final status in the bureaucratic euphemism "airborne toxic event." As the author has said, this is "a language that almost holds off reality while at the same time trying to fit it into a formal pattern" (DeCurtis, "Interview" 61).

The characters of *White Noise*, as in other novels, live in a world of simulacra, a virtual "mediocracy" (Crowther 20). When Gladney and Siskind go to see the "most photographed barn in America," Siskind says that it is impossible to see the barn once they have seen all its "signs," the roadside signs, the photos, myriad descriptions of it. Yet, the opposite of Walter Benjamin's prediction has come true. The reproduction of representations has not removed the aura of the authentic, Siskind says, but helped to maintain it: every photograph actually reinforces the aura, in a collective perception outside of which one cannot stand. The ultimate example of the superior reality of the simulacrum is during the evacuation after the disaster. An organization called SIMUVAC is organizing the evacuation, which Gladney points out is, after all, not simulated but real An employee replies that in fact the organization is going to use the real evacuation as a "model," i.e. a chance to rehearse the simulation.

b.

In at least three of DeLillo's later novels, *Players, Running Dog, and Mao II*, relations between politics, especially terrorist politics, corporate institutions, and the media are explored. *Players* (1977) is not DeLillo's investigation of game-theory but of an urban couple's inauthentic games at work, play, and politics. Lyle Wynant is a broker at the New York Stock Exchange, that is, he indulges in a form of high-stakes gambling through information gathering and sifting. The Exchange is "sealed off from the rest of the city," "a secret system and rite to outshadow the evidence of men's senses" (132). His wife Pammy professionally pretends to be serious about death in written brochures at an agency for "grief management." That her services hardly go beyond reifying emotion for profit is shown when she herself goes numb with grief and guilt at the grisly suicide of Jack Laws. Significantly, she succumbs to tears only while watching a film on television which she recognizes as a "bogus" tear-jerker. Emotion can only become real in media representation. For play, the Wynants have given up the usual yuppie pastime of discovering out-of-the-way restaurants and settled in to the boredom of TV and the charge of extra-marital sex. Lyle in front of the TV is a "channel-surfer;" aimlessly changing channels and ignoring content, "jerking the dial into fresh image burns" (16), while his wife watches her set in another room, an index of their alienation (and a denial of McLuhan's electronic hearth). Lyle says he feels bored by the three-dimensional bodies of the theater, "real space as opposed to the manipulated depth of film" (100). They socialize with the gay couple Jack and Ethan via witty but edgy conversation, skirting seriousness with defensive moves.[2]

Playing goes from contemporary alienation to contemporary menace, however, with Lyle's involvement in a terrorist plot to bomb the Stock Exchange. Here, again, Lyle remains a game-player, "[f]itting human pieces into gaps on the board," as he himself recognizes

(*Players* 145). He plays at being a terrorist without thinking too much about the meanings or implications of his acts; he plays off Marina and Kinnear against each other and informs on Marina to the police after going to bed with her. If Kinnear's allegiance is always in doubt (a terrorist but somehow independent of Marina and her group, or an informer who leaks information that he calls "disinformation"), Lyle plays all sides, giving "selective" information to Marina, Kinnear, and Burks, who may be a CIA agent. A professional sorter and emitter of information, Lyle plays at detection: like Pynchon's Oedipa Maas but without her paranoid vision, he attempts to interpret the plot he has become involved in and fails to comprehend the central truth of Kinnear, who is politically and existentially ambiguous. Lyle cannot determine who Kinnear is working for and the end of the novel finds Lyle waiting for his call, in which he hopes to hear secret information about Kennedy's assassin, another unresolved mystery, but nothing is forthcoming. Kinnear has simply vanished and Lyle is left literally holding the phone, his own "barely recognizable" shape "quickly" disappearing. As with Kinnear, who practices looking different in front of a mirror in order to assume varied identities and cannot be pinned down politically, the self in DeLillo's fiction remains elusive, even at times non-existent, a sentimental notion from the period when character at least was not yet commodity. Lyle's evaporation, of course, suggests a cinematic "fade-out," the natural end, as it were, of his playing movie roles, the big screen being our culture's most powerful mirror (Goodheart 118).

In the prologue, in which all the characters appear in a formal, mini-version of the novel, the yet unnamed Wynants watch an in-flight movie on an airplane, depicting terrorists murdering some businessmen on a golf-course. It is to the point that the spectators do not respond to it as a political act but are merely entertained by the cocktail pianist's (Kinnear?)

playfully ironic musical commentary to the (soundless) film. "The Movie" prologue promotes an expectation of terrorist violence in the story that follows but the bomb-plot Lyle is involved in never takes place, in the by now familiar postmodernist denial of closure for a novel that promotes generic expectations of a "thriller." The conspiracy itself is ambiguous. The terrorists belong to no apparent organization. The CIA agent never identifies himself as belonging to the Agency. A man is shot at the Exchange while Lyle still works there, but there are alternative versions of the murder and the police have difficulty identifying the killer. As with the Kennedy assassination, a "second gunman" is postulated, or the victim was to have activated a bomb but the attempt was aborted by a terrorist-turned-police-informer, or the terrorist was going to activate a suicide-bomb and shot the victim who attempted to abort it, etc. As in *Libra* (1988), DeLillo's novel about the president's assassination, there is an overload of information but no definitive truth about events.

The central system in *Players* is not the conspiratorial terrorists' but their target, the game of high finance, "the idea of worldwide money" (107). As Marina puts it: "It's this *system* that we believe is their secret power...Currents of invisible life...bip-bip-bip, the flow of electric current that unites moneys, plural, all over the world" (107, italics given). To attack this "symbol system of advanced capitalism" and "pseudo-religion of abstract symbols" (LeClair 147, 167), the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street becomes the concrete and symbolic target of international finance, which has to be "shattered" before the system, in its own kind of paranoia, goes "underground" or electric, "nothing but waves and currents talking to each other. Spirits" (*Players* 109). Her co-conspirator Rafael is in tune with this notion of money as contemporary religion, a "secret system and rite," when he observes that "[f]inanciers are more spiritually advanced than monks on an island"(107). The process has

already begun, Lyle realizes, when he thinks of the money being sorted and counted within the Exchange, "money shrinking as it moved, beginning to evade visualization, to pass from a paper existence to electronic sequences, its meaning increasingly complex, harder to name" (110). Lyle's perception of money as electronic flashes recalls his television channel-surfing in that both are "transforming random moments of content into pleasing territorial abstractions" (16). The cultural essences of the "weightless, kinetic medium" of television and this new electronic form of money with no real content resemble each other and are appropriate to a lack of substantiality of the human self in the novel, noted above in relation to Kinnear and Lyle (Goodheart 119).

This concept of money mocks Talcott Parson's attempt to equate currency as political power legitimized by use in a system of free exchange (Chapt. 1c) or even Burroughs's vision of "junk" as a palpably measurable commodity (Chapt. 6b). Money itself has begun to go underground, a process of de-commodification from the simple abstraction of paper for gold to the bips of electronic sequences. It resembles rather Foucault's "capillary" power, running simultaneously through the social fabric at every point, "invisible" (as Rafael says), difficult to identify and pin down, and more powerful for being so, as the terrorists realize in their anxiety to hit its concrete center, the Stock Exchange, while it still exists. Foucaultian, too, is this implicit idea that late capitalism is forever ahead of his determined adversaries, countering their attacks by changing its guise, its tactics, its political and symbolic strategies.

In *Running Dog* (1987), the terrorists work for the US government and the plot centers on an amateur film. Rumors have been circulating for some thirty years about a mysterious film shot in Hitler's Berlin bunker at the end of the war. As the erotic art dealer Lightbourne, a go-between for marketing the film, remarks, the Nazis put everything on film, including

atrocities they themselves committed. "Film was essential to the nazi era. Myth, dreams, memory" (52). The footage allegedly shows high-ranking Nazis, Hitler himself, indulging in an orgy, but it eventually turns out to be just another Nazi home movie, although with the ironic feature of a rather avuncular Hitler imitating Chaplin of *The Great Dictator* (i.e. Hitler imitating Chaplin imitating Hitler). It turns out to be commercially useless since it does not reveal some ultimate monstrosity of the dictator, that is "...it does not portray the open secret of Hitler's perversity in such a way that his public, historical persona and private self are one and the same" (O'Donnell "Obvious Paranoia" 61). While its content is unknown, however, it becomes a priceless commodity, like the mysterious drug in *Great Jones Street*, attracting the keen interest of a number of powerful prospective buyers. If the object of the quest turns out, unlike Pynchon's ultimately unknowable objects, not unknowable but merely banal, its narrative function is to unite the various strands of plot and characters who pursue it for different ends.

One of these, Richie Armbrister, a precocious king of pornography, represents the single-minded devotion and deviousness of the entrepeneur but also that breed's precarious situation in the contemporary world. He has "perfected the technology of smut, opening up channels of distribution and devising ingenious marketing schemes" (143). Armbrister has no interest in the film beyond its commercial marketing possibilities: "Avenues of commerce. That's all he cared about. The higher things" (194). Legally, he is "hidden in a maze of paper" (144), protecting himself from the law with holding companies and dummy corporations in several states: "I don't exist as a person. I'm not in writing anymore" (50). In his avarice, he resembles another prospective client, Vincent, a specialist in "acquisitions" for a Mafia family, but unlike Vincent, he hasn't the security resources to guarantee his physical safety and

has to live barricaded in a warehouse in Dallas, a reference to the Kennedy assassination. He is in fact obsessed with being assassinated and having his murder investigation bungled, too, with witnesses mysteriously disappearing, etc.

The potential buyer with the highest public profile is Lloyd Percival, a liberal US Senator in the process of conducting an official but confidential investigation of an organization known as PAC/ORD, a bureaucratic coordinating arm of the whole US intelligence apparatus. Specifically, Percival is trying to pin down information on a secret operations unit called Radial Matrix, a "systems planning outfit" that has great corporate success abroad and later cuts itself adrift from PAC/ORD to operate independently and illegally: "it was virtually unknown; there was no drift, no waste, no direct accountability" (153):

> Radial Matrix was in fact a centralized funding mechanism for covert operations directed against foreign governments, against elements within foreign governments, and against political parties trying to gain power contrary to the interests of US corporations abroad. It was responsible for channeling and laundering funds for unlisted station personnel, indigenous agents, terrorist operations, defector recruitment, political contributions, penetration of foreign communications networks and postal agencies (74).

This more efficiently-run, smaller-scale CIA is headed by Earl Mudger, a tough and dangerous type familiar from the novels of Mailer and Robert Stone; Mudger has run drugs and contraband in his own personal fiefdom as an independent operator in Vietnam and now applies his corporate and military skills as maverick chief of Radial Matrix. As the Senator describes him, Mudger is "the combination of business drives and lusts and impulses, with police techniques, with ultrasophisticated skills of detection, surveillance, extortion, terror, and the rest of it" (76). He now wants to move from systems planning into pornography.

The Senator wants the film, unlike the others, not for profit but for his extensive private collection of pornographic art, but as Lightbourne observes, this is in a different category from

the static almost quaint erotica Percival favors, rather "innocent," "all mass and body weight" (15), compared to the new style, in which "a thing isn't fully erotic until it has the capacity to move," that is, the motion picture, "[t]he image that moves" (18). Since Percival may uncover compromising material on Radial Matrix, Mudger has penetrated the Senator's staff with Glen Selvy, who has been trained as an agent and, for this particular assignment, as a connoisseur of erotic art. He acts both as a "reader" (spy) of Percival for Mudger and as a confidential buyer of fine pornography for the Senator. Mudger wants to have the details of the Senator's personal predilection to use as blackmail against him, if pressure should prove necessary. A radical expose magazine, *Running Dog*, has also got wind of the collection and wants to do a piece on the Senator as part of a series, as the magazine is in financial trouble and needs a scandal. The magazine's reporter-writer Moll Robbins gets involved with Selvy, thinking he works for the Senator in some secret capacity, and Mudger puts a hit-team of Vietnamese rangers to "make an adjustment" (i.e. kill Selvy), thinking either that he is the source of the resourceful reporter's discovery of the collection or has tried to get hold of the film for him-self, or even for the simple fault of Selvy's having destroyed a listening device Radial Matrix installed.

The novel seethes with menace. Unlike the amateur players of *Players*, the characters tend to be ruthless, trained professionals, playing "strict, rule-governed games of power and profit" (LeClair 164). Their power resources are money (Armbrister) and political office (Percival) but also sex (Robbins, Delaney, Selvy), blackmail (Mudger, Lomax), and violence (Mudger, Selvy, Vincent). The second part of the novel is given over to Selvy's skillful elu-sion of his assassins to head back to Marathon Mines, where he first trained for the agency, to await his futilely heroic demise. Selvy, something of a modern Samurai, adheres monk-like to

what he calls a "routine," which recalls Foucault's drill of repeated actions "to shape an obedient subject" for both "increased aptitude and increased domination" (Foucault, DP 129, 138). Discipline is inculcated by repeated and precise actions, which induces a "mind-set, all those mechanically performed operations of the intellect that accompanied this line of work" (*Running Dog* 81). At the Mines, he had been made an efficient killer, machine-like in his physical responses and, equally important for the perfectly disciplined subject, mentally unquestioning of the power structure that trained and uses him: "It wasn't within Selvy's purview to meditate on additional links, even when they might pertain to his own ultimate sustenance. Especially then. That was why the routine existed" (82). Part of the controller's purpose is that the disciplined subject is individually expendable. Selvy's ritual death is the logical end of the process of treating the body as an object and in any case he comes to realize that he is just a servant of a corrupt capitalist power structure.

One of the interesting points the novel makes about contemporary politics is the pervasiveness of shifting allegiances and divided loyalties. Alliances tend to be tactically rather than ideologically produced, which tends to increase paranoia. There is the overall interagency power struggles of government organs we have seen as a feature of Mailer's work: in this case, PAC/ORD and the Senate investigating committee. On the individual level, Selvy reports to Lomax, who reports to Mudger, but Lomax also seems to have connections to Senator Percival. Selvy spies on Percival for Lomax and Mudger, but Mudger tries to have him killed. Lomax warns Selvy, who was his protégé, against his boss. Selvy has a sexual relationship with Moll but tells her nothing. As Mudger says, "Loyalties are so interwoven, the thing's a game. The Senator and PAC/ORD aren't nearly the antagonists the public believes them to be. They talk all the time. They make deals, they buy people, they sell favors. I

doubt if Lomax knows whether he works for PAC/ORD or Lloyd Percival, ultimately" (89-90). The former radical Grace Delaney, editor of *Running Dog*, has politically turned after pressure from the Internal Revenue: she sleeps with Lomax, who protects her from Internal Revenue harassment, and as editor she turns down Moll's piece on Radial Matrix while admitting to Lomax it was the best thing Moll had ever done. The allusion in the magazine's title ("capitalist lackeys and running dogs"), while meant to be ironic in a politically hip Sixties way, when the magazine was a radical organ, therefore turns out to be true.[3] As Lomax tells Delaney, the only people who still believe in what they do, "who aren't constantly adjusting, constantly wavering" (220) are "the families." This, a situation where the Mafia becomes the model of political and ethical integrity, is perhaps the chief irony.

Another important aspect of the novel, related to media and communications, is its depiction of a society of surveillance. A man in a dive where Selvy is drinking claims to be able to see cameras and listening devices installed by the FBI everywhere--in bars, under the seats of buses, etc. The man is dismissed as a paranoid drunk but the first attempt on Selvy's life immediately ensues. As Mudger explains in another context: "Devices make us pliant. If *they* issue a printout saying we're guilty, then we're guilty" (93, italics given). He himself is a specialist in making and using such devices. He has, for example, taped Moll's conversation with Percival, which he can use against the Senator for blackmail by splicing in appropriate sex sounds. Although both *Players* and this novel suggest that images are deceptive and even that there may be no reality behind surfaces, but only other images displacing them, "some of these mediated constructions can be made substantial and used to frame us" (Johnston, "Generic" 271). When Mudger goes on to enumerate the various agencies and organizations that have recorded information ("Banks, insurance companies, credit organizations, tax exam-

iners passport offices reporting services police agencies, intelligence gatherers," RD 93) one is reminded of Foucault's genealogies. The connection of film with Bentham's (and Foucault's) panopticon is made explicit by Lightbourne:

> "Go into a bank, you're filmed, " he said. "Go into a department store, you're filmed...Not only customers, mind you. Employees are watched too, spied on with hidden cameras. Drive your car anywhere. Radar, computer traffic scans. They're looking into the uterus, taking pictures. Everywhere. What circles the earth? Spy satellites, weather balloons, U-2 aircraft. What are they doing? Taking pictures. Putting the whole world on film" (149-50).

The film of Hitler in the privacy of sexual intimacy (which is also "public" since it is an orgy) and in the privacy of the Berlin bunker (whose prosaic activities are already on film) is a confirmation of the intrusion of media technology into private life (O'Donnell, "Running" 59). As Robbins replies to Lightbourne's speech, above, "The camera's everywhere...Even in the bunker"(150).

c.

Media and terrorist politics come together once again in DeLillo's latest novel, *Mao II* (1991), which also looks at the power of charismatic figures in our century, those men, the author says, that are "twisted by power and who seem capable of imposing their vision on the world" ("Interview," Nadotti). There is an implied parallel between the personality cults of the Communist leader Mao ZeDong and the Korean religious leader Reverend Moon, not so much in their propaganda techniques as in the nature of their appeal, the effect on the masses who follow them, the devotion to a belief or a cause embodied in a supreme leader. DeLillo does not slight the perceived personal rewards of submerging fragmented modern selves, one effect of which can be stated as, in the words of another novel, "To become a crowd is to keep out death" (*White Noise* 73), even while he makes clear the human costs. The flower-child Karen, for example, is both deluded and compassionate. One of the counter-culture's

media-directed youth that emerged from the Sixties, she tends to conflate political and relig-ious leaders.

In *Mao II*, Weberian charismatic power is complicated by the story of a terrorist group from Beirut that holds a Swiss poet hostage as a means of making the West aware of their existence and aims. Their leader Abu Rashid uses charisma, but the violence he encourages of his followers to maintain his image is not concealed in the name of historical necessity, as so often with cult-figures of the past like Stalin or Mao, but made public, even paraded, in a new version of what Foucault called the old power of the spectacle. In the arbitrary kidnapping or execution of an artist for exemplary ends, the guilt or innocence of the victim is not in question; his or her aura as an artist is, as it were, captured by the terrorists. In spectacles of terror like an urban bombing, not even the identity of the victims matters, i.e. unlike the old type of spectacular punishment, there is nothing personal (as they say) in the choice; innocent victims will do quite as well as the notorious criminals of earlier centuries, or rather will do even better, since the spectacle will be directed toward the executioners rather than the victims: "The more heartless they [the terrorists] are, the better we see their rage" (129-30). Means become ends, as the usual identity of the leader with the inevitable course of history is here transferred to the violent action itself. As Rashid explains: "...terror is what we use to give our people their place in the world. What used to be achieved through work, we gain through terror. Terror makes the future possible. All men one man. Men live in history as never before" (235).

The quotation suggests what is constantly and explicitly evoked in the novel: a link between novelist and terrorist. The older view, found in James and Conrad, that the terrorist is the alter-ego of the novelist (Scanlan 229) is suggested by George Haddad, the terrorists'

intermediary in the West, who tells Gray, "It's the novelist who understands the secret life" (158), and by the photo-journalist Brita, who feels as if she's being taken to see a terrorist leader on her way to photograph the well-known novelist Bill Gray in his hide-out. Author Gray, a total recluse in the manner of Thomas Pynchon, realizes that the power he has acquired through anonymity is mainly due to the worn-out role he has been living, with the collusion of his obsessive assistant Scott, of the old-fashioned, solitary Romantic artist. He maintains his aura, in Benjamin's formulation, by being unique, non-reproducible. Old and unable to finish his last book, which he has been revising and rewriting for over twenty years, perhaps because words no longer seem able to express reality, Gray consents to have his picture taken, an act that for Scott is a means of continuing to cultivate the Romantic aura, since the image will substitute for the work that Scott thinks will never be finished. For Gray, it seems, the picture is an admission that the role is no longer viable and his old task of creating fictions of the "inner life" no longer relevant. The image in the novel is emblematic of the omnipresence of the media through which, it seems, all reality is increasingly "mediated." The terrorists destroy the sense of self of the captive poet by depriving him of sense experience and refusing him paper and pencil, through which he might reconstruct a self through words, while they themselves watch a VCR. Militias in Beirut engage in a new kind of fighting by shooting out the images on the posters of rival group leaders.

With his image to be made public and his cover blown, Gray himself can be persuaded by his publisher to take part in a "media event" in an attempt to free the young poet--reading his poems on television--but things go awry and Gray is nearly killed in a bombing staged by the terrorists, i.e. for once reality substitutes for the image. The bombing jars him into action and he goes underground again, but without the illusions of self-importance his isolation had

given him (and his daughter told him was often just an excuse for avoiding human involvement), eventually dying on his way to meeting Rashid on a solitary mission to exchange himself for the poet. This attempt is both a last Romantic gesture that could mean his own execution and an illustration of the futility of such a gesture in a more prosaic and technological world, since he dies from injuries sustained after being hit by a car. This may be a statement of his own that his work is finished and perhaps of the author that the old, humanist novel is also quite dead. Ironically, Gray's own personality cult arising from the anonymity of his life, is at the end protected and even continued by Scott's careful and extensive archival work, the texts that replace their absent author, work that will be sustained perhaps indefinitely by monthly checks to Scott emitted by a computer.

DeLillo shows how the actions of terrorists have become the eloquent "statements" of the new political realities, as the old relationship of terrorist as the novelist's alter-ego is transformed into the novelist's competitor. Gray realizes this, as he goes from a principled anonymity ("The image world is corrupt, here is a man who hides his face" 36) to a grudging recognition of the power of the image: "There's the life and there's the consumer event. Everything around us tends to channel our lives toward some final reality in print or in film" (43). But the old link of novelist-terrorist as solitary rebel has given way "to a corporate take-over of art by violent people who manipulate the media" (Scanlan 241), so that those toting guns or cameras are barely distinguishable. In a kind of "zero-sum game," where one side in a power struggle gains from the loss of another (cf. Chapt. 1c), Gray says that print has been losing out to the visual image, which is the means *par excellence* by which the terrorist makes his statement: "What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they

represent equals our own failure to be dangerous" (157). Gray thinks that Samuel Beckett was "the last writer to shape the way we think and see. After him, the major work involves mid-air explosions and crumbled buildings" (Ibid.). This is "the new tragic narrative" of the postmodern novelist (DeLillo once said in an interview that "the news is fiction...is the new narrative"), and perhaps the "only meaningful act" in "societies reduced to blur and glut" (Ibid.). Glutted sensibilities can only be jarred by literally explosive statements.

Yet, if DeLillo is suggesting the decline of the former power of literature to change consciousness and influence events, he seems also to share Gray's belief in the forging of meaningful words to counteract the power of charismatic movements (and their simplifying slogans). As Gray responds to the "historical" arguments of Haddad:

> Even if I could see the need for absolute authority, my work would draw me away. The experience of my own consciousness tells me how autocracy fails, how total control wrecks the spirit, how my characters deny my efforts to own them completely, how I need internal dissent, self-argument, how the world squashes me the minute I think it's mine" (159).

This is not merely the usual call for the integrity of individual consciousness against public reality--Gray as a radical individualist is certainly evident both in the description of his early work as a deeply personal vision and his chosen life of isolation--but a reminder that in response to the realities of power the novelist's task "depends on the acknowledgment that there is a life of which we are a part" (Bradbury 1127-28). The longing of people for absolute authority that he is resisting, whether by Moonies or Red Guards, may be a longing for loss of self, but the resulting empowerment cannot, he admits, satisfy a man of his old-fashioned sensibility and ultimately fulfills the will of the master. The "total politics, total authority, total being" (158) Haddad calls such a commitment is not only the end of the self; it may require more sinister measures, for which one need not bring up the hackneyed example of the Nazis:

from the left, one might reflect on certain policies of Stalin and Mao, or more recently, the Khymer Rouge in Cambodia, where the mass politics of orthodoxy led "logically" to genocide. Mass murder, Gray tells Haddad, begins with a single hostage, "the miniaturized form. The first tentative rehearsal for mass terror" (163).

The question that the novel proposes of the power of literature to change minds was brought forward most forcefully in 1989, just two years before *Mao II* was published. This was the year of the Tienman Square massacre in Peking and the Ayatollah Khomeni's funeral, both described in the novel, themselves media events and examples of the mass emotional and potentially violent appeals of both religion and politics. In that year, too, the Salman Rushdie affair, in which a novel (*The Satanic Verses*) found deeply offensive to certain devout members of Islam, who put a price on the author's head for alleged blasphemy against Islam's sacred text and its founder's family, seemed to confirm postmodern fiction's claim to engage political life and transform the world (Scanlan 231). [4] Blasphemy in the liberal cultures of the West hardly seems possible, since the separation of church and state and constitutional guarantees of free speech have ensured that an accused blasphemer cannot legally be prosecuted. Furthermore, as a non-Western critic has observed, "Western liberal free speech has inscribed itself within certain self-generated limits, idealizing free expression even as it suspends the material effectivity of 'language' in the world" (Aravamudan 3, qtd. in Scanlan 249, n.10). In a similar vein, Western writers have sometimes expressed an almost wistful envy of their colleagues in the formerly Communist states of Eastern Europe, where a writer could be imprisoned for departures from political orthodoxy. Such possibilities, however unpleasant, even dangerous, to the individual author, are a back-handed tribute, as it were, to the power of

the word to disturb, challenge, and subvert the reigning order and thus offer a promise of renewal. The very fact of repression is, in this view, a guarantee of literature's power.

The literal-minded Muslims who demonstrated against Rushdie, burned his books, branded him as infidel, called for his assassination, and condemned him to a life of exile, have in effect, by these active "statements," not regarded Rushdie's novel "as an inconsequential imaginative exercise," just one more postmodern text dazzling jaded Western readers with verbal ingenuity and provocative situations, "but as a powerful expression of ideas deeply engaged with reality" (Scanlan 234). Furthermore, the "consumer event" that Gray acknowledges as what all current experience tends toward is present as well in the Rushdie episode. The protest demonstrations and book-burnings, even Khoumeni's public announcement of the *fatwa* or righteous execution (the CIA, by contrast, would have merely sent a secret squad of assassins to do the job), are eminently media events. Nothing really happens these days, as novelist may lament but terrorists realize, unless it is duly recorded on film. "The twentieth century is *on* film," a character from *The Names* says, "It's the filmed century" (200 italics given). If the media thus determine existence, they are doubly powerful, for they can both create realities and make them non-existent through selected silences (Guareshi et al. 14).

And yet, if the novel recognizes the diminished power of literature in a media age, it insists on its necessity, a necessity even recognized by Haddad, who urges Gray to write something monumental of the order of "the little red book" of the sayings of Chairman Mao, quoted and waved about by the Chinese masses, an "experience of Mao" that "became uncorruptible by outside forces": in other words, a sacred text, "the unchanged narrative every culture needs" (162). Gray's reply to this argument is both prosaic ("I'm not a great big vi-

sionary, George, only a sentence-maker. Like a donut-maker, only slower," Ibid.) and thoughtful ("I need internal dissent, argument," 159). DeLillo's resistance to the totality and the domination of abstractions, to the ahistorical and even sinister idea of "unchanging narratives," takes the form of a perception of the novel as essentially ambiguous, skeptical and self-questioning, a view held by the Czech novelist Milan Kundera, by Rushdie himself, and by Bakhtin (Scanlan 241). Bakhtin, as we have seen, theorizes the novel as both critical and self-critical discourse. If power attempts to centralize language in dominant and exclusive forms, literature subverts this attempt through the "dialogic" of multiple voices, its "evolving heteroglossia" (cf. Introd. sec.II). As Rushdie puts it: "The novel has always been *about* the way in which different languages, values and narratives quarrel, and about the shifting relations between them, which are relations of power" ("Is Nothing Sacred?" 102-3, emphasis given). For his part, DeLillo seems to be speaking through Gray, who, dying and reflecting on the imprisoned poet, thinks:

> When you inflict punishment on someone who is not guilty, when you fill rooms with innocent victims, you begin to empty the world of meaning and erect a separate mental state, the mind consuming what's outside itself, replacing real things with plots and fictions. One fiction taking the world narrowly into itself, the other fiction pushing out toward the social order, trying to unfold into it....This is how we reply to power and beat back our fear. By extending the pitch of consciousness and human possibility (200).

d.

The interlocking themes of charisma and the captive masses, public appearance and private retreat, language and mass-media have also been examined in *Great Jones Street* (1973), a novel that is historically related to the late Sixties and Seventies as *Mao II* is to the Eighties. Driving the plot is the quest for a secret drug (called simply the "package" or the "product") entrusted to the keeping of a burned-out rock star, Bucky Wunderlick, who at the beginning of

the novel has gone into private retreat in a room on Great Jones Street in the Manhattan Bowery. Like Glen Selvy of *Running Dog*, Gary Harkness of *End Zone*, and that archetypal American, Henry David Thoreau, he seeks in asceticism a way of ordering his life and simplifying existence. The drug, like the Hitler film in *Running Dog*, is the commodity that attracts the desire and greed of nearly all the characters but will turn out to be disappointing. The manipulative Hanes, the underground scientist Dr. Pepper (who as sinister trickster-figure and master of disguises recalls characters out of Burroughs and Barth and historically the legendary LSD chemist of the Sixties, Augustus Owsley III), even Bucky's fellow musician Azarian and his girl-friend Opel, all try in some way to gain control of the product and all turn out eventually to have connections with the conspiratorial organization that first obtained it.

The desire of all these people to possess and control the drug has its analogy in Bucky's manager, Globke's, desire to get hold of his client's secret "mountain tapes" that he hopes to exploit for profit (he eventually resorts to stealing them). Globke, who runs the holding companies and subsidiaries subsumed under the Pynchonean name of Transparanoia Enterprises, recalls Armbrister in *Running Dog* and other caricatures of the wheeling-dealing entrepeneur: "Nothing is too personally distasteful for me to get involved in as long as it helps create a new product or extends the life an existing product" (188). Living above Bucky is an eccentric, unpublished writer Eddie Fenig, who pursues fame and profit in the dubious literary genre of child porno and, when that fails in the market, the more promising one of "financial writing," the "ultimate corporate fiction." All the characters in the novel are therefore engaged in a pursuit of profit, except for Bucky, who seeks his Thoreauvian inner economy to oppose the late capitalist market economy, and, in any case, while personally wealthy, he has no access to money tied up in interlocking enterprises. The music business and the drug business, the

legal and illegal markets, are both suggested as enterprises that market a product of Burroughs-like control that tends to deflect political dissent. In *Great Jones Street*, the focus is, as LeClair sums up (89), on "mass entertainment and political organization, issues of commerce, conditioning, consumption and control." The cultural direction is from the political disturbances of the late Sixties to "the dreadful cynicism, deep alienation, and desperate privatism of the Seventies" (DeCurtis, "Product" 133).

The drug itself is worthy of Burroughs: the "jones" of the novel's title is junkie-slang for a serious habit, and the main effect of the drug is to destroy the ability of a person to speak, the ultimate downer, "leaving product and consumer consumed in the act of consumption" (LeClair 100), In another variation on drugs and speech, the drug Dylar in *White Noise* has the effect of causing a person to be unable to distinguish words from things, a "Saussurian nightmare" and new kind of paranoia (Saltzman 818). Speech in this novel is reduced to its terminal extremes--silence and noise--and amplified in the lyrics of pop music, a tendency therefore toward excess or dearth. Upstairs from Bucky, for example, Fenig has trunkfuls of writing no one wants; downstairs lives a boy resembling a mutant who is speechless. Everyone who visits Bucky is loquacious. The pseudo-dialogue of the celebrity interview is effectively parodied when Bucky is interviewed by humanist intellectuals (103-7) and by a disc-jockey (130). Bucky, who has voluntarily lapsed into silence and is pressured into returning to speech through a threatened release of the tapes and a new promotional tour, will eventually be injected with the drug and so forcefully silenced. When he eventually recovers and begins to negotiate with himself a return to society, it will be through writing. A professional "sender" as rock musician, Bucky will become after his first silence, a "receiver," noting and

recording what others have said to him, before again becoming a sender in writing his memoirs (LeClair 88).

The drug has been produced by one of those sinister organizations, found in both Pynchon's and DeLillo's fiction, that seems to be part of the opposition but works both sides, and which suggests the paranoid possibility that there is only one side. It may even be the case that the organization, the disarmingly named Happy Valley Farm Commune, is fronting for the government itself, marketing and distributing its own product, for (it is rumored) the drug was originally designed by the US government to silence political dissenters (which recalls a paranoid fear by some Sixties radicals that drugs were actually encouraged by the government) and may have been "stolen" from a government research office. This is more probable when one considers that the bad effects of the drug would not bring it any street-value, which suggests the Commune does not really know what it has. The "Farm Commune" is actually an urban group, recalling Pynchon's Tristero in its tentacular reach and ambiguous aims. It reveres Bucky for his example of a "returning the idea of privacy to the idea of American life" (19), which would paradoxically turn privacy into a mass movement and seems to parody the "me-decade" aspect of the 1970s, especially since the Commune pursues the capitalist dream of a monopolistic corner on the market The group turns out to be in control of most of the events in the novel: it owns, for example, the very room Bucky thinks he has escaped into, which explains why he keeps having visitors while his location is a secret.

The Commune both inspires and results from paranoia. Its means of power are a disciplined and ruthless organization with a "soft" front, anonymous or dissimulated action, the dissemination of disinformation, and, when deemed necessary, violence through its terrorist wing, a group of thugs called the "dog boys." In its relentless pursuit of market control of the

product, the Commune is the model of a private corporation, but in its secrecy and methods resembles a disciplined Leninist revolutionary cadre, both organizations that prefer manipulation to exposure, power to fame. It eventually injects Bucky with the drug, effectively silencing him in the name of its ideology of a return to private experience, and destroys the tapes that would constitute his return to public life. The implication is that the Commune's real aim all along has been to control him.

For Wunderlick the performer is, as suitably packaged product, the personal equivalent of the drug, the absent commodity people want to exploit for profit. A composite of Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison, perhaps others, but in any case a cultural figure at the other end of the spectrum from *Mao II*'s recluse writer Paul Gray, he is also an alternative focus of mass adoration to be compared to the cult religious and political leaders of that novel. Like Gray, he chooses a retreat into isolation, but only when he begins to suspect that he is losing his power over his fans. Although as pop-idol Bucky carries his own kind of charisma so that at the beginning of the novel he claims a "true fame, a devouring neon, not the somber renown of waning statesmen or chinless kings"(1), the glitter of fame is not, as he seems to recognize in this passage, the same thing as true power. His fans seem to control him as much as he controls them and he suffers from the paranoid fear that they will someday rise up and kill him. In the meantime, they have become subdued, expectant of his death, which, "to be authentic," part of the tradition (i.e. Elvis Presley, Janice Joplin, Jimmi Hendrix, Jim Morrison), must be self-willed, the next logical step of fame, requisite to the myth of the authentic rock hero. Withdrawn into anonymity and lapsed into silence in his room, self-imposed isolation has ironically increased his power ("The less you say, the more you are," a newsman tells him, 128)

and Globke plans to bring him back with an increased market value. Even the supremely private acts of silence and suicide have become commodities.

As rock star, mass communicator, "a channel for redistributing information" (LeClair 95), Bucky produced music with a message in his first album, "Amerikan War Sutra," a late Sixties blend of hippy culture and political protest, while the more self-referential second album, "The Diamond Stylus," his move into the Seventies, shows an increasing concern with aesthetic over political themes. The third and final album, as the title song "Pee-Pee-Maw-Maw" indicates, abandons meaning altogether for pure sound (or "noise," as Opel says) and infantile gibberish. Thus, Bucky's personal musical development through the three albums parallels the historical development of rock and roll itself from the artistic expression of rebellious (and proletarian) youth against the conformity of a stifling adult culture in the Fifties, followed by its status as main cultural vehicle for the Sixties' political protest but also hippy "do your own thing" counter-culture, to its total co-optation by capitalist enterprise that became evident then and is taken for granted nowadays. The co-opting, of course, includes the marketing of its artists, whose increasingly desperate posing as alternative social models ("the decline of rock into shock spectacle," DeCurtis "Product" 139) can hardly disguise the central facts of the musicians' transformation into capitalist entrepreneurs administering huge fortunes and the poverty of their attempts to go beyond the creative efforts of rock's first two decades.[5] No longer a source of meaning or transmitter of messages, therefore, Bucky by the time of his retreat has become a mere product for mass consumption (96), Globke's own "package," in the form of the "Bucky Wunderlick Media Kit." In the singer's absence, his manager starts rumors about him designed to sell more records.

Watney, the English rock-star, who has accordingly abandoned music to become a representative of a European conglomerate, explains the difference of manufactured fame and real power when he tells Bucky that he himself quit because he realized he was just a performing monkey with "no real power":

> Nothing truly moves to your sound. Nothing is shaken and bent...You're above ground, not under.. The true underground is the place where power flows. That's the best-kept secret of our time...The presidents and prime-ministers are the ones who make the underground deals and speak the true underground idiom. The corporations. The military. The banks. This is the underground network. This is where it happens...You're not insulated or unaccountable the way a corporate force is. Your audience is not the relevant audience. It doesn't make anything. It doesn't sell to others (231-32).

This passage explains the power of the underground networks of both private corporations like the Commune and the government, refuting Bucky's initial claim that fame is superior to political power. It suggests, especially through Watney's own change of career, the cultural transformation of rock from underground force to part of the capitalist system that it set out to contest, and, more generally, the power of capitalism to co-opt its adversaries. It recalls the secret flow of money described in *Players* and the tentacular reach of the Firm in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Finally, Watney's insistent metaphor of where one is located, above or under-ground, reiterates the Foucaultian theme of power's secret and insidious "capillaries," ubiquitous and diffuse. Power as spectacle Foucault sees as less efficient in that it allows too many gaps wherein it does not reach and where resistance can thus take form. DeLillo's novel sees the spectacle as essentially empty, where, despite Bucky's claim to make "people move," nothing is truly "moved" or "shaken," and what is offered is the illusion of fame and the compensation of profits. The implication of the passage is that even statesmen, public figures who occasionally engage in displays of political hierarchy, find their es-

sential meaning in their underground activities, their secret pacts and deals by which they move the world.

Bucky's final silence, this time imposed and not chosen, makes him think of "an unimprinted level" somewhere beyond speech, a place to which he has in fact been moving of his own volition.[6] After the drug wears off, his return to the world, like David Bell's in *Americana*, will be negotiated through soundless language, i.e. literature, the memoirs he is writing that becomes the novel we are reading. Bell has given up film, Wunderlick music, for writing. Bucky cannot, of course, master the commodity culture, is himself consumed by it, but he is reborn into a new kind of language. DeLillo seems to be suggesting again the function of literature in the media age, overwhelmed as it may be by the noise. Earlier, Bucky expressed his media-hip contempt for the art of writing: "When people read a book...they just sit there...A long time ago, that was okay...Now it's different. I make people move" (105). But the power to make people move is precarious and uncertain, as he learns by experience with his fans, and, in any case, moving bodies is not moving the world, as his British rival reminds him in the passage just quoted. In writing, he makes a product rather than becomes one, "creating an object--unlike a record or the drug--that can communicate to a large crowd but silently, individually, and with increased complexity" (LeClair 107). Communication, not mere consumption, is that which stimulates thought, response, and the feedback he has lost with his music.

e.

If language is the extension of possibility for DeLillo, it can also be a tool for the obfuscating discourses of power. By his second novel, *End Zone* (1972), DeLillo says he "began to suspect that language was a subject as well an instrument in my work" ("Interview," LeClair 21). This interest has become a method, and some critics have predictably complained

that DeLillo's characters often talk as if they are giving a lecture, constantly offering theories, like Murray Siskind in *White Noise*, professionally involved in producing theories but also temperamentally adapted to it (Bawer 35-42). The characters do not talk like "real people" or we should probably not bother to read what they say. While DeLillo does not attempt fictional realism, his ear is remarkably attuned to the American idiom, and more important theoretically, he is adept at using characters as vehicles for other "languages," a tendency carried nearly to absurdity with the wacky scientists of *Ratner's Star*, where the "think-tank" setting explores language not in relation to silence, as in *Great Jones Street*, but to the special codes and jargons of science and technology (Johnston 266). The ideas expressed by DeLillo's characters are not related to their psychological motives nor are they necessarily consistent with their actions, as they would be in realist fiction. Individual subjects are not responsible for apprehending or creating but tend to be determined by the codes that control them or are mouthpieces for ideas and Bakhtin's "interrelationships between utterances and languages." Some negative criticism of DeLillo has been unable to see this, insisting on the need for "plausible characters" and the way "people really talk." [7] The novels cannot really be defined by realist ideas of mimesis but by something akin to heteroglossia, "the multiplicity of social voices" and "the movement of the theme through different languages and speech types" that Bakhtin thought distinctive of the novel (Johnston 265; Bakhtin, "Discourse in Novel" 263). The specialized languages and professional jargons either engage in dialogue or collide with one another. *End Zone* is a particularly good case in point.

All the characters in *End Zone* play language games and the absent spirit of Wittgenstein, in the form of a missing poster, hovers over obscure "Logos College" in the Texas desert. [8] The football players communicate, or rather just "engage in wars of jargon with each

other," "Interview, LeClair 21), using the specialized jargon of sports but also eloquent insult and obscenities, platitudes and clichés, and the "fierce, alien noises" they use to psyche each other up before games. One practices sports commentary to a silent television set; another suggests he may be "speaking in tongues." The protagonist sets himself to mastering a new, difficult word every day and his sole erotic adventure takes place in the library where he is turned on by reading the dictionary with his girl-friend. Most curiously, the players recite specialized mathematical or scientific definitions of common words that come up in conversation, a form of apparently irrelevant commentary that serves to pull words out their simple meanings in banal contexts to foreground the strangeness of language.

The protagonist, Gary Harkness, a halfback on the Logos football team, is in "exile" from more prestigious schools where he somehow didn't fit in. In his self-conscious alienation he often sounds like Camus's Meursault but both playfully and seriously tries out his own variety of languages; he is often ironic, mocking pretensions and promoting ambiguity. At times, he seems to support and reinforce the linguistic and behavioral reductionism promoted by the authorities, but often he labors to contest it, as when he evades being used as propaganda by the newly hired publicity man or puts on his fellow players by inventing stories. Of Bobby Luke, who shows his unthinking belief in the coach by often saying he would "go through a brick wall" for him, Harkness shows an awareness of such reductive, and seductive, formulas: "Maybe the words were commissioned, as it were, by language itself..lullabies processed through intricate systems...old and true, full of reassurance, comfort, consolation. Men followed such words to their death because other men before them had done the same" (EZ 54). Toward the end, however, after Harkness shows his refusal to play the authorities' game any more by smoking a joint and walking off the field in the season's last game, he is

reintegrated in the system by the coach, who names him co-captain, and he realizes his status as outsider has been compromised: "I was now part of the apparatus. No longer did I circle and watch, content enough to be outside the center and even sufficiently cunning to plan a minor raid or two" (202).

The coach, Emmet Creed, is another of DeLillo's obsessives, a believer in moral perfection through the simple ascetic life, a "land-locked Ahab," whose monomania reaches beyond victory in the game to some theological vision, "unfolding his life toward a single moment" (54). Creed recalls the Fascist obsession with order, discipline, and purity. He has in any case embraced the Stoic creed of refashioning oneself in order to be worthy of leadership. From humble beginnings, Creed molded first himself ("Purify the will. Learn humility. Restrict the sense life," he tells Harkness, 201), then a series of unpromising teams, for which he "became famous for creating order out of chaos" (10). As coach, Creed thinks that football played properly is "an interlocking of a number of systems" (199) and sees his players as interlocking parts of a functional unity. Ignoring his athletic opponents and sequestering the athletes from the outside world (he puts canvas around the stadium to discourage spies and confines his players in their own dormitories), he concentrates obsessively on the team's unity or "oneness," machine-like performance in a closed "system that protects his power as a single ruler" (LeClair 66-67).

As supreme leader, Creed requires only "obedience" and takes the lofty view of a divine monarch, letting his assistant coaches mix with the players and hassle them for their mistakes and shortcomings while he silently observes the patterns of plays from a tower, from which he rarely descends. His authority comes both from this (remote but visible) physical presence and his control of the word: "This was his power, to deny us the words we needed.

He was the maker of plays, the name-giver" (EZ 135). Yet, as Harkness explains, the coach is not really the god-like creator such attributes suggest: "All teams run the same plays. But each team uses an entirely different system of naming" (118). The play "Blue turk right, double-slot, zero snag delay," for example, has an original, even poetic ring, but in the context of a game it is called on a "signal" and functions merely as a command, exacting the unhesitating obedience of a practiced, programmed performance. Creed's power is not manifest in creation but implemented through discipline.

In what Tom LeClair calls this "deconstructive fable" (64), Logos suggests the centrality of the word. LeClair argues that Creed is the "primary voice of logocentrism," whose ideal is the Derridean metaphysics of presence. Creed desires a return to the "simple Logos" of the college's dead founder, a man "who believed in reason. He cherished the very word" (EZ 7) but, significantly, he himself was mute. Presumably, Creed will make the word become flesh in the bodies of his beefy players. His stated creed of simplicity, purity, self-knowledge, seeks a way back to the "original presence." Walking in the Texas desert, "in the middle of the middle of nowhere," a place stripped down to the perceived priorities of presence, Harkness too expresses a desire to emulate his coach in reducing a world too packed with meaning: "To begin to reword the overflowing world. To subtract and disjoin. To recite the alphabet. To make elemental lists" (89). In this reading, the novel shows, in response to Creed's linear single-mindedness, "that a quest for linguistic self-reference and simplicity leads to unsolvable paradoxes and a recognition of complexity" (61). DeLillo shows that the multiple discourses and play of language resist the "univocal pattern" from "origin to end" (71). The patriarchal discourse of authority (to which Harkness's father also subscribes) permits no play with the context framing it. The game cannot be contaminated, in Creed's

quest for purity, with the world outside the chalk markers of the field ("It's just a game," he says, "but it's the only game"). Power, according to Bakhtin (cf. Introd.II), attempts to centralize language in dominant and exclusive forms. In fiction, by contrast, language is transformed from an "impermeable monoglossia" to an "evolving heteroglossia ("Prehistory" 61). Creed's need to control discourse is monologic, a negation of dialogue; "it is univocal, direct: it is the Logos, the Word of God" whose "goal is to turn the team into goal-bound ascetics" like Creed himself (Osteen 148).

It is noteworthy that this novel has no single-line plot but employs a structure of circularity and doubling back, with ambiguity of action as well as language. The illusion of linearity given by the regular schedule of the football season is dissolved when the season ends and the players remain uncertain as to what to do with themselves. Harkness, who seems to have succumbed to Creed's closed system by agreeing to the co-captaincy, at the end starves himself and is taken to the infirmary: "High fevers burned a straight channel through my brain" (242) are among his last words. Does the straight channel signal a final mental burn-out, or a linear path that is capitulation to Creed's authority, or does his self-induced condition mean that he cannot fit in to the present system either, and a new cycle of removal and recommence is beginning? The refusal of closure is itself a denial of the single-line narrative that Creed throughout, and Harkness at times, have desired as the projects of their lives.

The end zone is literally the area beyond the goal line, the aim of the game, a closure in the satisfyingly closed system of football, but as the author has pointed out, football is only one of the games in the novel, in which "fiction itself is a sort of game" ("Interview," LeClair 21). Creed and Harkness, and many a character in other novels, in their different ways strive to simplify competing discourses into a single-line narrative moving toward the end zone of

perfect closure (Osteen 344), Creed through a return to the simple Logos, Harkness through attempts to drastically simplify meaning and choice. Harkness's roommate Bloomberg is an extreme example of this tendency. He tries to "walk in a perfectly straight line," become "single-minded and straightforward" and "start all over with simple, declarative sentences"(188). His isolation from and indifference to his fellows, his desire to be "superrational," to "unjew" himself in Texas from guilt and the burdens of history (46-7), and his declared respect and admiration for the "systems planner," "the management consultant," and "the nuclear strategist" (49) are all to the point. By contrast, Professor Zapalac, who can be seen as Creed's polar opposite, does not impose or admire monologic discourses. As a teacher, he not only lectures but makes jokes, asks questions, mixes with his students, and generally underemphasizes his authority. Zapalac, who admits to being " a little bit paranoid" (183), explicitly warns students of the militarized state. He calls the midwestern Republicans, among whom he taught before, "masters of the categories of things," who have been "raised to believe everything they've been told by their elders": "They do things in alphabetical order. They know their place" (164). He rejects the rigid order of patriarchal and authoritarian discourse for "unpredictability" and "the potential for disorganization in things and people" (163).

"End Zone" also alludes to Beckett's "Endgame," the extreme conditions of nihilism and death itself. The players indulge in rituals of death, games like the childish "Bang, bang, you're dead," and the post-season pick-up football game in the snow where the rules keep simplifying into a basic one-on-one shock of bodies. The end zone is also the terminal place to which the slogan "Militarize" (which Harkness once saw posted or printed everywhere in his home-town) inexorably leads in an escalating political crisis, in a world (the early 1970s)

where the super-powers were armed to a dangerously redundant degree. Although we are perhaps meant to see the simplifications of Creed, Bloomberg, and Harkness as springing from the same ascetic impulse, Harkness's vision goes beyond the reductive asceticism of his coach, which encompasses his life and his team, to the planetary level, a fantasized vision of the contemporary apocalypse of thermonuclear war, with which he becomes obsessed (Zapalac's subject, by contrast, is "exobiology," life on the planetary level). Harkness takes a course in "disaster technology" and guiltily enjoys reading about disasters. Every day he imagines a different city being obliterated ("Pleasure in the contemplation of millions dying and dead," 21); his fantasy recalls the Gladney family's pleasure in watching disasters on TV. He seems to share the bizarre contemporary fantasy of the ultimate "purification" of nuclear war, what Robert Jay Lifton has called the extreme "solution to death anxiety" (qtd. by Osteen 152).

Harkness also becomes the best student in a class on modern war designed for Air Force officer trainees. Although he resists being recruited for the military wing by Major Staley, he agrees to playing an elaborate nuclear war game with the Major in his motel room in the desert (which is usually the site for nuclear testing). Staley's game is based on a geo-political crisis situation devised by strategists like the Sixties' "futurologist" Herman Kahn, whose notion of "thinking the unthinkable" (one of his titles) actually helped make horrendous situations seem thinkable and therefore almost acceptable.[9] The linguist Noam Chomsky perhaps first called attention to how our leaders learned to talk in public of operational strategies and global scenarios. In one of his examples (qtd. by Williams, *Problems* 13), the bombing of refugee peasants in Vietnam can be described, in a show of procedure, as "acclerated urbanization." Whether actual military strategists in the Pentagon or conservative "think-tank" theo-

rists like Kahn, these people describe nuclear war through computer model "scenarios," a practice and perception that helps disguise the reality of wholesale death and destruction, possibly even the end of present and future life on the planet. "Slow-motion counter-city war, super-ready status, collateral destruction, civilian devastation attack" (42) are subjects Harkness brushes up on, while "thermal hurricane, overkill, circular error probability, post-attack environment, stark deterrence, dose-rate contours, kill-ratio, spasm war" (21) are phrases he becomes "fascinated by." Like the electronic media, which through its repetition of disasters, assassinations, explosions inuring people to the reality of such events, the specialized language, the curiously arcane and impersonal jargon of nuclear war, helps to obfuscate the horrendous possibilities.[10]

An equation of the jargons of football and nuclear war as both discourses of games of power (for example, on the book jacket of *End Zone*) is simplistic if it implied that football is a type of stylized war or a manifestation of an American spirit of destruction. As Zapalac, who loves football, says, "I reject the notion of football as warfare. Warfare is warfare. We don't need substitutes because we've got the real thing" (164). Football is a ritual of violence that can be played and replayed, while nuclear war is "its terrible obverse, an endgame that can never really be played at all" (Johnston 263). American football, although a systems game where pre-programmed plays are run by players with defined assignments (as opposed to soccer, where players must react spontaneously to unfolding patterns determined by the unpredictable position of the ball), is not, after all, a closed system, since the players must always take account of the actions of its opponents, unlike Coach Creed, who ignores his team's adversaries. The development of a play will therefore depend on the reaction of the opponent's defense, which in turn will call for unplanned response or counter-measures in an un-

folding and unpredictable situation. The system is closed only in the sense of its being confined to a limited space and being allowed to work according to well-defined rules. Despite Major Staley's suggestion that future wars will be so defined, with "referees" as in a football game, it is virtually certain that there could be no such curb to escalating violence in a volatile political situation involving nuclear bombs. Nuclear war-fighting by definition defies reason.

Language is, of course, not a closed system for analogous reasons. In communication, an utterance stimulates a response and while the linguistic exchange is subject to certain rules it is unpredictable. In the novel, it is not the violence of war and football that provokes metaphorical comparisons but their languages. Football creates an illusion of order amid the renewable physical violence and chaos on the field through its language and symbols: the names of the plays receive their interpretation in repeatable performance. Nuclear war, however, simply impoverishes language (Johnston 263). As Harkness tells Major Staley, "there's no way to express thirty million dead. No words. So certain men are recruited to reinvent the language" (85). Like nuclear strategy, this invented language is reductive, words designed to shield participants from reality: "They're painkillers. Everything becomes abstract" (Ibid.). Despite Staley's insistence on the quasi-divine omnipresence of the bomb, the atomic bomb, as Mark Osteen points out, eludes the metaphysics of presence because its value as a weapon depends on it never being used: paradoxically, it can be present in our minds only when absent; its physical presence would ensure our total absence (151). The "wars of jargon" DeLillo has applied to his players are employed by strategists to mask the unspeakable reality of such a war. Jargon itself becomes a weapon, a linguistic defense created to avoid thinking about what it might mean, a translation into "language that is always insufficient to represent a condition in which meaning is necessarily absent" because its users are all dead (156).

Language is central to *The Names* (1982) and, as in *End Zone*, can serve as a means of domination for the powers-that-be. On the positive side, as in *Mao II*, language can mean open possibility, a weapon against terrorism. Here, for example, it means the real communication of conversation, as illustrated by the Athenians among whom James Axton, the protagonist, lives. He notes how much of their lives is given over to conversation, what pleasure, enthusiasm, and physical contact it brings out. For these people, "[c]onversation is life, language is the deepest being...The talk is unconditional, the participants drawn in completely" (52). Axton illustrates the double function of creativity and reductiveness in his very presence in Greece, when he notes that Americans used to come to Greece to write and paint: "Now we do business" (6). It is to the point that he speaks only rudimentary Greek, little more than the tourists of whom he still feels a member.

This other side of language is shown by the occupations of Axton and his companions. Citing Walter Ong's analysis of literate and preliterate societies, LeClair argues that that DeLillo is emphasizing "the costs of literacy" (191), a situation at odds with the reciprocal orality displayed by the talkative Greeks. Such an interpretation may suggest the contrast Derrida scorns of nostalgia for the presence of the spoken word over the dead letter, but writing will turn out to have its place, and Ong's theory does seem to apply to the novel. The technology of print is sight- rather than sound-dominated; it "isolates and dissects" rather than "incorporates and unifies," encouraging the qualities of "discreteness and analysis, originality, abstraction, detachment, absolutism, and possible self-destructiveness" (190-91), qualities which are evident both in the personalities and occupations of the novel's multinational bankers and businessmen and in the murderous actions of the bizarre cult Axton will learn about.

Axton himself started as a writer of corporate and government "institutional litter," one who in an alienated disregard of content merely engaged in cleaning up the syntactical and stylistic errors of a prose devised for domination. As a free-lancer, he seemed to be even further removed from responsibility for what he wrote, but he is now fully engaged by the corporate structure as a "risk analyst" in Greece for the multinational Northeast Group, for whom he no longer even writes, just reads reports and sends telexes. The classic American "innocent abroad," he is a willing if occasionally critical corporate servant who feels betrayed when he eventually learns that his company has connections with the CIA and he has been therefore been indirectly engaged in espionage. His job consists in reviewing reports and analyses in order to determine what "seems likely" in volatile Near Eastern countries: "Collapse, overthrow, nationalization? Maybe a balance of payments problem, maybe bodies hurled into ditches. Whatever endangers an investment" (34). The irony of this utterance can be gauged when the Greek Eliades tells him that Americans learn about other countries only when their vital interests are threatened, interests that have no relation to the needs of the countries themselves, since their governments seem to run on the principle of "Take the Americans' money. Do what the Americans tell us to do" (235). Axton's naiveté consists in his thinking that the information he gathers from private and public sources and assesses for the company has no harmful political consequences, that information is somehow independent of power, or rather that the political and economic realms operate independently.

In contrast to the Greek people's reciprocal conversation, the corporation depends on one-sided abstract reports and statistical analyses, information gathered not through mutual intercourse and for mutual benefit but secretly, for purposes of exploitation. The analysis of the documents and studies of the businessmen and bankers' neo-colonialist project is sug-

gested to be analogous to the linguistic work of the epigrapher Rawlinson, who deciphered cuneiform writing: "fit together the elements of a pattern," find a "design" that will explain otherwise diverse and confusing information, and, in what could be a virtual motto for colonialism, "subdue and codify" (80). The implication of such apparently disinterested scientific activity in colonialism, "the scientific face of imperialism" (80), is clear when Axton points that the British epigraphers were in fact employed by the East India Company. The cutting edge of British imperialism in the East, this was an organization that had acquired exceptional trade privileges for the British Crown from the Mogul emperors and when their power declined intervened directly in Indian affairs. As in Pynchon, the collaboration of science and business, both technical research and the codifying properties of language, in a culture of death is questioned,: "Technicians are the infiltrators of ancient societies. They speak a secret language. They bring new kinds of death with them" (114). For his part, Axton enjoys his companions' "technical cant," the specialized vocabulary of the foreign bankers, businessmen, and experts, "which resonates with the power of the institutions that employ them" (McClure 111).

The older humanistic expatriates who sought inspiration in ancient societies for artistic creation have given way to these new multinational "corporate transients," Europeans as well as North-Americans, but "serving the same broad ends," (70) and forming "a subculture, business people in transit, growing old in planes and airports" (6). Axton's boss Rowser sums up the apolitical, profit-is-the-only-motive, point-of-view of these multinational servants when he quotes his own boss: "Power works best when it doesn't distinguish friends from enemies" (236), and yet the corporations must take account of local and national politics in order to protect both its investments and its personnel. The time frame is the end of the 1970s, during

the Iranian revolution, a situation that makes such people, with their vision of the American hostages in Tehran, want to be based in a less volatile area like Greece. Their personal security, however, can be compromised by nationalist terrorists. Accordingly, Rowser is obsessed with secrecy--his life is "full of the ornaments of paranoia and deception" (44), and it is doubtless no accident that he is involved with the CIA, "that fantastically uncentered, nearly autonomous dissemination of misinformation, paranoia and terror" (Foster 157). As Axton observes: "If America is the world's living myth, then the CIA is America's myth. All the themes are there, in tiers of silence, whole bureaucracies of silence, in conspiracies and...brilliant betrayals" (317). One of the mythic fimctions of the CIA, as we have seen repeatedly in novels dealing directly or indirectly with the Agency is that it "allows us to participate in a spectacle of violence," since "it produces much of the violence that justifies it," as is seen in the episode at the end of the novel (Foster 162-63).

Rowser's job is to sell risk (i.e. ransom) insurance coverage to multinational executives against kidnapping, for which he has "tons of research material on the cost-effectiveness of terror" (46), but risk insurance is not designed to actually stop terror or reduce risk but discover its "cost-effectiveness," since profit, as with other kinds of insurance, depends on the fear being greater than the actual risk. Axton, the risk-analyst, is therefore the "silent partner" of terrorism, since he is the one who calculates its meaning (Foster 161). The precariousness of serving the multinational corporate structure is shown in the novel when the banker Keller is shot by gunmen while jogging in the park and Axton, who witnesses the action, cannot be sure that the assassination attempt was not meant for himself, as unwitting but now public CIA spy, or that Eliades, who works for the multinationals but is privately critical of foreign involvement in his country, has not been involved. The ambiguity of the human target further

shows the collusion between government and capital, as well as the impersonal nature of the terrorist act.

The costs of literacy also affect more sympathetic characters, like Owen Brademas, himself a reader of inscriptions, that is, one who would make the ancient stones "speak." Epigraphy, however, is a form of one-sided conversation with the dead and Owen eventually admits that he finds the letters more interesting in themselves than as signs of ancient cultures. He is, for example, indifferent to the archeological dig he supervises on a Greek island, and when he goes to India to read a Sanskrit epic on the walls of a ruin he contents himself with merely admiring the script. He tells stories and offers intriguing cultural analyses, but these are given in monologues that preclude dialogue (during one of these discourses on language Axton drifts off into an erotic day-dream about his wife in the next room). Owen's obsessive search for ancient esoteric scripts seems to indicate a desire to reach some definite meaning, a mistaken belief in the capacity of language to finally explain the world (Bryant 22). The point is that we no longer live in a world that can be figured out, no matter what our intelligence, obsession, or need, as witness Pynchon's Oedipa Maas.

Owen's most traumatic boyhood experience was in Kansas when he witnessed a rural preacher urging his parishioners to "speak in tongues," a false example of language reciprocity in a community since the languages are unintelligible babble, but what was disturbing to him was his inability to participate, to "loosen" his tongue. This episode is reproduced at the end of the novel in a chapter from the "non-fiction novel" of Axton's precocious young son, Tap, in which Owen's "tongue-tied" alter-ego cannot "yeeld" (sic) to his neighbors' glossalalia. The text's misspellings and malapropisms suggest both youthful speech and a kind of

Joycean playfulness and punning into which the over-analytical Owen cannot free himself. As he admits to Axton, he has used language to separate himself from experience.

Owen discovers in the Greek hills, and eventually pursues to other countries, a bizarre alphabet cult, "abecedarians," which provides one line of the unresolved plot. A guide says in explanation of the cult's fascination with the alphabet: "The alphabet is male and female. If you will know the correct order of letters, you make a world" (152), and yet the cult seeks an order or rightness, a "logic," through senseless murder, a sort of linguistically-motivated version of the murderous California "family" of Charles Manson. The cult members select a victim in the locale they are inhabiting, some mentally or physically deficient person, whose initials match the first letter of each word in the place-name of the locale, and carve or engrave the initials on the tool-weapon, a ritual practice that suggests voodoo or sympathetic magic rather than real language. Their choice of outcast victims also suggests that they are excessively concerned with establishing a "rightness" and order in an imperfect world. They co-opt words from logic like "premise" and "valid" (302) and call themselves "beginners," as if seeking a fresh vision, in which they resemble Coach Creed from *End Zone* and other misguided radical simplifiers of worldly complexity. As one of their spokesman says, in explaining why he joined the cult: "It seemed right to me...Numbers behave, words do not" (108). The cult evidently seeks a pure language, something approaching the logical rigor and precision of mathematics, which is exactly what words, in their eminently social formation and development, can never achieve. The cult's "texts" are their victims on which the abstract configurations of discrete letters have been written. Referentiality has been replaced with mere matching and the reciprocity of communication with an imposed, one-sided order (LeClair 192).

The cult's secret name may be the "Ta Onomata" (The Names), as Axton discovers those words painted on a rock in the Mani, in the mountains, a place inhabited by the cult, where, a member tells him, "it is possible for men to stop making history. We've invented a way out" (*Names* 209). To attempt to escape history by murder, "reify the act of murder into an ultimate artifact of fury against the inconsistency of the unknown" (Bryant 19) is a futile exercise, as another member seems to recognize at the end when the cult has nearly died out: "The world has become self-referring...a world in which there is no escape" (297). The "discreteness and analysis, originality, abstraction, detachment, absolutism, and possible self-destructiveness" of literacy are fulfilled in the cult's acts of murder and its own demise.

When Owen first encounters these people in Greece and again later in India, they ask him: "How many languages do you speak?," and his answer seems to be his password for admittance to their presence, so that his fascination gradually becomes implication. Although he says that he can often see "design" where others cannot, Axton has also deciphered the alphabetic connection with the deaths, but Owen's perception of design has led him at the last to being considered a member by the other cult members, showing how the search for presumably disinterested knowledge can become an ally of the abuse of power: he virtually has to become complicit since there is no other way to carry out his inquiry and his curiosity is such that he does nothing to stop the final murder (Morris 114). Similarly, the film-maker Volterra, who also pursues the cult, is mistaken when he thinks he can make a movie about it: "A murder, pure and simple...It'll be an essay on film, on what film is, what it means. It'll be like nothing you know. Forget relationships" (199). In his quest for cinematic purity, a visual language that can forget human relationships, Volterra too becomes complicit. He wants the cult

members to film themselves and eventually his idea is to film the actual murder from a helicopter.

Owen leaves the cult to retire to a small room in Lahore where Axton tracks him down and urges him to tell the story, somewhat relieving his guilt by oral communication. The "pattern" and "design" sought for by the multinationals for their own purposes is evidently a quality fostered by writing itself, or rather the kind of writing in which the connection with a living or lived social history has been removed or forgotten. This is signaled earlier on in Owen's case by his admission to Axton that he has lost his former scholarly interest in older cultures, but now sees "a mysterious importance in letters as such" (35), that is, mere characters removed from any human context. As a cult-member points out, "character" in Greek means "blade," an instrument for inscribing or etching but here, of course, for brutal killing. Such detached characters are not only dead, they are death-dealing, which can be seen when the cult actually indulges in the act of killing, during which they speak no words but emit only inarticulate grunts and cries and their weapons or instruments resound with rhythmic thuds. Their "subverbal form of connection is violence," which is discrete, detached, and occasional" like the communications of the multinationals, with whom they share "an urge to be disconnected from the ambiguities of spoken language" (LeClair 188, 193).

In contrast to Owen, Axton's progress through the novel can be read as a linguistic learning-experience, from a position of being a slave of the stasis of corporate language to a gradual realization of language's artifice and an eventual understanding that words can be regenerated and recombined for the purpose of renewal (Bryant 18), an understanding that depends on the view that language is not fixed but fluid from its nature as a medium of social intercourse (Williams, *Marxism and Lit.* 37-38; Introd. sec.II). Axton shows the new under-

standing when he questions or resists Owen's analyses, refuses to be the writer-recorder for the cult, and seduces a banker's wife by combining speech and body-language, naming the parts as a prelude to physically combining them. When toward the end Axton asks himself how one connects things, he answers: "Learn their names" (328). Names become not discrete and empty signifiers but are dissolved into their connecting function, a way of both making and sharing sense.

The living aspect of language as opposed to the death of empty ritual is illustrated in his final visit to and vision of the Acropolis, the monument to a vanished civilization, which in the beginning of the novel he has avoided as a timeless, pure abstraction, something too "exalted," an analogue of his earlier perception of language itself. When he finally walks up to the temple at the end, as opposed to viewing it from afar in its brilliant glory, he realizes that it is not "a relic species of dead Greece but part of the living city below it" (330). The visitors throng in, speaking a variety of languages: "This is what we bring to the temple, not prayer or chant or slaughtered rams. Our offering is language" (331). He is able to do this because of his prior reading of his son's zany chapter, included as an epilogue to the novel to break up for the reader the modernist closure of Axton's discoveries and the neat circular structure of the narrative. Language is opened outward once again (Bryant 24-25). Axton is jarred by Tap's inspired transformations of ordinary English: "I found these mangled words exhilarating. He'd made them new again, made me see how they worked, what they really were. They were ancient things, secret, reshapable" (313). Language though ancient is ever renewable, the lesson he takes with him in his new "seeing" of the Parthenon. It is not only oral conversation that is alive, after all; writing too can be reshapable, can rewrite reality. Indeed, it must, for "an individual's life in language is not a *tabula rasa*," as radical beginners like the cult would

have it, "but as a palimpsest, already scored over and smudged by prior contact" (Bryant 26). Words display an inherent textuality and a messiness that ever recalls their origins and development in social use over time.

NOTES

[1] Tom LeClair, who has written the first full-length study of DeLillo's fiction, with an interpretation of the novels as "systems novels," calls the 438 page *Ratner's Star* the "metasystem of the systems novel" (136) and compares it to the major efforts of Gaddis, Pynchon, and Coover, the postmodernist novelists of "excess." For reasons of space, I shall no more than mention it here. DeLillo says that this work was an experiment in formal structure, with Pythagoras as guiding spirit and Lewis Carroll's Alice books as a structural model, the second part a mirror image of the first ("Interview," LeClair 27). In his chapter on the novel, LeClair shows how the individual chapters of *Ratner's Star* replicate a history of mathematics and in a chart (125) names the unnamed mathematicians and the relevant concepts. See also Shaub's comments on systems vs. systems planning and LeClair's occasional confusion of mystery and mystification ("Don DeLillo's Systems" 130-33).

[2] DeLillo says he began the novel with the idea of producing the "intimate, casual, off-the-cuff speech" between close friends and husbands and wives (DeCurtis, "Interview" 61).

[3] LeClair points out (167-68) other meanings of the title: Selvy's self-reference as an Indian brave with that name while escaping the hit team; Selvy's destiny also suggests running, and his instructor at the Mines, Levi, says Selvy was "the best I've ever run," which means both controlled and put physically through the paces; Selvy's run or flight "home" from his assassins can be associated with the running dog of folklore which always finds its way home. The dog itself recalls Pavlovian training of the sort Sel.vy receives, and to me the title of Robert

Stone's novel, *Dog Soldiers* (1974), which also features a Selvy-like character, concerned with the purity of discipline, who returns to a training encampment to die in a final combat with pursuers.

[4] Scanlon finds (235-36) no direct allusions to *The Satanic Verses* in *Mao II* but a number of themes and motifs in common: the omnipresence of the electronic media and the sinister side of new technologies (e.g. Gray notes the potential for blowing up a building from a distant city), the pervasive and indiscrimate advertising for First World products in Third World cities (e.g. the bright red signs for "Coke II" in bombed-out Beirut), the centralized and charismatic authority of fundamentalist religion and uncondescending portrayal of its committed believers (e.g. Karen), the preference for the image over the word (e.g. Scott's aim of publishing Gray's picture but suppressing his novel).

[5] The current phenomenon of studio "mixing" is a good example. Old songs are pirated for their fragments, which are then reintegrated into a continuity of sound, the logical extreme of the production processing of both technology and the market and an apt symbol for the loss of unself-conscious spontaneity of the early years of rock. For the rock-artist as entrepeneur, DeCurtis (141) quotes Axl Rose, of Guns n' Roses, who advises his would-be successors: "I don't care what else you're gonna do, if you're gonna do art or anything, take business classes."

[6] DeLillo half-seriously speculated in an interview (LeClair 24) "if there is something we haven't come across. Is there another, clearer language? Will we speak it and hear it when we die? Did we know it before we were born?" He goes on to say that the "untellable" suggests limitations, which is why there is babbling, alternate kinds of speech, and specialized languages in his novels, a point I shall take up in the next section.

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[7] Bruce Bawer's article on DeLillo is, in this respect, a monument to obtuseness, an almost comical catalogue of possible mis-readings and critical contradictions. For example, "In DeLillo's overly diagrammatic world, savagery is the only alternative to depersonalization by sensory overload"(35). Granted that many characters react to depersonalization by violence, the author is hardly defending this strategy, merely suggesting one social consequence of al-ienation.

[8] DeLillo said in the LeClair interview (26) that he liked the way Wittengstein used language: "It's like reading Martian...mysteriously simple and self-assured. It suggests without the slightest arrogance that there is no alternative to these remarks."

[9] Osteen (156) points out that the game comes directly from Kahn's *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (1965), a title that illustrates the notion of projected crises as language games.

[10] As Goodheart puts it: "The apocalypse may be the dominant media trope of our time; its endless replay has inured us to the real suffering it might entail...Repetition wears away the pain. It also perfects the image or our experience of it..The event becomes aesthetic and the effect upon us anaesthetic" (122).

CONCLUSION

The narrative of individual experience could once, Frederic Jameson says, "map out larger social boundaries and institutions" in the era of the realist novel but at a later moment, especially the period of a new international order of imperialism in this century, this possibility began to break down and give way to the formal experiments of modernism. In the second half of the century, in developments directly related to the Second World War, the restructuring of older political and economic systems into late multinational capitalism must be seen as a separate stage, in which the newer structures have become invisible to individual subjects, "*experientially* absent from our daily life as the ultimate laws of Einsteinian relativity are from our normal dealings with Newtonian gravity on this planet" (Rev. *Names* 116, italics given). This study began with the positing of a split between private and public in the post-war American consciousness that is for a number of reasons a consequence of this new situation. The split was manifest in post-war literary fiction in the continued concentration of most serious novelists of the time on individual dilemmas in a world that had become too large and complex to be adequately comprehended and represented. It was as if these writers could not themselves comprehend the growing social and political irrelevance of the individual except in relation to his/her awareness of it, as displayed in existential anguish and a retreat into the self: in self-defeating gestures of rebellion or a self-fulfilling insistence on authenticity.

With notable exceptions, the public world of politics, its personalities and institutions, was left to popular fiction, which could not be expected to penetrate the complexities of official power structures with anything much beyond the desire to entertain or unconsciously uphold the ideology of the United States as justified in its post-war role as the world's moral and military policeman. The novels of the period tended to evade the situation entirely in the

above-mentioned retreat into the self or provide only the most timid responses as liberal novelists seemed to succumb into postwar revisionism, in which liberalism itself became conservative. Thus, one has writers of political pot-boilers, such as Allen Drury, who creates a melodrama that unconsciously dramatizes the witch-hunting paranoia of McCarthyism by promoting a liberal professor to the status of someone who could make such dangerous concessions to the Soviet Union as threaten not only the peace of an assumed free world but the existence of the much vaunted American way of life. And other, better writers who attempted to take on the realities of American political power in their work ended up in effect by evading them. Thus, Edwin O'Connor clouds his portrait of an old-style urban patriarchal politician by sentimentalizing his subject and effectively erasing his flagrant abuses of power, thus avoiding important questions of effective political rule in a democratic state.

Middle-brow intellectual Norman Mailer and high-brow critic Lionel Trilling also fail in their attempted novels of ideas to project a clear notion of how the Left might think and behave in the reactionary political climate in the 1950s, Mailer by sheer confusion and inability to provide a credible historical context, Trilling by idealizing the debate and steering a safe course through the middle of Stalinism, on one hand, and McCarthyism, on the other. Robert Penn Warren's classic study of an idealist politician corrupted by the give-and-take of political office and the delusions of *Realpolitik*, in the end, too, follows Trilling's path, canceling out ideological extremes in favor of a liberal consensus, in which all may be contained by the democratic pluralism of the US and the spiritual advances of the individual enlightened by suffering. As I noted at the end of Chapter 2, what is notable about all these writers is that the constitutional ideals which they either uncritically uphold or, more commonly in the serious writers, upbraid national leaders for not upholding, are repudiated in the novels. What is

common to them all is an apparent disbelief in the consensual or contractual ideas of American political theorists like Parsons or Arendt in favor of perceptions that political power works through deviousness, deceit, pressure, and even blackmail, and not the classical checks-and-balances, perceptions that to some extent may be justified by historical revelations but that also put undo emphasis on individual manipulation while continuing the tendency of realist fiction to psychologize individual motivations.

For Gore Vidal, whose historical fiction was examined in Chapter 3, the constitution is well-nigh irrelevant in discussing American power. He concentrates on the country's power-elite, the men (rarely women) who attempted to shape its destiny through the sheer force of their personal will and for other than civic ambitions. While impressive in their historical detail, these novels were seen to ultimately depend on an entertaining mix of high-level gossip, social satire of the wealthy, and the debunking of national icons, and they expose only in the older sense of exposé and of matters which one might think need little further elucidation. The ideal notions of Arendt, that politics is the highest human endeavor and the American Revolution was a collective effort to guarantee a space where freedom could occur, is absent in Vidal's America, though her idea that a republic consists of free exchange of ideas among equals finds a resonance there, if not in the democratic sense she intended it, for Vidal's powerful men do exchange ideas freely but only among themselves.

Vidal's attacks, then, were seen to depend on a personalist view of power that obfuscated the structural situation of unequal distribution of wealth and institutionalized injustice. Despite the author's declared intention of attacking dominant economic interests as well as the ruling class administering those interests for their own benefit, his novels are somewhat idealized social chronicles of the rich and powerful, if biting satires of their ideas and mores, and

take little or no interest in the economic policies elaborated by these people and the real consequences of the policies that determine the lives of the rest of the population. The whole historical process tends to be banalized and socio-economic factors ignored in the interests of entertainment. What Vidal has added to perceptions of power of the other novelists mentioned above is in his characters' interest in representation--their concern for public image in the press and through film--and he seems to share their idea of a spectacularized power in which they hold sway over other people instead of exercise power within the social fabric through more subtle means. Vidal's portrait of the Hollywoodization of national politics does, however, perceive and insist on its decline into a mere "spectator sport," so that while "American political *life*" is full of dramatic incident (mass marches, armed militias, financial scandals, to give some very recent examples), "American *politics*" is colorless and predictable, "the province of donors and pollsters and those pay or are paid by them" (Hitchens 23, italics given).

In contrast to Vidal, who writes, it has been remarked, as if nothing has happened in prose fiction since the Fifties, Norman Mailer's style is a recognition of the need for a language adequate to large subjects. Mailer's novels, which were examined in Chapter 4, might be seen as one main pole of this study, DeLillo's being the other, as the lengthy chapters I have devoted to each might indicate. The model of power Mailer and the younger novelists emerging in the 1960s who perceived the US as a "totalitarian" state is basically a Weberian one: a situation, one recalls, in which one "party" is in a position to carry out its will against the resistance of another. In Mailer's novels, one has, in succession, a number of such dominant parties in a variety of combinations. Thus, there are, in succession, the military hierarchy in *The Naked and the Dead*), the Pentagon and the press in *Armies of the Night*, and the CIA

in *Harlot's Ghost*. That some of the dominant groups are personified in individuals suggests Vidal's personalism, but it should be added that these powerful individuals tend to act as metaphors for institutional powers. The repression of hegemonic powers, Mailer's notion of "corporation-land" a technologically sophisticated, bureaucratically managed, politically repressive, and militarily dangerous state, and the fraudulent ideologies that support it, suggest a Marxist position of resistance, but in each case this turns out to be inapplicable, at least in the terms Mailer himself has established. Although in the novels the institutions are the dominant agent, the oppressed and resisting agent is, in each case, an individual: Hearn, "Mailer," Hubbard. These characters are fully realized in contrast to their more generalized oppressors and they act not in the name of an oppressed class but for the personal struggle for authenticity and freedom so typical of the novels of Mailer's non-politicized contemporaries.

Still, Mailer's perceptions are valuable. He has, for example, shown the power struggles of bureaucratic organizations in *Naked*, *Armies*, and *Harlot*. In *Armies* he has shown both the potential of mass-movements in resisting government and the importance of the media in a new politics of representation and in *Harlot*, he has depicted an organization dedicated to secrecy and covert activity with the paradoxical but declared aim of defending an "open society." Thus, Mailer has done much to expose and contest the contradictions of American power in a number of themes that postmodernist fiction takes up and develops further.

If one may risk an apparent oxymoron, the proto-postmodernism of the novelists of Chapter 5--Kesey, Heller, Vonnegut, and Burroughs--has also represented power in ways basically similar to Mailer's American-totalitarianism, with visions of an oppressive, technocratic managerial state whose size, social engineering, reactionary politics, and indifference to spiritual values threaten individual existence, autonomy, and creativity. Burroughs is ex-

emplary in this regard, since his early fiction makes the "initial rupture between the individual and the threatening discourse of the state" (Federman, "Self-Reflexive" 1153). As this statement implies, language is one of the agents of the system, the means by which the powers-that-be hold people captive, especially through the media and their propagation of received ideas. Burroughs is a pioneer in these perceptions in contemporary literature and reconsiders as well prior thought on the connections of a dehumanized language with a rationalized Weberian bureaucracy. His targets are the intellectually homogenizing force of hegemonic "one-way" communications systems, in which he was especially prophetic, and, less perceptively, what he thinks of as the Aristotelian logic of Western modes of thought. The attempt to wrench language out of its categories, the eschewing of narrative, and the emphasis on an "allegorical war of control" in which individual integrity takes priority over the perception of control as a political aim are regressions to the modernist sensibility.

The individual is shown in the works of Burroughs and these other novelists as beset on all sides by the system: in Kesey, by an institutional structure which achieves submission by disciplinary methods and a resort to violence when thought necessary in extreme cases. Both Mailer and Kesey show the brutality of the naked power Russell posits exercised on the bodies of individual subjects and Arendt's notion that strength alone is ineffective in resisting power. For Arendt, such systems are sustained not by power, a collective effort to solve human problems, but violence, which is always limited and inevitably calls up resistance, a perception well illustrated in the novels of these writers. Kesey's hospital may stand for the state itself, about which Arendt theorized, as Heller's military structure may stand for post-war corporate organization, which Galbraith sought to expose as concealing its intentions and Heller perceived as the principle adversary of freedom: the American military at the height

of and immediately after the war as the supreme example of a bureaucratic organization in the service of death, the corporation as beyond any human considerations, even established notions such as national boundaries, in the relentless pursuit of profit.

Heller's military, in Galbraith's terms, is a condign instrument of government policy in compensatory collaboration with the manufacturing capabilities and technological development of the corporations. Although this combination of means, along with the conditioning power of propaganda and effective concealment of corporate motives Galbraith also describes, has in fact augmented war-making capacities to a hitherto unknown degree, Heller's concern, as is Vonnegut's, is typically with the alienation of the individual confronting death and absurd situations. While Heller does effectively show the contemporary absurdity of men who are completely in the control of an organization they belong to but that is only intent on its own self-perpetuation, in both writers, as we have seen, the individual is an essentially passive element in a condition of unequal power and the larger issues suggested tend to be absorbed once again by a psychological emphasis. In this respect, it is to the point, as Heller and Vonnegut, as well as Mailer and Kesey, show, that any resistance for the individual is politically futile, however spiritually liberating. The obsolete apparatus of spectacular power is shown, in Warren, Vidal, and Mailer as being defeated (in Mailer's *Armies* by the spectacle itself), while postmodernist fiction seeks to show that new forms have taken hold, in secretive organizations such as the CIA (Mailer, Barth, Pynchon, DeLillo), and the modern corporation tentacled reach (Burroughs, Barth, Pynchon, DeLillo).

The political question for postmodernism is whether it is essentially a conservative retrenchment, as some detractors have argued, or in effect radically critical, in which contestation is central, or at least potentially subversive in its program of de-naturalizing or exposing

aspects of society, as supporters have claimed. I have argued that in effect some postmodernist works (DeLillo) are more effective than others (Barth), with some ambiguously so (Pynchon), in their radical critiques of the power relations of American society. Barth's novels, examined in Chapter 6, both suggest and negate the Foucaultian theme of power's dispersal in contemporary society. In *The Sot-Weed Factor* and even *Sabbatical*, secrecy at the upper echelons of government makes it difficult to identify who controls who, the identification so essential to traditional leftist strategies of resistance, although in both novels the ominous presence of secret government organizations eventually becomes mere background for the personal triumphs of questing heroes and heroines. In *Giles Goat-Boy,* Barth's WESCAC foretells the increasingly hegemonic role of computer technology in contemporary life with the recognition of the beneficial as well as controlling effects of power, but the quest of the protagonist ends in a merging of the protagonist with the machine, who turns out to be his literal and spiritual father, to turn into a regressive Fifties' quest for the authenticity of a beleaguered self, similiar to the writers of the previous chapter. Barth is the best example of a "politically neutered postmodernism," whose playfulness of language and dazzling variety of techniques leads not to a contestation of power, since a "lack of distance from the market place prevents it from claiming any special authority, or any means of making a difference in the social sphere," but "to a basic refusal of seriousness" (Kucich 329).

Far from being the "classic example" of "complex poses of despair" (Kukich, Ibid.), Thomas Pynchon, whose novels were discussed in Chapter 7 has explored most profoundly the implications of Foucaultian insights. Foucault has, for that matter, been and can be read pessimistically, that effective opposition to insidious and far-reaching power is doomed and attempts to discover truth are finally delusive. If he insists on struggle by making power

"appear" and attacking it where it is most visible, this may not be a general call to arms but at least recognizes the secret and pervasive aspects of power and its all-important connection with knowledge, which are generally ignored by previous theories if not by contemporary novelists like Pynchon. The connection of colonialism and the technology of death in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, the collusion of government, science and corporations in *Gravity*, the precariousness and dispersal of the self in a reifying world in *V.*, *Gravity*, and the *Crying of Lot 49*, are Foucaultian themes, but Pynchon has also touched on matters from other theoretical and fictional predecessors. Thus, for example, his examination of the networks of failed and successful communications in *Crying*, reflects one of Burroughs's chief concerns, and the devious methods and growing hegemony of the corporation in *Gravity*, one of Galbraith's. Where Weber and Foucault meet in the perception of Pynchon and other postmodernists is in the perception that no one specifically rules, that bureaucracies make location and responsibility difficult to discover and assign, which is rather different from saying that such writing embraces despair and quietism. If Pynchon has shown equal adroitness at manipulating the postmodernist multiple languages, mixed genres, "anything goes" fictional strategies as Barth, he does so not in the pursuit of mystification or retreat into self One might compare Barth's *Giles* with Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, as I have done in Chapter 7, arguing that the quest in that novel is for a national destiny and meaning, in a tightly organized circular pattern of repetitive images more appropriate to a paranoid vision of society. Pynchon's world is "shot through with intimations of conspiracies vast and pervasive enough to undermine the possibility that there can be anything personal or individual about identity" (Hite 716).

Don DeLillo, whose works are discussed in Chapter 8, is the other pole from Norman Mailer of important writers concerned with understanding and exposing the sites, forms, and machinations of power in our society, how institutions have been transformed and individuals been reduced by it. In DeLillo's fiction, most of the concerns with power in the contemporary world reach their culmination. Here one finds the systems, both hegemonic and conspiratorial, of Burroughs, Vonnegut, Barth, and Pynchon, and the pervasive paranoia and underlying menace of Burroughs, Pynchon, and Robert Stone, who make up what has been called "the paranoid school" of American fiction, of which DeLillo is the "chief shaman" (Towers 6). In these works, one also finds an intense preoccupation with language, its power, play, and abuses, that was present in most of the older writers mentioned, including the powerful languages of advertising and the mass media. DeLillo's work is in tune with both Burroughs's early insights and contemporary theory in that he realizes that political conflict in the contemporary world is ultimately fought out in the uses of language--in ideology, cultural codes and representations, "rather than in overt forms of repression, in individuals, or in the shape of historical events" (Kucich 330), such as one finds in Mailer, Heller, Kesey, Vonnegut and even in Pynchon.

The Names is a case in point. Language is in a sense the subject of the novel, and all the characters, even the plot itself, revolve round its political uses, as DeLillo develops analogies between language systems and hegemonic political systems and their adversaries. The protagonist's son writes a non-fictional novel with an episode about a boy who witnesses a rural community speaking in tongues. Tongue-tied, the boy becomes a man who becomes obsessed with reading the inscriptions of ancient languages and eventually with a an alphabet cult that links letters and murder. In the media-madness for aesthetic over ethical choice, a film-maker

wants to make a film about the cult in the act of killing. The multinational businessmen wax wittily about their anomalous status in an unstable political region. The protagonist's politically dubious profession of risk analyst involves decipherment of bureaucratic reports for a firm connected to the CIA, who uses the information for destabilizing governments unsympathetic to the US's policies furthering international capitalism and anti-leftist ideology. As Jameson points out in his review of the novel, none of these narrative lines takes precedence over any other. Although one of DeLillo's most conventional novels, the political is not background for the psychological, as in most conventional novels with political themes, nor are the characters mouthpieces of theories, as in some of his other works. The ambiguity of motive is paralleled by an ambiguity in narrative structure, since the expectation of finding out the solutions to the assassination attempt or the outcome of the cult in the apparent genre of international thriller are left unfulfilled. Where does power lie, how does it operate, who does it affect? are some of the questions raised and shown not capable of being definitively answered. Language is both an agent of colonization and a means of (limited) understanding and liberation, but no liberal consensus works to cancel alternatives out. DeLillo, "one of the foremost postmodern stylists," writes a "nuanced prose" assimilates a variety of contemporary "languages," such as science, technology and international business, media and information industries, as well as the musings of individuals who are involved in these areas either as participants or victims.

To conclude, most of these works in their own ways have contributed to an understanding of the complex notion of power, its forms, spaces, functions, methods, machinations, and abuses. As we have seen, some have reiterated reigning ideologies; others contested them in a variety of strategies. Between the literary text and its social context there exists what Brook

Thomas calls "a field of energy" so that history itself can be seen as a social text and the literary text as a social event. As Raymond Williams insisted, literature reveals but also creates experience. The contemporary novel continues to be a valuable instrument of social perceptions, a way to bridge the alleged gap between our private lives and public institutions.

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